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Supporting the Hungarian Language both inside and outside Hungary

Abstract (English)

The overall situation of Hungarian speakers in today's Hungary and beyond is briefly described in the first part of the paper. Having described how the socio-historical changes of the twentieth century influenced the foreign language skills of today's Hungarians, the main activities of the Institute of Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences are outlined, as this institution plays an important role in helping Hungarians in and outside Hungary through its public advice services concerning the Hungarian language. In the 21st century, this activity is supported with the help of language technology applications, some of which are listed in the final part of the paper.

Magyar összefoglaló

Az írásban röviden ismertetjük a magyar nyelv beszélőinek helyzetét a mai Magyarországon és annak határain kívül. Ezután kitérünk arra, hogy a beszélők számszerű megoszlása és a kialakult történeti helyzet a mai magyarok idegennyelvtudására milyen hatással van. Az ezt követő részben bemutatjuk az MTA Nyelvtudományi Intézet fő tevékenységeit, valamint azt a társadalmi szerepet, amit a – ma már gépi segítséggel is megtámogatott – magyar nyelvi szolgáltatások területén nyújtani tud.

1.   The Hungarian language in Hungary

Hungarian is the only official language of Hungary. Hungarian became one of the country's official languages in 1836, and in 1844 it was established as the only official language. Since Hungary's accession to the European Union in 2004, Hungarian has become one of the 24 official languages of the European Union. The main dialects of Hungarian are Central Transdanubian, Western Transdanubian, Southern Transdanubian, North-Eastern Hungarian, Palóc, Southern Great Plains, and the Tisza–Körös dialect. Hungarians have difficulty in understanding the Moldavian Csángó dialect spoken in Romania and the Oberwart dialect spoken in Austria. Outside Hungary, Hungarian is also spoken by Hungarian communities in countries that today make up Slovakia, Southern Poland, West Ukraine, Transylvania and Partium in Central and West-Romania, Vojvodina in Northern Serbia, Northern Croatia, and Northern Slovenia. (The Treaty of Trianon after World War I resulted in many ethnic Hungarians being displaced from their homes and communities in the former territories of the Austro-Hungarian Em-

pire.) Hungarian is also spoken by Hungarian diaspora communities worldwide, especially in the United States, Canada and in many South American states. Like two other EU languages, Finnish and Estonian, Hungarian belongs to the Uralic language family branch. Hungarian's closest relatives are Mansi and Khanty, two languages spoken in Siberia. Hungarian is the 14th most widely spoken European language: the total number of native Hungarian speakers is around 13 million, 9.8 million of them in Hungary, and there are thirteen officially recognised minorities, who make up nearly 3% of the total population.[1]

2.   The Hungarian language outside Hungary

Hungarian is a recognised minority language in many countries, primarily those bordering Hungary. According to various census data, in the first decade of the 21st century the numbers of Hungarians in other countries[2] were as follows: 1.56 million in the United States, 1.22 million in Romania, 458,000 in Slovakia, 315,000 in Canada, 253,000 in Serbia, 200,000 in Israel and around one million more in other (mostly European and South American) countries.

Just as Hungarian speaking minorities can be found in other countries, there are also a number of non-Hungarian speaking minorities in Hungary, including Armenian, Boyash, Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Greek, Polish, Romani, Romanian, Ruthenian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovene, Ukrainian, and Hungarian Sign Language (HSL).

3.   Second language acquisition in Hungary

In the First World War Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory, including all the multicultural and multilingual regions. Consequently, in Hungary today there are almost no multilingual regions: practically everybody speaks Hungarian. Before the Second World War, German and French were widely spoken. German was a true second language – Hungary was historically an area of Austrian-German economic, political and cultural interest – while French was spoken mostly by upper class citizens. After 1945, knowledge of German and French gradually disappeared and Russian became the only official second language. It was taught in primary and secondary schools and at universities, but for political and linguistic reasons most Hungarians were reluctant to learn the language. Hungary as a typical communist country was a rather closed area between 1945 and 1990: almost nobody left the country, and almost nobody entered it. Therefore Hungarians had no opportunity to meet flesh-and-blood people from foreign cultures speaking foreign languages. This situation was exacerbated because all films and TV programmes were dubbed. Consequently, an artificial "linguistic island" was created in the

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[1]   According to the 2001 census data.

[2]   https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_diaspora.

middle of Europe. The main linguistic influences on the Hungarian language today are Romani (local influence) and English (international influence). Interestingly, after more than four decades of communism there are almost no Russian loanwords in today's Hungarian, while earlier cultural and linguistic influences – Turkish, Latin, German and Slavic loanwords – are still present.

4.   The Research Institute for Linguistics

The Hungarian Academy of Sciences was founded by Count István Széchenyi in 1825 with the aim of developing the Hungarian language and contributing to scientific work being carried out in Hungarian, because at that time the official language in Hungary was German. Since 1870 the Academy has evolved to become the centre of scientific activity in Hungary. It is the responsibility of the Academy to support the development of the Hungarian language and the cultivation of sciences in Hungarian, scientific research, and the publication of scientific books and journals. The Academy regularly evaluates scientific research results as well as encouraging, supporting, disseminating and using publications. Within its sphere of responsibilities, it represents Hungarian science in Hungarian public life and at international scientific fora. A network of academic research institutes has been established with the aim of excellence in research, authenticity in science and a commitment to society, producing scientific results of value to Hungary and the rest of the world. Today the research network of the Academy comprises 10 research centres and 5 research institutes. One of the latter is *Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Nyelvtudományi Intézete* (MTA NYTI or in English, the *Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*), which was established in 1949. The primary tasks of the Institute include theoretical and applied research in general linguistic issues, as well as in Hungarian linguistic and Uralic studies. Additional tasks today include psycho-, neuro-, socio- and computational linguistic research. The latter covers, among others, the assembly of corpora and databases for language technology and speech processing applications. The Institute also undertakes the ongoing compilation of the comprehensive dictionary of Hungarian based on corpus linguistic research. A unique feature of the Research Institute for Linguistics is that it runs a "virtual university chair", the *Theoretical Linguistics Programme*, jointly with Eötvös Loránd University, involving co-workers as professors. Other projects investigate different variants of Hungarian and minority languages in Hungary, as well as issues of language policy. The Institute operates a public advice service and prepares expert reports on relevant matters as required. In 2014, the Hungarian Government established *Magyar Nyelvstratégiai Intézet* (MANYSI – in English, the *Hungarian Language Strategy Institute*). The plan is for the academic research institute and the governmental strategic institute to share a number of tasks concerning the Hungarian language in the future.

5. Public advice services, "linguistic otherness" projects and language technology services at RIL

Many Hungarians believe misleading assertions such as "Hungarian is a unique language", "Hungarian is almost impossible to learn", "There are no other languages in which you can express yourself better than Hungarian", or "We are unique, so our relatives should be one of the distinct nations (like Sumerian or Etruscan)". Many Hungarians seek "official" answers to these questions, so the term 'linguistics' is generally understood as a sort of explanation service concerning language. Another type of language service is replying to questions such as "How do you write something according to the norms?" The origin of questions about orthography can be found in "prescriptive linguistics", which is the basic linguistic framework taught in schools. Another group of typical questions asked of the public linguistic services are those concerning given names: "Can a certain word be used as a given name?" Because of the general demand for academic confirmation or academic feedback to these problems, the RIL has introduced the following public advice services:

– An advisory service concerning language use – 700-800 emails and phone enquiries per year since 1949 (in earlier years via letter and fax).
– An advisory service on male and female given names (a legal requirement) – 700-800 queries per year.
– www.helyesiras.mta.hu – a web portal for the most typical spelling questions, set up in 2013

Several sociolinguistic projects concerning multilingual issues and language diversity both inside and outside Hungary are organised by the Institute for Linguistics. In 2008 the *Research Centre for Multilingualism @ RIL* was established. Its representatives organise local events and participate at conferences and workshops organised in and out of Hungary. They also participate in the networking and dissemination activities of projects like the *Mercator Network* of Language Diversity Centres. This connects multilingual communities across Europe, promoting knowledge sharing and cutting-edge initiatives. Since its foundation in 1987 the Institute for Linguistics has been the only Eastern European member.[3] It focuses on comparative sociolinguistic research on linguistic minorities, sign language and deaf community issues and Romani sociolinguistics. Another important project of the Centre is *Dimensions of Linguistic Otherness* (DILING): this is about the future prospects, maintenance and revitalisation of minority languages.[4] The Centre participated in the *Language Rich Europe* project focusing on policy trends and best practice in multilingual education in Europe. The activity

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[3] www.mercator-network.eu/mercator-network/research-institute-linguistics/.

[4] www.nytud.hu/diling/.

of the Research Centre for Multilingualism covers various further research projects concerning Romani/Lovari and Boyash gypsy communities as well as hearing-impaired communities. The Centre has been involved in the development of the Sign Language Law of Hungary, which was adopted in 2009 and recognises sign language as an "independent and natural" language. Sign language became the 14th minority language used in Hungary alongside Armenian, Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Greek, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Ruthenian, Serbian, Slovak, Slovenian and Ukrainian.[5] The Research Centre for Multilingualism is a member of the network of Hungarian linguistic research centers called *Termini Network*, which was established in 2001. The network consists of institutions in neighbouring countries across the whole area of the Carpathian Basin where Hungarians live. Its most important programmes are the following: the characteristics of the lexicon of the Hungarian language abroad; lexicological, lexicographical research: the enlargement of the wordlist of the Hungarian language abroad (Termini network); corpus building, language planning and treatment of language problems, etc.

The Research Institute for Linguistics is also very active in human language technologies, and the most important resources and services at RIL are the Hungarian National Corpus,[6] the Spelling Advisory Portal,[7] the Hungarian Historical Corpus,[8] the Budapest Sociological Interviews,[9] the Verb Argument Browser,[10] and the Uralic Etymological Database.[11] Many more (besides the above) can be found at the National Corpus Portal.[12]

6.   Conclusions

We briefly described the situation of Hungarian speakers in today's Hungary and beyond. We then sketched how the numerical distribution of speakers of Hungarian and the sociological-historical changes of the 20th century influenced the foreign language skills of today's Hungarians. We presented the main activities of the Institute of Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the social role it can provide in the field of public advice services concerning the Hungarian language. This activity is supported, in many cases today, by language technology solutions.

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[5] www.mercator-network.eu/mercator-network/research-institute-linguistics/.

[6] http://hnc.nytud.hu.

[7] http://helyesiras.mta.hu.

[8] www.nytud.hu/hhc/.

[9] http://buszi.nytud.hu/.

[10] http://corpus.nytud.hu/mazsola/index_eng.html.

[11] www.uralonet.nytud.hu/.

[12] http://corpus.nytud.hu/nkp/.

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