

MODERN TRENDS
IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING
AND APPLIED LINGUISTICS

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**MODERN TRENDS
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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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POSSIBILITIES OF HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN TRANS-CARPATHTHIA IN THE LIGHT OF A DISRESPECTED LANGUAGE LAW*

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“Laws have never ever knocked down walls, my son; we have to do that ourselves.”

Elek Benedek: “Testament and six letters”, 1895

So what has the Language Law promised us? On the one hand, it has promised that every man can freely define their mother tongue and can choose the language of communication. However, these nice principles are impossible to realize in practice because the Constitution adopted in 1996 clearly states that Ukraine is a monolithic state. From this derives that the Ukrainian language is the mother tongue for everyone. But if one is allowed to choose which is one’s mother tongue then one will choose the language into which they were born. That way the language would be one’s first language.

On the other hand, it has promised to define the concept of ‘regional languages’ which is extremely crucial in a country that is monolithic only by the Constitution, otherwise numerous minorities live in it. In addition, these are not immigrant but autochthonous minorities which were formed in various centuries as a result of historical, political, and economic processes. Because of this, they live in a block, and consider themselves native; therefore the law about the regional languages is essential for them.

The regional languages according to the law are: Russian, Belarusian, Bulgarian, Armenian, Gagauz, Yiddish, Crimean Tatar, Moldavian, German, Modern Greek, Polish, Romani, Romanian, Slovakian, Hungarian, Ruthenian, Karaim, Krymchak. In terms of the law, the use of regional and minority languages is possible where the percentage of representatives of national minorities reaches or exceeds 10% of the total population of the given geographical area. The law has promised declared rights for the regional languages, namely that the abuse of the state language and the regional languages, as well as their purposeful distortion in official documents shall be punishable. The law has promised the protection of names of settlements and proper personal names, too, as distortion of the latter ones violates human rights.

* Про засади державної мовної політики. Відомості Верховної Ради (ВВР), 2013, № 23, ст.218.
Available online: <http://zakon1.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/5029-17>

The law has also promised that it realizes the natural bilingualism, which has existed for centuries in Transcarpathia, in a written form. It refers to the essential need of minorities to issue official documents, e.g. general certificates of secondary education, in two languages. In addition, the law promised us to teach Ukrainian indispensable for integrating into the Ukrainian society. But it failed to define the measures. Unfortunately, there is a deep abyss here between the declaration of the law and the required measures. The fact is that nowadays nobody is expected to acquire the state language at a level necessary for their own needs and career, but everybody is expected to speak the state language at the mother tongue level irrespective of what community the person was born into or where they live. This appears to be a discriminative influence, especially in the sphere of tertiary education or further education because our school-leavers applying for any speciality must take and pass an examination in Ukrainian language and literature which is tailored according to the system of requirements of native Ukrainian speakers leaving Ukrainian schools. Thus, here is the discrimination.

It is even worse that the Ukrainian language, as it is dealt with as a political question, cannot be a second language because this is the official language of a monolithic nation state. Thus, no elaborated system of requirements exists for this language (like for instance, the description of levels A, B, and C in the Common European Framework for Languages^{**}). There is only one level of language knowledge of Ukrainian which is tailored to meet the capabilities and possibilities of native Ukrainians. Hence it derives logically from the viewpoint of the state that this language cannot be taught as a second language then, because there is only one level that everybody has to achieve, namely the level of the native user.

The issue of language teaching should be dealt with methodologically rather than politically in the future. Also, one should admit that it is not an assimilating tool, but rather an integrating one. As such, it should mean that everyone has to achieve a level necessary for their own well-being. Therefore, it would be necessary to develop a differentiated evaluation system, which could also be a pre-requisite for further education. Unfortunately, the fact that Ukraine entered the Bologna process has not resulted in a breakthrough, either.

Now let us examine how a European law can be interpreted in two different ways. According to European norms, the Bologna system claims that everyone can enter the system, and it is decided only later who can step forward to the next level in education and who will quit. In Ukraine it is vice versa because the system of education is closed from the very beginning: only those can enter who pass the school-leaving examination in Ukrainian language and literature. Other languages in Ukraine did not have this advanced level school-leaving examination system; therefore, one can see that a double standard is applied in the country. While school-leavers could take such an advanced level examination in Russian, they were not allowed to do it in Hungarian,

^{**} Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. (2001). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Council of Europe.

Romanian, or Slovakian. Consequently, when a student wanted to study Hungarian language and literature, or Romanian language and literature, or Slovakian language and literature in tertiary education, their knowledge of these languages was not measured. They were tested on whether they knew Ukrainian at the native level, and their knowledge of English was also measured.

The erroneous idea that everyone in Ukraine speaks Ukrainian at the L1 level creates further problems. For instance, teachers of Ukrainian as a foreign language are not trained in the country. The unprepared teachers recognize and face the fact in a minority context that their speech is completely incomprehensible for learners. This can lead to serious conflicts, for example to the learners becoming estranged from the teacher, and also from the language.

Ukraine has realized the fact that in the complicated world we are living in monolinguals cannot succeed, and the law supports the launch of teaching a second foreign language in schools.

In our context where we live, at least one language of the environment or a regional language and a universal language or a foreign language should be acquired in order for somebody to succeed in various spheres of life. For instance, for a Ukrainian person from Aknaszlatina Romanian could be the regional language, while for a Ukrainian in the Ungvár/Uzhhorod district the regional language could be Hungarian because he lives in such circumstances. For Hungarians, the regional language would be Ukrainian as it is spoken in their context. However, politics interferes and officials state that Ukrainian cannot be a regional language for us, Hungarians as this is the state language. At the same time Romanian and Hungarian cannot be the second language, only English, German, French, Spanish and perhaps Russian. Although teaching the regional language would be compulsory in schools in theory, but based on experiment and experience Hungarian has not been allowed to be taught as a regional language in schools in the Ungvár and the Nagyszőlős districts in a totally Ukrainian context.

It is done despite the fact that other orders were also issued concerning it, for instance, Order 409 which clearly stated that hours can be diverted to other disciplines within the language competence block when teaching the compulsory second foreign language from Form 5. This order does not use the term ‘regional language,’ it only mentions the Ukrainian language, foreign language, the Russian language, and the languages of other nationalities. We have initiated the introduction of those languages starting from Form 5 in Hungarian schools which are official in Transcarpathia. However, the ministry insisted on the one enumerated by them. Therefore, most of the Hungarian schools introduced Russian as a second foreign language. This confuses the pupils completely.

Despite the fact that the law states that state language and regional language or minority language education is allowed at all levels, one has to request it officially, and the requests are either accepted or refuted. If they are accepted, then authorities should take into consideration at entrance examinations and later on at higher educational

establishments that students learn special disciplines in the language in which they can proceed most easily.

The law also details that the regional language can be chosen by non-state-supported or private institutions except for Ukrainian language and literature. This proves that the Ukrainian language and literature deserves a peculiar status, which is not tailored to the given context, but is supported by a political power.

Well, every law is worth as much as one can realize from it. So far nothing has been done because it had been cancelled by the time any measures could be taken. Now a new law is promised, the first draft of which is even more disadvantageous than the previous one was because it defines the regional language status and forming the regional language competences in 30%. Moreover, this could only be reached if 30% of the population would request it with personal signature. Simply put, it means that an officially ratified law, for example tax law, comes into force only in case 30% of the population claims they agree with this law, although it is declared to be universal.

Therefore, we local people living here have to decide how to go on. I believe the first and the most important issue is that whatever the new law brings for us, it should be accepted as a national minimum that we demand keeping the former norms as much as possible. And no party policy or other questions should be involved in this issue.

Our urgent task is now to develop with educational experts the short-, mid- and long-term conception of mother tongue education which could also include the question of language teaching in Transcarpathia.

We would err if we waited for only ready instructions from Kyiv. We should claim that the rights guaranteed by the law remain in all spheres. Now it is an interim period, and if we speak about constitutional state – and Ukraine is striving to be one – then no one should deal with the limitation of the guaranteed rights, and one should be perseverant enough to wait for the state's declaration that the rights guaranteed by the law before should be followed. However, for this declaration it is crucial that we do not renounce our rights voluntarily because of any fears. We should give preference to our children's rights and should not be afraid to announce that for our children three languages are as enough as for the Ukrainian children: the mother tongue, a world language and a regional language. The hours allocated for teaching the three languages should be divided among them and nobody should try to persuade us to learn another language.

What else can we do? We can enjoy and benefit from the opportunities that the law ensures. We do not renounce our rights, i.e. we can demand in first place at every level – thus in those villages where Hungarian schools were closed (Tekeháza, Mátyfalva, Fancsika, and Csepe) – that Hungarian education be restored with the condition that Ukrainian is also taught. However, the basis of this is that the Ukrainian language is taught as a second language to us, Hungarians, and not as the mother tongue, starting from Class 1 when the children do not speak it yet.

A second possibility that the Upper-Tisza region can make use of – Rahó and Kőrösmező, where we lost Hungarian education 40 years ago; the children now cannot speak Hungarian properly and we have to admit Ukrainian became their first language – is that they can ask for Hungarian as a foreign language to be taught as a compulsory school subject because there is a worked out syllabus and a possibility provided by the law for it, but it must be asked for. Again, our courage is needed in this case because we should not only claim Hungarian citizenship when applying for a visa, but also we should assert our rights by the Ukrainian authorities.

The third phase is that we ask for Hungarian as a first foreign language in those sporadic settlements where the parent wants very much that their child get schooling support from Hungary^{***}, but actually it is not possible because the child cannot learn Hungarian language and literature as compulsory school subjects as there are not enough applicants for this. But communities can also ask for Hungarian as a second foreign language, in those sporadic settlements, especially in towns, where other educational establishments are not available for them.

An even weaker version than this is teaching Hungarian as an optional school subject. The local authorities can order that there should be a curriculum accepted by the ministry for this school subject. The Hungarian state helps us in designing the necessary textbooks for the curriculum, and while we do not have this all, the Balassi Institute (Budapest, Hungary) can provide us with teaching aids for teaching a foreign language. Furthermore, I hope it can provide retraining and further training for those Hungarian teachers who were not qualified for this task, either.

Naturally, we are facing up with challenges. The first one is that we achieve that the question of language learning be dealt with as a methodological, rather than a political issue. Concerning further education, the Ukrainian language competence should be measured and not the knowledge of Ukrainian language and literature at the mother tongue level.

We should also widen the scope of our mother tongue usage because a language cannot survive on its own, but only in case it is needed and we use it in other professions. This is also needed so that our feeling of comfort be reserved in the territory where we were born as autochthonous inhabitants.

I wish we overcome the political publicity and propaganda and we could handle them in a way that the peace present so far in Transcarpathia will remain.

Finally, another crucial question: every solution about which a decision has been made will function effectively only in the case there are devoted people locally, who will fight for a cause with perseverant work till the end. Otherwise, we can only have a desire over which we will lament.

^{***} The Hungarian state aims to support the Hungarian education beyond its borders; therefore a schooling support is paid annually to all those children who can prove that they study Hungarian language and literature in schools with Hungarian language of instruction. With this financial help parents are motivated to let their children attend Hungarian schools. As a consequence, these schools will not be closed and Hungarian education will survive. (Editors)

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