MINORITY HUNGARIAN COMMUNITIES
IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

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7. THE CONTACT DIALECTS OF HUNGARIAN

Miklós Kontra

Any regular contact with speakers of another language or dialect can have an effect on the way we speak. When about 3 million native speakers of Hungarian became citizens of Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia and Austria, they came into increasing contact with speakers of Slovak, Ruthenian, Ukrainian, Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, German and other languages. The new international borders drawn after World War I disregarded the ethno-linguistic boundaries in the Carpathian Basin and turned formerly majority Hungarians into minority Hungarians overnight, in a similar fashion to “members of the Spanish culture” who “woke up one morning to find themselves citizens of the United States” when the USA annexed New Mexico following the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. This had two kinds of linguistic effects: 1) Hungarian regional dialects in the circum-Hungary countries began diverging from the regional dialects in post-World War I Hungary, and 2) the increasing contact with speakers of Slovak, Romanian, Serbian, and so on, gave rise to contact dialects of Hungarian, that is, varieties of Hungarian that show the effects of language contact and are unknown and unused by Hungarian-speakers in Hungary.

The effects of the post-World War I border changes on the indigenous Hungarians in what are today Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia are shown in Table 1.

According to Pál Péter Tóth, the number of Hungarians in the neighboring countries decreased from 3 million in 1920 to 2.4 million in 2000. However, the percentage of Hungarians vis-à-vis the majority nations’ populations decreased even more (Table 1).
Table 1. The effects of post-World War I international border changes on indigenous Hungarians in Hungary’s four neighboring countries: total numbers (N) and Hungarians as a percentage of the total population of Slovakia, Transcarpathia (Ukraine), Romania and Vojvodina (Serbia)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
<th>Ukraine</th>
<th>Romania</th>
<th>Serbia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>650,597</td>
<td>111,052</td>
<td>1,423,459</td>
<td>371,006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>21.68</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>9.96</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>520,528</td>
<td>166,700</td>
<td>1,431,807</td>
<td>280,207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>9.67</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, indigenous Hungarians belong to one cultural nation and eight political nations. According to the theory of political or civic nation, national identity is defined on the basis of citizenship. According to the theory of cultural nation, it is defined on the basis of language and culture. Since the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hungarians have defined themselves as a cultural nation. By contrast, says Gal, “Majority politicians in the circum-Hungary states have most often taken the ‘civic’ stance. This was the Hungarian position before 1918, and is currently legitimated in the post-socialist region by pointing to its espousal by prestigious Western states.”

Throughout the twentieth century, state borders changed frequently, and, as a result, many people have held five different citizenships without ever leaving their hometown. Deportations, population exchanges, ethnic cleansing and other similar acts have been used to create homogeneous nation states. The language rights situation of Hungarian minorities has varied from country to country and from time to time since 1920, but most of Hungary’s neighboring states have exercised linguist policies towards their Hungarian minorities. (Linguicism is social discrimination between groups of people defined on the basis of language.) The Hungarians in Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia are overrepresented in blue-collar trades and underrepresented in higher education. Gal observes that in those states “where there are large Hungarian minorities (Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, Serbia), the language issue has remained the focus of political dispute for the twenty years since the end of communism.” Control over the reproduction of the national languages influences jurisdiction over schools and can result in bilingual programs that “turn out to be submission or transition programs that take Hungarian-speaking youngsters into Serbian.”

Hungarian linguists did not recognize, let alone contemplate, the linguistic consequences of World War I for many decades. Then, in 1995, Langyás proposed that Hungarian be viewed as a pluricentric language, that is, a language that has more than one standard variety (similar to, for instance, German, which has a standard variety in Germany, another one in Switzerland and a third one in Austria). Thus the standard variety of Hungarian spoken by Hungarians in Slovakia, or that spoken in Romania, is recognized as somewhat different from the standard Hungarian in Hungary. These standards show the effects of bilingualism and must not be viewed as “impure, corrupt, degenerate” varieties. In a lecture delivered at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 2002, Szilágyi made a well-argued proposal to revise the periodization of Hungarian linguistics. He suggested that the modern Hungarian period (which is held to begin in 1772 and to continue to the present day) should end in 1918, and that the period following World War I should be regarded as the latest period (legiősből kor in Hungarian), because it is since the end of World War I that Hungarian has been spoken as a native language not only in Hungary but in several other states as well.

Domains of language use – One important consequence of the language hierarchies in Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia is seen in what domains and to what extent Hungarian is used in those countries. Data gathered for the Sociolinguistics of Hungarian outside Hungary project reveal that in 1996 most Hungarians in Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia used their mother tongue overwhelmingly with family members and neighbors, and in church, but in more official domains such as a doctor’s office, bank, local
government office or police station those who used Hungarian alone or Hungarian and the majority language together fell well below 50 percent of our respondents. See Figure 1.13

As Figure 1 demonstrates, use of the Hungarian national minorities’ mother tongue tends to be restricted to the family; it may be used at work in some cases, but its use in official contacts is very limited.

*Attitudes to varieties of Hungarian* — Reviewing the studies conducted in the mid-1990s16 Susan Gal notes that the Hungarian minorities operate with a dual evaluative scheme: “With the economic lens, minority Hungarian speakers see the state languages as ‘better’ than Hungarian, since their chances of upward social mobility are better with higher education in the state language” but “With the aesthetic and cultural lens, Hungarian is valued very highly by its speakers in all countries.”17

Minority Hungarians also rank the regionally distinct forms of Hungarian, including their own variety. The Hungarian used in Transylvania is valued most highly in all the countries. Hungarians in Transcarpathia also evaluate their own variety as beautiful, in contrast to Hungarians in Slovakia, who devalue their own distinctive forms of Hungarian, as do those in Serbia and the countries in the southwest (Croatia, Slovenia and Austria). Gal is correct in stating the following: “Hungarian speakers in Hungary make no allowances for the linguistic effects of bilingualism. This, and the somewhat divergent local forms used by minority speakers are heard by metropolitan Hungarians as provincial and chronotopically ‘backward’ or unsophisticated.”18 In a recent study, Mennyhart shows that over half of the Hungarian primary school children in a village in southern Slovakia report that their speech patterns are identified by Hungarians in Hungary as different from those heard in Hungary (Figure 2), and the most telling feature is their use of borrowed words from Slovak, such as pérek ‘hot dog’ (which is virső in Hungary) or korecká ‘mustard’ (mustár in Hungary). See Figure 3.19

Hungarians in Hungary are strong supporters of standard language ideology; that is, they believe in the existence of a “correct
Figure 2. Awareness of the variety of Hungarian spoken in and outside Hungary as perceived by Hungarian primary school children in Vráťa, Nyíregyháza, Slovakia (N = 158)

When you speak to Hungarians in Hungary, do you know, do they realize that your speech identifies you as a Hungarian who lives in a neighboring country?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Almost never</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never spoken to</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3. What feature of your Hungarian speech gives you away as a Hungarian from one of Hungary's neighboring countries?

Respondents are Hungarian primary school children in Vráťa, Nyíregyháza, Slovakia (N = 158)

When you speak to Hungarians in Hungary, do they realize you are from a neighboring country no?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My accent</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My dialect</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words like parking / lot (I don't understand certain Hungarian)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>certain Hungarian&quot;</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>certain Hungarian&quot;</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my accent</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my dialect</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking / lot (I don't understand certain Hungarian)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>certain Hungarian&quot;</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>certain Hungarian&quot;</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hungarian” and expect everybody to use it in nearly all speech situations. Linguistic stigmatization of, and social discrimination against, those speakers who use “incorrect” Hungarian are both extremely widespread, and “in the pan-European regime of monolingualism and standard language” borrowing words from the majority language, code-switching (the alternate use of Hungarian and another language) and other language contact phenomena “lead to stigma and to self-deprecation. Judgmental encounters with purist linguists and teachers also create problems of self-confidence.”

**Vocabulary differences** — Some regionalisms date from before 1918: for instance, the present-day Transylvanian word *laska* ‘ribbon noodles’ is *tészta* in standard Hungarian in Hungary. Use of this regional word can create temporary misunderstanding between a Transylvanian and a metropolitan Hungarian-speaker. International words that were used by Hungarians before 1918, for instance *internátus* ‘boarding school’, *katedra* (university) chair or *pénzjó* ‘pension’ have become old-fashioned in metropolitan Hungarian but continue to be used as colloquial words by Hungarians in the neighboring countries.

Lexical changes induced by contact with the majority languages can be of several kinds. First, a Hungarian word can obtain a new meaning due to contact with another language (semantic borrowing), as is the case with *szemfőr*, which means “(railway) semaphore” in Hungry but ‘traffic light’ in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine, Croatia and Slovenia. Second, calques (word-for-word translations into Hungarian) are often used: for example, *jelölt* ‘record something on tape or video’ in Slovakia equals *felvész* in Hungary, *előadótanár* ‘associate professor’ in Romania equals *egyetemi docens* in Hungary, *előlát* ‘plan something’ in Serbia is *tervez* in Hungary. Third, the most conspicuous effect is the use of direct borrowings from the majority languages, for example *abonámen* ‘bus pass’ in Romania (which in metropolitan Hungarian is *buszbelélet*), *avanson* ‘advance payment’ in Ukraine (metropolitan Hungarian *előlosg*), *délkvenca* ‘defaulter’ in Serbia and Slovakia (metropolitan Hungarian *hunozés*). Under the influence of a contact language, minority Hungarians may use a different form of the same international word from that used by metropolitan Hungarians: for example, all Hungarians in Hungary use *infarktus* ‘heart attack’ but the Hungarians in all the seven neighboring countries use *infarkt*.

Our study conducted in 1996 in seven countries has revealed statistically significant differences in the use of universal contact variables, that is, variables that vary both in Hungary and in the neighboring countries, and one of whose variants has an analogous variant in the contact languages. In metropolitan Hungarian, compound profession nouns with the component - *nő* ‘woman’ are only used when it is important to stress the referent’s gender. Such nouns were used by significantly more Hungarians in the neighboring countries than in Hungary. Figure 4 shows the respondents in seven countries on the written sentence completion task *Amiam egy középiszkolában tanít, ő tehát... (tanár ‘teacher’ or tanárnő ‘teacher + woman’) ‘My mother teaches in a high school so she is a...’

**Grammatical differences** — The use of place name suffixes by Hungarians 75 years after the Treaty of Trianon shows some of the grammatical effects of the borders drawn after World War I. First, a review of the rule for Hungarian place name suffixation is in order. The majority of Hungarian city and village names take the surface cases or on cases (for example *Budapest-en* ‘in Budapest’) whereas some names denoting Hungarian settlements and all names of foreign cities take the interior cases or in cases (for example *Tihany-ban* ‘in Tihany, Hungary’ and *Boston-ban* ‘in Boston, USA’). The role of the semantic feature ‘foreign’ in suffix choice can be illustrated by such a pair as *Velence-n* ‘in Velence, a village in Hungary’ and *Venecê-ben* ‘in Velence [= Venice], a city in Italy’. The Hungarian vs. foreign distinction is often interpreted as “belonging to historical (pre-1920) Hungary” vs. “outside historical Hungary.” In our study we hypothesized that Hungarians in Hungary and those across the borders will differ in their use of place name suffixes: the latter will use the surface (or) suffixes for place names outside historical Hungary but within the state in which they live (for example, Hungarians in Yugoslavia will favor *Koszovó-n*).
whereas Hungarians in Hungary will use the interior (in) cases for these places (for example Koszovó-ban). Two such place names were chosen to gather the data: Craiova (a city in Oltenia, Romania) and Koszovó (in 1996 an autonomous region in southeast Serbia). Both have always been outside historical Hungary.

In one task, informants were required to choose one of two words (Craiovăn or Craiovăn) that best fit the sentence Az egyik ismerősöm fia ... volt katon... 'The son of an acquaintance of mine was a soldier in...'. In the other task, respondents had to choose the more natural sentence of these two: 1) Koszovăn folytatódnak a tárgyalások az albánok és a szerbek között and 2) Koszovăn folytatódnak... 'Negotiations between the Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo continue.' Country-by-country analyses show that significantly more respondents in Romania chose the "home suffix" with Craiova than respondents in the other countries (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Choice of Craiovăn/ban vs. Craiovăn by Hungarians in seven countries. N = 818, chi-square (df = 6) = 109.501, p < .01
The same "home suffixation" was favored with Koszovó by respondents in Yugoslavia and Slovenia: only 20 to 27 percent of the respondents in five countries chose the "home suffixed" form Koszovón as more natural, but 61 percent in Yugoslavia and 78 percent in Slovenia judged it more natural than the "abroad suffixed" Koszovóban. (The chi-square test shows this difference to be significant: N = 830, chi-square (df = 6) = 130.475, p < .01.)

The explanation for the effect of border changes on the use of place name suffixes comes from Szilágyi: in categorizing a place name, what is important is whether or not the place is in an area where Hungarians or speakers of Hungarian (potentially) live, or are perceived to potentially live. Speakers may vary in their perception of different places, hence the variation in language use. Hungarians in Romania perceive the Romanian regions beyond the Carpathian Mountains (which have never been part of Hungary) as places that they could themselves inhabit, and consequently they say and write forms such as Craiova-qi in Craiova, which are highly unusual for Hungarians in Hungary.

There are several other contact-induced effects on the grammar of minority Hungarian-speakers. When respondents had to choose the more natural sentence of these two for "I saw you on TV yesterday", a) Tegnap láttalak a tévében and b) Tegnap láttalak téged a tévében (where use of the overt object pronoun téged is induced by the contact with Slavic languages), statistically significant differences were found between metropolitan and minority Hungarians. However, minority Hungarians are not homogeneous in their language use. One factor that plays a role in creating heterogeneity is the number of speakers of Hungarian with whom one is in daily contact. Hungarians who constitute a local majority (over 70 percent of the local population) show fewer contact effects than those who form a local minority (less than 30 percent of the population). For instance, 28 percent of the local-majority Hungarians in Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Yugoslavia judged the contact-induced sentence with the overt object pronoun (Tegnap láttalak téged a tévében) to be more natural, as opposed to 38 percent of the local-minority Hungarians. This difference is statistically significant (N = 536, chi-square (df = 1) = 6.056, p < .05).  

Language maintenance, shift, and the role of education - As was indicated by the previous finding, the high or low concentration of Hungarian-speakers in a locality has a strong impact on the maintenance of Hungarian. Low speaker numbers are one of the factors in language shift: that is, the process whereby a group of Hungarian-speakers stops using Hungarian and starts using another language. This process is all but completed in Oberwart/ Felsőor, Austria, and is undoubtedly taking place in several parts of the Hungarian-speaking regions. In the early 1990s, more than half of the minority Hungarians lived in settlements with a local Hungarian majority: 70 to 77 percent of the Hungarians in Slovakia, Transcarpathia (Ukraine) and Slovenia, and approximately 56 percent each in Vojvodina (Yugoslavia) and in Romania formed a local majority in the villages and towns where they lived. In 1991 there were 1,410 localities with a Hungarian majority population in the neighboring countries. Linguistic assimilation is shown, for instance, by the number of native Hungarian-speakers in Croatian-majority territories being 12 percent lower than those of Hungarian ethnic affiliation.  

A very influential factor in minority language maintenance and shift is education, which can contribute to the maintenance (reproduction) of a linguistic minority or its demise. Where the dominant (state) language is taught additively (in addition to the pupils' mother tongue), chances for maintenance are much better than in situations of subtractive teaching (where the state language is taught at the cost of the mother tongue). The right of Hungarian minorities to education through the medium of their mother tongue was more or less recognized throughout the twentieth century. Typically, there has been an inverse relationship between the number of students studying in mother-tongue-medium schools and the level of their education. For instance, Gal notes that in Slovakia "Roughly 80% of Hungarian-speaking children go to Hungarian primary
schools; this figure drops to 50% for secondary education and is even lower for technical education.\textsuperscript{33} The subtractive language policy pursued in Slovakia is evident in Gal's diagnosis: "While Slovak is taught in Hungarian schools, Hungarian is not taught in Slovak schools, so that parents who decide to send their children to Slovak schools give up all possibility of Hungarian educational input."\textsuperscript{34}

Such education can easily result in what Lanskyák and Szabómihiály\textsuperscript{35} term language lapses and language gaps. The former denote cases when a speaker is temporarily unable to recall a word or a grammatical structure with which s/he is otherwise familiar. By the latter the authors mean cases when a required word or structure is not part of the speaker's linguistic system at all. These phenomena contribute a great deal to bilingual Hungarians' linguistic insecurity and may lead to register attrition. For instance, Hungarians in Romania often find it hard to write an official letter in Hungarian, since they have hardly any opportunity to write them in their mother tongue. Language gaps have also become evident recently among Hungarian school teachers in Slovakia, who find it difficult to write class registers and school reports in Hungarian now that it has become legally possible. It is evident that such language gaps are the result of restrictive language policies or violations of the minority speakers' linguistic human rights.\textsuperscript{36}

The choice of the medium of education has been shown to have important effects on the linguistic development of bilingual Hungarians. For instance, Lanskyák and Szabómihiály demonstrated that monolingual Hungarian high school children exhibit systematic differences in their use and judgment of different forms of Hungarian from their bilingual peers in southern Slovakia. A further difference has been established between bilingual Hungarian pupils who go to schools with Hungarian as the medium of instruction and those who go to schools with Slovak as the medium. For instance, when the three groups of high school children had to insert one of two forms that best fit the sentence provided, significant differences were shown in their choice: the Slovak-contact-induced form was used to a much greater extent by the Slovak-medium pupils than the monolingual Hungarian form. See Figure 6.

Sentence to complete:
Jó napot kívánok. A ... jöttem, panaszt szeretnék tenni.
'Good afternoon. I have come to see the boss, I would like to lodge a complaint.'
Choice (a) főnökhöz (monolingual Hungarian form)
Choice (b) főnök után (induced by Slovak íst' za niekým)

Figure 6. Choice of contact-induced főnök után vs. monolingual Hungarian főnökhöz by three groups of high school children: Hungarians in Hungary, Hungarians in Slovakia with Hungarian as medium of instruction (Slovakia_H) and Hungarians in Slovakia with Slovak as medium of instruction (Slovakia_S) (N = 806).\textsuperscript{37}
Lanstyák and Szabómihály have found that the linguistic differences between the Slovakia H and Slovakia S students are much greater than those between the Hungary students and the Slovakia H students, despite the fact that the latter groups study in schools 40 to 50 kilometers apart, while the two bilingual groups often study in the same building. Thus the choice of Slovak as the medium of instruction clearly contributes to linguistic divergence (and possibly a shift to Slovak). 38

Mother-tongue-medium education for the Hungarian minorities in most if not all of the neighboring countries suffers from legislation that makes minority-language-medium education seem a privilege, or something over which the minority pupils only have themselves to blame if they find school too difficult. “Equality” is provided by state-language education for all, without regard to the pupils’ mother tongue. 39

One other problem influencing the linguistic skills of minority Hungarians is how the state languages are taught to them in schools. In most cases they are taught as if they were the mother tongue of Hungarians. What usually happens is that a school subject such as “Hungarian language and literature” is identical in the curriculum for Romanian pupils and for minority pupils, although the teaching should serve radically different purposes. For Romanians the goal is to educate mother-tongue (L1) speakers of Romanian in Romanian language and literature, but for Hungarians and other minorities the goal is to enable them to acquire Romanian as a second language (L2). If the same methods and teaching materials are used to teach the state language as an L1 and an L2, the result can only be that Hungarians do not acquire Romanian well enough in school, which later renders them disadvantaged. 40 Such practice, the denial of the right to learn an L2 as an L2, constitutes educational malpractice. 41 is a violation of linguistic human rights in education, and generates social conflicts in Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia.

Notes

2. See, for instance, József Menyhárt, Károly Presziszky and Anna Sándor, Szlovákiai magyar nyelvészház [Hungarian Dialects in Slovakia] (Nyitra, 2009).
4. These figures are from 1990: see Attila Benő and Sándor N. Szilágyi, Hungarian in Romania, in Anna Fenyvesi, ed., Hungarian Language Contact Outside Hungary: Studies on Hungarian as a Minority Language (Amsterdam, 2005), p. 135.
6. These figures are from 1989: see Károly Kocsis, Kárpátalja mai területénak etnikai térképe/Ethnic Map of Present Territory of Transcarpathia (Subcarpathia) (Budapest, 2001).
7. These figures are from 2002: see Károly Kocsis and Saša Kicev, A Vojvodina mai területénak etnikai térképe/Ethnic Map of Present Territory of Vojvodina (Budapest, 2004).
11. Ibid., p. 218.

14 See Miklós Kontra, “Contextualizing the Sociolinguistics of Hungarian Outside Hungary Project,” in Fenyvesi, ed., Hungarian Language Contact Outside Hungary, pp. 29–45, and several other chapters in the same book.


16 See Fenyvesi, ed., Hungarian Language Contact Outside Hungary.


18 Ibid., p. 227.


20 Ibid., p. 343.

21 Ibid.

22 Gal, “Hungarian as a Minority Language,” p. 228.

23 Ibid.


25 Ibid., p. 128.

26 Ibid., p. 129.


28 In the captions of Figures 4 and 5, N equals the number of respondents in the study. The result of the chi-square test is presented (with the degree of freedom in parentheses), followed in this case by “p < .001”. In plain English this means that there is less than one in a thousand chances that the differences shown in the figure for the seven countries are due to chance. In other words, this is a statistically significant result, and we can be sure that it is no accident that the majority of respondents in Hungary used tanvér but the majority of all other respondents in the neighboring countries used tansza. In Figure 5, p < .01 means that there is less than one in a hundred chances that the differences in the data between respondents in Romania vs. the other countries is caused by chance.


34 Ibid.


38 Ibid., pp. 135–142.


41 For the term educational malpractice, see John Baugh, Out of the Mouths of Slaves: African American English and Educational Malpractice (Austin, TX, 1999).