

УДК 811.511.141

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**THE MAIN FACTORS
OF HUNGARIAN-SLOVAK BILINGUALISM**



The study briefly describes the bilingual language situation of Hungarian minority communities living outside Hungary. It deals with the fact that for the Hungarian communities discussed, the Hungarian language is the primary identity-forming factor, briefly covering the effects of bilingualism on the language of the Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian Basin. It shows the close connection between language maintenance and minority education, arguing that one of the most important issues for minority education policy is how bilingual development works. The paper analyzes the educational situation of the Hungarian minority communities in the Carpathian Basin and states that the basic condition for the survival of the language and culture of the Hungarian minorities living outside Hungary is adequate minority education.

Keywords: bilingualism, Hungarian-Slovak bilingualism, language interference, Hungarian language, bicultural personality.

DOI: 10.35634/2224-9443-2021-15-2-222-227

Introduction

Today, in the early 21st century, a significant proportion (about a third) of those who spoke Hungarian as their mother tongue live outside Hungary, as members of minority communities. The historical antecedents of the present situation are well known: with the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after World War I, Hungary's borders were determined not on the basis of the ethnic distribution of the population, but on the basis of the interests of neighboring powers. As a result of historical events, people of Hungarian nationality today form significant minority communities in seven countries in Europe: in Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria. In the changing political and social circumstances of the period since 1920, the maintenance of language and preservation of culture have become the basic goals of the Hungarian minority communities. The fate of these communities demonstrates similarities and, of course, some differences characteristic of the given society: the shared historical background, the similar homogenizing aspirations of the majority societies building nation states, the linguistic and cultural assimilation processes, the emerging bilingual situation, affecting all minority Hungarian communities show many unfavorable parallels. We can see favorable similarities when we examine the efforts aimed at building and maintaining the Hungarian language education systems of minorities as fully as possible, the democratizing processes after the change of regime, and the elements of the national policy strategy of Hungary concerning Hungarians living outside Hungary [Vančo 2017, 357].



It is an important fact that there is a significant difference between the minority Hungarian communities in their demographics and socio-demographic structures. While the Hungarian minorities in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, and Ukraine have a mature national sense of community, the communities of Hungarians in Slovenia, Croatia, and Austria can be well characterized by features of ethnic and regional minority groups as well. Numerous studies prove that one of the most important elements of the identity of Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin is their mother tongue [cf. Bodó 2003, 2004, and 2006; Csernicskó 1998; Göncz 1999; Lanstyák 2000; Szarka 2006; Péntek 2012; Tóth 2020]. Education is one of the key factors for the minorities in maintaining the language that is the basis of their identity [cf. Kondratieva 2020, 148–153]. However, with regard to the language and language use of Hungarian minorities living outside Hungary, it has to be stated that “[...] without exception they speak contact varieties of the Hungarian language, i.e. they speak varieties more or less different from the language of Hungary Hungarians and exhibiting the influence of the bilingual or multilingual environment. This is also true of those who do not speak or understand the majority language (Slovak, Romanian, etc.), as their Hungarian mother tongue also exhibit the language elements and rules developed under the influence of Slovak, Romanian, etc., which are unknown in Hungary Hungarian”¹ [Kontra 2006, 551].

Language retention of Hungarian minorities outside Hungary: goals and problems

With this in mind, defining the language goals of Hungarian minority mother tongue education is a complex task and is closely related to the language policy of the given majority and minority community. It cannot be ignored that the political and language policy aspirations of the ruling majority create a social situation in which the value and prestige of a language is determined and increased or decreased, i.e. the implementation of minority education always depends on the social conditions in which it is established and operates.

However, Hungarian language ethnic education is in a more difficult position than majority education not only because of the generally less favorable social and economic situation of minorities in general. It also faces a number of problems that are not relevant to mainstream education. These include the ways of bilingual development, which follows directly from the linguistic aims of education, and which is decisive when examining the place and role of minority education in the development of minority bilingualism. The type of bilingual education and the linguistic aim of the education can have as direct consequence language maintenance on the one hand or language shift on the other. By the beginning of the 21st century, the Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian Basin have become bilingual, exhibiting different degrees of bilingualism. While in the case of people living in a sizeable communities, Hungarian dominant additive bilingualism is more typical, in the case of people living in smaller settlements and cut off from other, larger communities where the stronger effect of assimilation prevails, subtractive bilingualism with a dominance of the majority language is more common. In this way, the ways of bilingual development become an unavoidable issue for minority education policy.

Problems to be solved include the use and prestige of the Hungarian varieties used by minorities, the use of the variety in education, and the way of successful integration into the monolingual majority society. While the minorities living in larger communities strive to provide the above as fully as possible, for the minority communities that are more dispersed and isolated minority education should be tailored to the needs of the communities living in the given region.

Today, in addition to Hungary, education in Hungarian or the organized teaching of Hungarian within the framework of public education is provided in seven countries (Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria). The most well-known of the educational models of organized bilingual education has been developed by Skutnabb-Kangas [cf. Skutnabb-Kangas 1997,

¹ It should be noted that today, in the 21st century, the majority language, such as Slovak, Romanian, etc. is not spoken only by the youngest children, whom parents socialize in Hungarian.

2000a, 2000b)², which analyzes the language of education, the linguistic goals of education, and its possible linguistic effects on participants in education, taking into account the dominance relations of the community in society (minority or majority³). Analyzing the education of Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian Basin, Lanstyák [1995a] distinguishes the following types of education in terms of the language of instruction:

- “state language education (minority students only participate in state language training, which in the Skutnabb-Kangas typology corresponds to language immersion or submersion programs);
- bilingual education (in bilingual educational institutions, education is provided in the state language and in a minority language within a given subject, or the minority language is used as the language of certain subjects);
- a subtype of bilingual education: the language of the minority appears only as a subject in education;
- and mother-tongue education (in the Skutnabb-Kangas typology, it corresponds to the type of program for the preservation of the mother tongue” [Vančo 2017, 360].

The latter-mentioned type of education in the mother tongue⁴ is a natural right for the majority, but an acquired right for the minority. Of the types of minority education (as I have also argued above), this type of education in the mother tongue provides to the fullest extent possible for the transmission of minority culture, identity and language from generation to generation.

Minority bilingualism is always asymmetrical [see Borbély 2016], so it is natural that the concept of bilingualism is interpreted differently by minority and majority communities. For those who speak the dominant language [see Tóth 2019] of the powerful majority as their mother tongue, it seems to go without saying that individuals who speak the minority language should master the language of the majority, and it is a common argument that only perfect acquisition of the state language can give minorities equal opportunities. Attaining native proficiency in the dominant state language may pose additional problems for minorities, such as language shift and assimilation, from the point of view of their minority community (as do the possibilities and methods of such attainment, which are not discussed in the present study). The language of minorities in the countries studied (see below) can be used in fewer domains of language use than the language of the majority. In a minority situation, the minority school (education) is the only arena for language use that allows for the development of various registers of the language.

As the economic weight of Hungarian minorities is generally lower than that of the majority group, the language of the minority is used in fewer domains of language use, and therefore has less prestige than the majority language. All this can have a considerable effect on assimilation and its acceleration. As the state language becomes dominant for the individual, the chances of language shift increase, also affecting their identity as related to the minority as a community, and possibly causing alienation from their own minority. Anna Sándor documents this process well through examples from Slovakia by analyzing the language choice of the Zoboralja community which is undergoing language shift [see Sándor 2000]. The acquisition of a more prestigious majority language by the minority at the native level, without the possibility of forming and strengthening the minority identity, leads directly to the development of subtractive bilingualism, the final stage of which is full-scale language shift. If all these processes take place in a situation where the community that speaks the majority language

² One of the positive conclusions of Skutnabb-Kangas’ educational typology is that it predicts the possible consequences of the linguistic effects created by education, be they monolingual or bilingual. It can be used to analyze and predict the impact of the languages of instruction on the personal development of students, both for linguistic minority and linguistic majority groups, and to outline the possible negative and positive consequences of different bilingual education models.

³ On this and the effects of bilingual education types on identity, see also Vančo [2015].

⁴ The use of the term is often uncertain in the education literature. A good example of this is the volume entitled *Fundamentals of National Policy* [Kántor ed. 2013] and its chapter “Hungarian education abroad: Processes and challenges” [139–157], in whose Section 5.1, the use of the term “education in the mother tongue” is consistent, but in subsequent sections “mother tongue education”, i.e. the teaching of the minority language, and “education in the mother tongue” appear in several cases as synonyms for each other.



as a mother tongue is monolingual, and the value, for the majority society, of bilingualism in a non-international language is low, a further loss of prestige of the minority language may occur. This is a self-aggravating process that may lead to the full scale language shift and assimilation of the minority. This is why members of the Hungarian minority communities in the Carpathian Basin often view bilingualism as a source of danger and a path to inevitable language shift.

The apparent momentary interest of the individual – the acquisition of the state language at the highest possible level, even at the cost of language shift – comes to the fore and is antagonistic to the community and social interest of the minority group. i.e. survival. From the perspective of society, the establishment and operation of the minority school system, while from the perspective of the individual and the parents, the choice of school are also decisive for the next generations. According to a study carried out in Slovakia, Bálint and Vincze [2009], a minority mother who attended a majority language school is 17.2 times more likely to send her child to a majority language school. A school using a language of instruction which is not their native language can present a cognitive disadvantage and negative psychological strain for a child. For a parent who chooses a majority language school for their child, mastering the state language as perfectly as possible appears to be almost the main goal, thus actually downgrading the majority school to a language school⁵.

This line of reasoning does not mean that I do not consider it necessary to acquire a state language at a high level in a minority situation. I want to draw attention to the fact that if the acquisition of the state language is not sufficiently coupled with the conscious application of the results of several disciplines in this field, the acquisition of the state language and its promotion as the individual's dominant language may have undesirable consequences for minorities. Based on all this, I want to emphasize that, in my view, mother-tongue education for minorities is one of the most important factors in ensuring the long-term survival of minority communities.

Conclusions

The language, form and content of majority and minority education are in all cases determined by the ideologies of the groups in power. If the state's education and language policy merely ensures the social strength of the majority language speakers, it also puts minorities at a linguistic disadvantage (see the Language Act of 1995 in Slovakia and its amended version in 2009) [Puskás 2000]. As a result, the education and language policies of minorities are again and again forced to apply only the strategy of defense and catching up. As the central element of this is the preservation of national identity, the circle closes: ethnic language and education policy is forced to address not only the (professional) challenges of the age, but also the problem of survival⁶.

In a minority setting, minority education has two important tasks. One is to preserve the language and culture of the minority, and the other is to establish functioning bilingualism in such a way that bilingualism enriches rather than undermines the life of the given minority. As explained above, one of the basic prerequisites for this is the establishment and maintenance of an adequate minority education system for the Hungarian minorities living outside Hungary.

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⁵ The most common argument of parents who choose a majority language school for their child is to enroll their child in a state language school in order that they learn the state language well.

⁶ All this is well exemplified by the struggle of the Hungarian education system in Romania after the change of regime for the reorganization of minority education. The process is overviewed in detail by Fóris-Ferenczi and Péntek [2011].

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Received 05.03.2021

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ОСНОВНЫЕ ФАКТОРЫ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ ВЕНГЕРСКО-СЛОВАЦКОГО ДВУЯЗЫЧИЯ

DOI: 10.35634/2224-9443-2021-15-2-222-227

Аннотация. В статье предпринята попытка выявления основных факторов, влияющих на формирование венгерско-словацкого двуязычия в условиях социокультурного контекста современной Словакии. Двуязычие рассматривается как сосуществование венгерского и словацкого языков в рамках одного и того же речевого коллектива, использование указанных языков в различных коммуникативных сферах. Отмечается, что в основе формирования билингвальной среды лежит исторический контекст. В условиях развития современного общества важную роль играют также демографическая ситуация, социально-экономические факторы, семейные ценности, наличие культурных контактов между Словакией и Венгрией и др. Но особое место в этом ряду занимает система образования, направленная на формирование раннего детского билингвизма. Важная задача образовательной системы – не только изучение венгерского и словацкого языков, но и формирование бикультуральной личности. В процессе обучения венгерскому языку в условиях существования в Словакии языковых меньшинств необходимо обращение к функциональным, контрастивным, культурологическим аспектам, что обеспечивает целостное понимание изучаемого языка в его коммуникативной, когнитивной, эстетической функциях.

Ключевые слова: билингвизм, венгерско-словацкое двуязычие, языковая интерференция, венгерский язык, бикультуральная личность.

Citation: Yearbook of Finno-Ugric Studies, 202, vol. 15, issue 2, pp. 222–227. In English.

Поступила в редакцию 05.03.2021

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