

MODERN TRENDS
IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING
AND APPLIED LINGUISTICS

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AND APPLIED LINGUISTICS**

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The present volume publishes the proceedings of the international academic conference held on 11 April, 2014 at the Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute. During the event, the participants worked in two sections. In the first one, presentations on language pedagogy could be heard, while in the second one participants discussed applied linguistic issues. The internationally known and acknowledged plenary speakers and presenters spoke about the most modern trends of their research areas. The written-up version of the presentations has been collected and published in one volume so that they could reach a wider audience.

Jelen kötet a 2014. április 11-én a II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskolán megtartott nemzetközi tudományos konferencia írott anyagait tartalmazza. Az eseményen két szekcióban folyt a munka. Az egyikben nyelvpedagógiai, a másikban alkalmazott nyelvészeti kutatásokról hangzottak el előadások. A nemzetközileg ismert és elismert előadók kutatási területeik legmodernebb irányzatairól értekeztek. Az előadások szerkesztett változatát egy kötetbe gyűjtöttük össze, hogy minél szélesebb szakmai közönséghez jusson el.

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Contents

PREFACE	7
Medgyes, Péter WHY WON'T THE LITTLE BEASTS BEHAVE?	8
Orosz, Ildikó POSSIBILITIES OF HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN TRANSCARPATHIA IN THE LIGHT OF A DISRESPECTED LANGUAGE LAW	24
Ajtay-Horváth, Magda CONTEXTS CHALLENGED BY POETRY	29
Bárány, Erzsébet METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS OF THE ACQUISITION OF UKRAINIAN AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (USL) IN TRANSCARPATHIAN HUNGARIAN SCHOOLS: PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS	37
Csernicskó, István THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING UKRAINIAN AS A STATE LANGUAGE IN TRANSCARPATHIA	45
Fábián, Márta IMPACT OF MONOLINGUAL AND BILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT ON THE RECEPTIVE SKILLS AND LEARNING STRATEGIES OF YOUNG LEARNERS OF EFL IN TRANSCARPATHIAN HUNGARIAN SCHOOLS	53
Fodor, Gyula LANGUAGE SITUATION IN UKRAINE AND POSSIBILITIES OF TEACHING THE TRANSCARPATHIAN GEOGRAPHICAL HERITAGE THROUGH ENGLISH	64
Frank, Jerrold WHAT IS A GOOD ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER?	72
Henkel, Beatrix THE HOW AND WHY OF MINORITY LEARNERS' LANGUAGE MOTIVATION	76
Horváth, József "TWO WORLDS AND US" ORIGINALITY IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' E-BOOKS IN	90
Husztí, Ilona DO MENTORS AND TRAINEES AGREE? INSIGHTS INTO THE PROCESSES OF BECOMING A TEACHER	101
Illés, Éva ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA IN LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY	119
Kovács, Júlia A CASE STUDY OF A JAPANESE-HUNGARIAN SECONDARY- SCHOOL EFL STUDENT: THE INTERACTION OF SOCIOCULTURAL IDENTITY, LANGUAGES AND WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE	132
Lechner, Ilona IDIOMS BASED ON METAPHORS IN THE FLA PROCESS FROM A COGNITIVE LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE	148
Márku, Anita and Bartha, Csilla RESEARCHING THE INTERNET LANGUAGE USE AS A MODERN TREND IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS	156

Negre, Marianna THE INFLUENCE OF MULTILINGUALISM ON LEARNING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE	168
Pecsora, Krisztina ‘COURSEBOOKS ARE NEEDED MUCH MORE BY THE PUPILS THAN TEACHERS’: THE ANALYSES OF ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS FOR FORMS 5 AND 6 USED IN TRANSCARPATHIAN HUNGARIAN SCHOOLS	180
Pillar, Granville W. VIDEO-TEXT VERSUS AUDIO-TEXT AS STIMULUS FOR L2 INSTRUCTION AND ASSESSMENT.....	196
Szerencsi, Katalin A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF TOP AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL INAUGURATION ADDRESSES	210
Szócs, Krisztina LANGUAGE TEACHERS’ PERCEPTION REGARDING LANGUAGE LEARNING AUTONOMY AND SELF-ASSESSMENT IN A HUNGARIAN SECONDARY SCHOOL CONTEXT	223
Vraukó, Tamás “BREEDING” TEXTS FOR TRANSLATION PRACTICE.....	236
CONTRIBUTORS	244

THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING UKRAINIAN AS A STATE LANGUAGE IN TRANSCARPATHIA

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The efficiency of state language (Ukrainian) teaching is poor and unbalanced in the Transcarpathian Hungarian schools for several reasons.¹

1 The status of modern-day Transcarpathia over the last 150 years

The territory of the administration unit that we call Transcarpathia today existed neither as a geographical, nor as a geopolitical entity. Throughout the 20th century it belonged to several countries (Csernicsekó & Ferenc, 2014). The state language has changed six times during the 20th century and accordingly changed the compulsory language taught in the schools of the region. The compulsory state language role was fulfilled by the Hungarian, ‘Czechoslovakian’, Russian and Ukrainian.

There were always generations left out from compulsory language education during the state- and state language-changes. The ‘Czechoslovakian’ language, for example, was introduced as a compulsory subject in every Transcarpathian school, but those who graduated before this year had never come across the language at school. After the power shift in 1938/39, a generation was, again, excluded from Hungarian language teaching. Although, after WWII, the teaching of Russian was emphasised by the Soviet authorities, those who left school earlier had no chance to learn Russian at school in an instructed way. Then, when suddenly compulsory Russian language teaching was replaced by Ukrainian, many people did not study Ukrainian because of the above mentioned reasons, not to mention those who attended school during the transitional periods. Students, for example, who were in the 5th form in the academic year of 1990/1991 in a Transcarpathian Hungarian school learned Russian for the first 5 years, then commencing on 1 September 1991 they were taught in Ukrainian.

The efficient teaching of Ukrainian is hindered by many factors.

¹ This problem has been widely researched and discussed (cf. Csernicsekó 1998a (pp. 164-173), 1998b, 1998c, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2009a, 2009b, 2011, 2012, Orosz & Csernicsekó, 1999 (pp. 70-83)).

2 The lack of qualified teachers

In the academic year of 1997/1998, 60% of teachers teaching Ukrainian in minority schools of Transcarpathia had no qualification in Ukrainian language teaching (Beregszászi, Csernicskó & Orosz 2001), while in the academic year of 2008/2009, 40% had (Motilchak, 2009). In the summer of 2009, Viktor Juschenko called it shameful that in some schools with a minority language as the language of instruction, there are no qualified Ukrainian language teachers². The president instructed the leaders of the county state administrations to assess how many Ukrainian language teachers were needed in the schools of the county and to ensure that by 1 September, 2009 every school had qualified Ukrainian teachers³. The presidential order could not be executed fully. In 2011 in the Hungarian schools of the town of Beregszász, 22 teachers taught the Ukrainian language, 10 of whom had a Russian language teaching qualification, 6 were elementary teachers and only 6 had a degree in Ukrainian language and literature (Bárány, Huszti & Fábíán, 2011).

Until the academic year of 2003/2004, teachers in Ukraine were not trained to teach Ukrainian as a second language (state language) for non-Ukrainian students, instead it was taught as a mother tongue. In those schools where the language of instruction is the minority language, the state language is taught by teachers who were trained to teach the Ukrainian language to students whose mother tongue is Ukrainian, or teachers with other specializations who participated in a short retraining course. In many small villages the state language is taught by persons who have no qualification in pedagogy but have a good level of language proficiency. Some teachers do not even know the language and culture of those nationalities to whom they teach the Ukrainian language (Gulpa, 2000; Póhán, 1999, 2003; Milován, 2002). However, according to *The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities* and language rights experts (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990) the state language should be taught by bilingual teachers.

3 The lack of appropriate coursebooks

For many years after the introduction of the Ukrainian language as a mandatory subject in schools, the necessary curriculum and coursebooks were not provided by the state. When finally they became available in the minority schools, teachers heavily criticised them (Gulpa, 2000; Koljadzsin, 2003; Póhán, 1999, 2003). The reason of the critics in the first place was that the textbooks were composed by teachers and scholars who did not know the minorities, their language or culture (Gulpa 2000, Koljadzsin 2003, Póhán 1999, 2003). The other rightful critique in

² http://oktatas.origo.hu/20090807/nincs_eleg_ukran_nyelvtanar_karpataljan; <http://www.nyest.hu/hirek/nincs-eleg-ukran-nyelvtanar-karpataljan>

³ <http://tsn.ua/ukrayina/yushchenko-vimagaye-znaiti-po-vchitelyu-ukrayinskoyi-movi-dlya-kozhnoyi-shkoli.html>

connection with the coursebooks was that they were too grammar-centred, focusing on the theoretical teaching of grammar, and they did not include any communication perspectives (Bárány, Huszti & Fábíán, 2011).

The curriculum and the coursebooks do not take into consideration the language background of the students: expectations exceed possibilities. The Ukrainian language curriculum does not build on the knowledge already gained in the mother tongue and foreign language classes: it requires the acquisition of grammatical categories that have already been learnt in mother tongue classes. For instance, students already know the parts of speech (in Hungarian lessons they have learnt about verbs, nouns, adjectives, numerals, pronouns, etc.), but they have to learn them again in elementary classes in Ukrainian with their definitions, instead of focusing on speaking skills. The necessity of grammar teaching has long been debated in the language teaching literature, and recently Singleton and Cook (2014) have shown that it plays an important role in second language acquisition, though vocabulary and phonology may seem more obvious. However, grammar is overemphasized in the Ukrainian language coursebooks and one may have the impression that the leaders of education do not expect the acquisition of the Ukrainian language rather the knowledge of the Ukrainian grammar system.

Though the Ukrainian language has been a compulsory subject in the Hungarian schools since 1991, methodological aids have not been composed yet: there are no teachers' guidebooks, school dictionaries, and video- or audio-visual aids. The Ukrainian state budget does not provide methodological aids.

4 The lack of appropriate perspectives and methods

The Ukrainian language as a subject has the same name in the timetable of both, Ukrainian and minority schools, but means something different. In the former case, students come to school with native language proficiency, so the Ukrainian language (mother tongue) teaching, besides writing and reading, means developing knowledge and literacy in the mother tongue, awareness of the norms of the standard language variation and a grounding in foreign language learning/teaching. In the latter case, the main goal is the acquisition of the state language by non-Ukrainian students and the development of communicative skills in that language. If our starting point is the difference between these two aims, it becomes clear that we cannot use the same methods when teaching the Ukrainian language in Ukrainian and in minority schools. Baugh (1999), an American linguist, argues that the teaching of the state language (second language) according to the methodology of mother tongue teaching is a pedagogical mistake.

The need to distinguish between the two types of schools in connection with the goals and methods of teaching Ukrainian is also necessary when we look at the difference between the number of classes per week, curricula and coursebooks.

In the 11th form students of the Ukrainian schools learn the Ukrainian language subject in 44.5 classes, while students attending Hungarian schools learn the same subject in 30 classes per week (Cserniczkó, 2012).

As the aims of the teaching of the Ukrainian language and other conditions and circumstances are different in the two types of schools, it is logical that the learning requirements should also be different. Nevertheless, the same requirements apply to everyone in the Ukrainian language and literature subjects. The same knowledge of Ukrainian is required from those who studied in schools with Ukrainian as a language of instruction and from those who studied in Russian, Hungarian or Romanian minority schools (Cserniczkó & Ferenc 2010).

5 The lack of clear-cut objectives

Clear goals and tasks are not set in connection with the academic expectations of students in Ukrainian language as a school subject.

State requirements with regard to foreign languages (English, German, French and Spanish) are fixed in writing: by the end of elementary school (Form 4) students are required to reach A1 level, by the end of primary school (Form 9) A2+ level, and by the time they leave school (Form 11) B1+ level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001). The normative documents of education do not define the required levels non-Ukrainian students have to reach during their Ukrainian language studies.

In practice, this means that the Ministry of Education in Kyiv expects native-like proficiency from school-leaving minority teenagers. This is impossible from linguistic, psychological and pedagogical points of view.

6 The homogenization: universal curricula, coursebooks and methods

The Ukrainian education policy homogenizes language learners. It approves universal curricula and coursebooks, even though the linguistic and language ecological situations of Ukrainian language acquisition are different for students living in cities in residential areas compared to those living in small villages. In the teaching of foreign languages it is normal to create small groups of beginners, advanced students, etc. and they proceed according to their level and are provided with teaching materials. In the case of state language teaching in Ukraine, decree No 461 issued by the Ministry of Education on 26 May 2008 permits small groups in the Ukrainian classes of the minority schools. The decree does not say anything about the principles according to which the groups should be divided or about supporting schools with regard to books and curricula for different language proficiency groups. The language proficiency level of students is not measured at all when students start school.

7 Demographic features

Ukrainian language acquisition is not facilitated by the fact that the language background of students is not considered either when they start school or during schooling. According to census data, Transcarpathian nationalities live in relatively compact settlement areas. Almost half of the Hungarians (46 %) live in settlements where they have a majority of 80 % and 62 % live in settlements where they make up the absolute majority (Molnár & Molnár, 2010). Most of the Romanians also live in a relatively homogeneous block close to the Ukrainian-Romanian border. Members of the majority nation (Ukrainians) dominate the area in terms of numbers where they are settled.

8 Language preferences

The Hungarian language is dominant in those settlements where Hungarians make up the majority. The main (or exclusive) language of families, the private sphere, publications and the media (TV, radio, the press) is Hungarian (see Csernicskó, 1998a, 2005, 2010).

In spite of all this, the prerequisite of those who plan Ukrainian language teaching is that all children starting school already have some level of Ukrainian language competence and it is assumed that they also have daily opportunities to practise Ukrainian outside school. This is true for some children, but for many this is not the case.

9 The deficiencies of language education in kindergartens

State language acquisition should be grounded in kindergartens. There is no central curriculum or syllabus for teaching the Ukrainian language in the Hungarian kindergartens. Kindergarten teachers are not trained to teach Ukrainian to kindergarten children through different activities.

Proper language training and preparation for Ukrainian language teaching is hindered by other factors in kindergartens. For example, in most of the Transcarpathian Hungarian kindergartens the groups are mixed: children from 2.5 to 6 years of age can be found in these groups, and the number of children in one group varies from 12 to 30. In almost every kindergarten there are two activities per week in the Ukrainian language, but due to the size of the groups it is difficult to organise intensive training sessions. In practice, it is impossible to make an activity plan for mixed-age groups that considers both the linguistic background and the age of the children.

10 Conclusions

According to international linguistic human rights experts (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1990; Phillipson, Rannut & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994), the right to learn the state

language is an essential right of every minority citizen. *The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities* clearly states that official state language acquisition is needed for the successful societal integration of minorities. If we accept the fact that everybody has a mother tongue and we acknowledge the right to learn (a) the mother tongue and (b) the state language as a school subject, then we have to realize that: in the case of Ukrainian students the *Ukrainian language* subject covers the right of (a) and (b), however in the case of minority students point (a) means the *mother tongue* and point (b) means the *Ukrainian language* subject. So, the workload of Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian students is different: while the Ukrainian student is relaxing, playing games or preparing for the university entrance exam, their minority peers are learning the state language. It is a big luxury to invest time, energy and money in the children's state language acquisition when, due to the present conditions and circumstances, they master it to the required level.

If a Transcarpathian Hungarian student learns the Ukrainian language as a subject for 11 years (from 1st form to the 11th) and they cannot speak it at the required level, then we can be sure that the educational system does not work in the right way. The solution is not to study in the majority language but to find those possibilities within the frame of the present minority language school system, that lead to good language proficiency and additive bilingualism.

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