

Acta Beregsasiensis

2010/2

Acta Beregsasiensis

A II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskola
tudományos évkönyve

Науковий вісник
Закарпатського угорського інституту ім. Ф. Ракоці ІІ

A Scholarly Annual
of Ferenc Rákóczi II. Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute

2010
IX. évfolyam, 2. kötet
Том ІХ, № 2
Volume IX, № 2

УДК 001(477.87)
ББК 72.4(4УКР-43АК)
А-19

Az Acta Beregsasiensis a II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskola tudományos kiadványa. Jelen kötet a 2010-es év első felének magyar, ukrán, angol és német nyelvű tanulmányait foglalja magába. Az intézmény tanárai, hallgatói, valamint külföldi tudósok munkáit publikáló kötet a nyelv- és irodalomtudomány, a történelem, pedagógia, biológia, gazdaság és más tudományágak különböző területeit öleli fel.

www.kmf.uz.ua/hun114/index.php/kiadvanyaink/110-a-ii-rakoczi-ferenc-karpataljai-magyar-fiskola-tudomanyos-evkoenye

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A KÖTET TANULMÁNYAIBAN ELŐFORDULÓ ÁLLÍTÁSOKÉRT MINDEN ESETBEN A SZERZŐ FELEL.

A kiadvány megjelenését a



támogatta

ISBN: 978-966-2595-01-7

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Készült: PoliPrint Kft., Ungvár, Turgenyev u. 2. Felelős vezető: Kovács Dezső



A II. Rákóczi Ferenc
Kárpátjai Magyar Főiskola
tudományos évkönyve

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Fifth graders' receptive skills in English and Ukrainian

Резюме A jelen cikk a beregszászi magyar iskolás ötödikesek angol és ukrán nyelvi receptív készségeivel foglalkozik. Egy hosszú távú kutatás második fázisának részeredményeit mutatja be. Az itt részletezett tanulmány célja az volt, hogy bepillantást nyerjünk az ötödik osztályosok receptív (befogadó) készségeinek milyenségébe angolból és ukránból, illetve a kapott eredményeket összehasonlíthassuk az első fázis eredményeivel és megállapíthassuk a különbségeket. Az elemzések azt bizonyítják, hogy a vizsgált készségek tekintetében fejlődés és javulás ment végbe, bár ukrán beszédértésből jobb eredmények születtek, mint angolból. Megállapítható, hogy az olvasási készség fejlesztésére egyik nyelvből sem fordítanak kellő figyelmet.

Резюме У статті розглядаються рецептивні навички п'ятикласників, які навчаються в угорськомовних школах міста Берегова, з англійської та української мов. У роботі представлені результати другого етапу комплексного дослідження, метою якого було виявити рецептивні навички п'ятикласників з англійської та української мов, а також порівняти ці результати з попередніми та вказати на їх розбіжності. Отримані дані свідчать про те, що рецептивні навички учнів покращилися. У ході дослідження виявлено, що при викладанні цих мов недостатня увага приділена розвитку навичок читання.

1 Introduction and background to the study

The present paper describes the results concerning the receptive skills (listening and reading) in two modern languages (English and Ukrainian) of ten-year-old Hungarian children living in a minority context in Ukraine. The study was conducted in Transcarpathia, an administrative region in south-western Ukraine, where about 150 000 Hungarians live in minority. Berehovo (in Hungarian – Beregszász) is a small town in the west of Transcarpathia with a population of 26 000 people. 48% of the inhabitants are Hungarians (Molnár & Molnár, 2005). There are four Hungarian schools in the town where the first phase of our longitudinal study was conducted in the 2006/2007 school year.

Originally, we wanted to get insights into the processes and outcomes of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) and teaching Ukrainian as a second language (USL), or the official state language in Ukraine, to Hungarian minority children in our region. We examined the differences between the two processes, the reasons that caused these differences, as well as the outcomes, i.e. 76 eight-year old learners' proficiency in the two languages. A test battery was designed in which learners' four language skills were assessed. The English test had a parallel Ukrainian version (Huszt, Fábán & Bárány, 2009).

Based on our experiences as teachers of English and Ukrainian, we hypothesized that the learners' knowledge of English was better than that of Ukrainian. This hypothesis was refuted by the results of the proficiency tests, as learners performed better on the Ukrainian test than on the English one, most importantly in the productive skills (speaking and writing). We explained this by the learners' closer and more frequent contact with Ukrainian than with English.

We found the EFL and USL teaching processes controversial, though. In the EFL classrooms the teaching focus was more on communication, while in USL classrooms teaching was limited to grammar and translation.

In the second phase our aim was to see whether there was improvement of learners' proficiency in the two languages or not. We also surveyed the learners' ethnic identity,

* II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskola, Filológia Tanszék, angoltanár

** II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskola, Filológia Tanszék, angoltanár

*** II. Rákóczi Ferenc Kárpátaljai Magyar Főiskola, Filológia Tanszék, ukrántanár

motivation, and attitudes to learning the two languages, but these issues do not constitute the focus of this paper.

We have compared the curriculum requirements in English and Ukrainian, and the number of lessons per week in both subjects. Also, we have looked at the textbooks with special attention to the tasks and texts aimed at developing the examined (receptive) skills (Ivasiuk, Gujvaniuk, & Buzynska, 2005; Karpiuk, 2006; Rozumik, Laver, Penzova, Pynzenyk, & Chudak, 2005).

2 Receptive skills of Transcarpathian Hungarian learners

Transcarpathian Hungarian learners' reading skills were the focus of a study by Huszti (2007). She conducted research in seven Hungarian schools with the aim to find a satisfactory explanation of why reading aloud as a classroom reading technique was widely used in the school with twelve-year-old children in the English lessons. Through analysing learners' reading miscues, the relationship between reading aloud and reading comprehension was established. The findings proved that learners were not expected to understand the text they read. They were asked to translate passages from their textbooks with the help of bilingual vocabulary lists provided by the teacher. Very few of the 44 learners participating in the study used one or more cueing systems (Goodman, 1969) when decoding the message of the print. However, some learners used semantic cues and others used graphical ones to arrive at meaning.

A comprehension test of eight questions was also applied to the learners. An equal number of them scored above and below the mean score which indicated that learners achieved a balanced score and on the whole, did quite well.

In Transcarpathia, Hungarian learners' listening skills have not been researched yet. Neither is any academic literature published on the topic. Therefore, we cannot provide any relevant review on the listening skills in English or in Ukrainian of Transcarpathian Hungarian learners. This is a gap that needs to be filled in the future.

3 The present study

3.1 Aims

We first aimed to point out the differences between learners' EFL and USL receptive skills, and then compare the results with the receptive skills findings obtained in the first phase of our study. We intended to discover how the learners' listening and reading skills in EFL and USL changed during the two years between the two phases of the study.

3.2 Participants

Eighty-six learners aged 10 and 11 participated in the present study (36 boys – 42% and 50 girls – 58%). These learners were basically the same pupils who participated in the first phase. Now they were in Grade 5. The learners had been studying English for four years (as EFL teaching starts in Grade 2 – Schools A, B, & D), except for one school where the pupils started studying English in Grade 1 (School C). USL teaching in Hungarian schools starts in Grade 1, so the pupils had been studying the state language for five years. The number of lessons per week in EFL and in USL is given in Table 1. In Grades 3 and 4 the Ukrainian lessons include two lessons of language and two lessons of reading, in Grade 5 learners have three lessons of language and two lessons of Ukrainian literature.

**Table 1. Number of lessons per week in EFL and USL in Grades 1 to 5
(1 lesson = 45 minutes)**

School	Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		Grade 4		Grade 5	
	EFL	USL	EFL	USL	EFL	USL	EFL	USL	EFL	USL
A, B, D	0	2	1	3	2	4	2	4	2/3	5
C	1	2	2	3	2	4	2	4	3	5

3.3 Instruments

The learners took two tests measuring their receptive skills in English and Ukrainian. The tests were parallel in their structure, but not in their content. The tests consisted of two sections. The first one contained a listening test in which the learners had to complete two tasks. First, they had to fill in a table with data from the text they heard, then answer multiple choice questions in the target languages based on the text. The second section of the test measured the learners' reading comprehension. They had to read a text and then answer comprehension questions in the L1 (Hungarian) in a written form. (The English test can be found in the Appendix.)

3.4 Procedure

The study was conducted in four Hungarian schools in Berehovo. They were assigned codes A, B, C, and D. The tests were completed by the learners between September and December, 2008, with a period of three weeks between the two tests to avoid the practice effect (Nunan, 1992). The data were analysed quantitatively, significance and descriptive statistics were calculated during January and May, 2009.

4 Findings

4.1 Results of Phase 2

4.1.1. Test results

The results of the tests administered in Grade 5 are summarised in Table 2. As the score of the two listening tests was different the results are given in percents.

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the proficiency test taken by fifth grade learners (n=85)
(results are given in %)**

Skills	English		Ukrainian	
	Means	Standard deviations	Means	Standard deviations
Reading	28,46	20,30	30,23	20,02
Listening	59,9	14,72	64,45	20,68

Judging from the figures, we can state that the means are higher in Ukrainian in both skills though not significantly ($p > 0,05$, $t = 0,24$). Taking into account the fact that the state language is taught from age six while English is taught from age seven and that the number of lessons is higher in Ukrainian we can state that in spite of the higher scores the results should have been much better in USL. A previous investigation proves that the starting age, even if the difference is only one year results in better developed language skills (Huszti et al., 2009). In addition, the number of lessons per week in Grade 5 is two/three lessons in EFL (depending on the choice of the school) and five (3 language lessons and 2 literature lessons) in USL. Theoretically, this should lead to better knowledge of USL.

As referred to before (c.f. Section 3.2), the average number of lessons per week spent on learning the two languages during the years of study is higher in the state language. So, the time spent on learning it and the results achieved on the proficiency test lack proportion as in English nearly the same results were reached in a shorter period of time.

4.1.2. Interpretation of the results

The curriculum, the textbooks and the methods used in language teaching determine its outcome. While the new National Curriculum for Foreign Languages (Red'ko et al., 2005) is based on the standards advocated in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), the Ukrainian Curriculum though pays attention to developing the language skills is still more grammar-centred than communication-oriented. The textbooks in Ukrainian language are mainly based on grammar but also contain special sections aimed at developing the speaking skills. No special section is separated for the receptive skills; texts for reading and listening are usually connected with an issue of grammar or conversational topic. The textbook in Ukrainian Literature is a combination of a textbook and a collection of long, unabridged literary texts. The method used in the teaching process has the features of the grammar-translation method with some elements of communicative language teaching. In spite of the fact that a lot of positive changes took place in the methods of teaching Ukrainian to minorities it is still not based on the theory and practice of the prevailing language teaching method of the turn of the millennium – communicative language teaching.

Better results in Ukrainian, beside the higher number of lessons, can be explained, first of all by the real communication needs of the learners living in an area where one of the examined languages is the state language. Some of the learners need to communicate in their everyday life with friends, family members, neighbours, etc. and are exposed to more input in USL than in EFL. In English the learners have only expected communication needs: they know that they might need the language for some reasons in the future but do not have to use it in real communicative situations. Exchanging e-mails or chatting online with native speakers or other speakers of EFL is not characteristic for this age group, so neither oral nor written communication takes place in English. They get little language input outside the schools, mainly through listening to music, advertisements and in a few cases through the internet. So, while in EFL we cannot really speak about language acquisition, in USL we can speak about language learning and language acquisition as parallel processes due to the language environment of the learners.

Poor results in reading have two reasons. The first is connected with more emphasis on reading aloud than on reading comprehension in both languages. Reading aloud is still widely used in most schools but in English reading comprehension is also paid attention to. The second reason lies in the nature and the quality of the reading tasks. The English textbook contains a lot of different tasks for developing reading comprehension while the tasks to the texts for reading in the Ukrainian textbook are mainly confined to answering questions, retelling the text, making a dialogue on the basis of the text, or are connected with grammar. The textbook in Ukrainian literature contains comprehension questions to the texts, but the texts are not simplified and not adjusted to the learners' level of knowledge. They are for extensive reading. The listening tasks are usually aimed at understanding the content of the text in both languages. Thus, we see that much should be changed both in the methods and approach of developing the receptive skills in teaching USL as well as in teaching EFL.

4.2 Comparison of Phase 1 and Phase 2 results

The results of Phase 1 show that listening comprehension was significantly better in English than in Ukrainian ($p < 0,05$, $t = 0,0018$). In Phase 2 listening proved to be better in Ukrainian but not significantly. The results in reading are nearly the same as two years ago: they are better in USL but not significantly. (Phase 1: $t = 0,37$, $p > 0,05$, Phase 2: $t = 0,08$, $p < 0,05$). The graphical representation of the results of the two phases is shown in Figure 1.

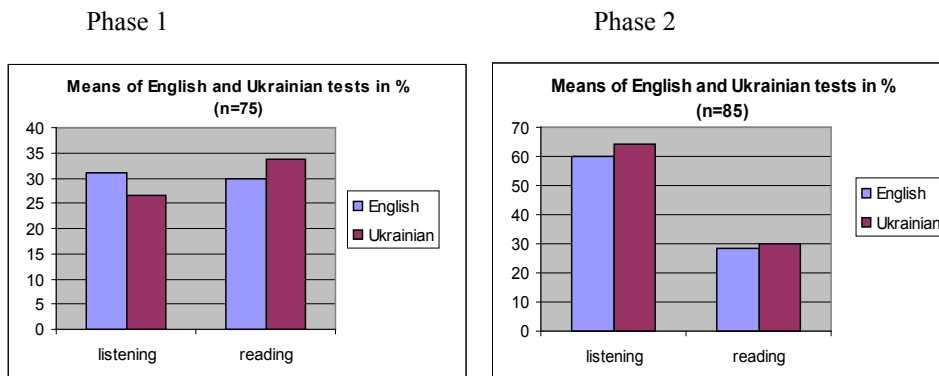


Figure 1. Comparison of the results of the proficiency tests on receptive skills in English and Ukrainian (%)

The reason for the better results in listening comprehension can be explained by the fact that learners are exposed to a lot of listening as in most schools the teachers of Ukrainian are native speakers of the state language and have poor or no knowledge of the learners' mother tongue. The situation with the teachers of English is quite the opposite: no native speakers of English can be found in Hungarian schools and all the teachers involved in the research are native speakers of Hungarian, so learners have no real communication needs with the teachers in the target language. Real communication needs can speed up both language learning and language acquisition (Navracsics, 2007). The present research shows that within two years the listening skills of the same learners improved by 37,69% in the language requiring real understanding (USL) and only by 28,93% in the language (EFL) with which they have no direct contact (e.g. communication with native speakers).

The slow development of reading skills in Ukrainian can be explained by the quality of reading comprehension exercises in the textbooks. In the first phase Ukrainian outscored English by 3.95% while in the second phase it was only 1.77 % better, so the development of this skill in Ukrainian was slower than in English in spite of the fact that much more time was spent on learning USL (see Figure 1 and Table 1). This might prove that the grammar-translation method used for decades during the Soviet era in Transcarpathia still has quite a strong impact on language teaching in the area.

Thus, we see that the most rapid development took place in listening comprehension of USL followed by the same skill in EFL. Real-life listening and real communication needs play a great role in developing the listening skills. Reading comprehension was found to be a more slowly developing element of both languages due to the fact, we believe, that reading aloud is paid more attention to than silent reading aimed at understanding the content in EFL and that elements of the grammar-translation

method prevail in USL. Contrary to the listening skills, from the two languages compared reading developed slower in Ukrainian than in English.

5 Conclusions

The aim of a nation or part of a nation living in minority is additive balanced bilingualism in the developing of which a great role is played by the educational system. From the research we can conclude that by providing sufficient number of lessons of Ukrainian in minority schools the state strives to reach this aim. The results, though, show that teaching the state language is not as effective as it should be. Probably, the reason lies in the quality of teaching, an issue to be researched in the future. Taking into account the time spent on teaching and learning the two languages we can conclude that though the results are better in USL the development is more rapid in EFL. The listening skills of the learners have developed considerably in USL while in EFL the scores were not as high as in Ukrainian but the progress was evident. It should be kept in mind that language acquisition plays a great role in this process. Reading comprehension, a skill which is taught rather than acquired, is not paid enough attention to, so the learners' reading skills do not develop in the proper way. So, we can state that the receptive skills develop differently in USL and in EFL: the listening skill is developed more rapidly in both languages than the reading skill.

6 Pedagogical implications and limitations of the study

1. More attention should be paid to developing the receptive skills in both languages and qualitative changes should be encouraged.
2. Skills development in USL should be based on the theory and practice of communicative language teaching.
3. Learners should be encouraged by teachers to find possibilities for real-life communication (e.g. through the internet – exchanging e-mails, online chatting, etc.)
4. Learners should be encouraged to do extensive listening and reading through which they can practise their skills in comprehension.

As a limitation of our study we should admit that due to certain conditions we had no possibility to find out if there were Hungarian-Ukrainian bilingual learners among the test-takers.

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Appendix

ENGLISH TEST FOR FORM 5 PUPILS

1. Listening

Listen to a story that happened to three friends and do the tasks.

a) Fill in the table

NAME	Kate	Liz	Monica
AGE			
TOWN			

b) Choose the correct answer.

1. What happened first?
 - a) Liz called the girls.
 - b) Liz found a bottle.
 - c) Monika and Kate went to swim
2. Monika and Kate swam to the shore because ...
 - a) they wanted to sunbathe with Liz .
 - b) Liz found something interesting.
 - c) Liz had a green glass.
3. In the bottle there was ...
 - a) a message.
 - b) a present.
 - c) some paper.
4. The sentence: "When we at last took **it** out of the bottle" means
 - a) They took the present out of the bottle.
 - b) They took the message out of the bottle.
 - c) They took the newspaper out of the bottle.
5. The girls read that ...
 - a) there is a house and a swimming pool on the beach.
 - b) Lawrence McLeod lives at 10, Sesame street.
 - c) they can get a birthday present.
6. Three girls were unhappy because ...
 - a) they went to the library.
 - b) it all was a joke.
 - c) it was a mystery.

The story that learners listened to:

Message in a bottle

This story happened to three girls one summer. The girls were on a summer holiday in England. Kate lives in Budapest and is 12 years old. Liz is from London and celebrated

her 14th birthday the week the story happened. Monica, Kate's cousin is from New York and is only 13.

It was a hot summer day, so my friends and I went to the beach. When we arrived, Monica and I went for a swim but Liz decided to stay on the beach and sunbathe for a while.

Suddenly, Liz called us "Monica, Kate, come quickly! I've found something." We swam back to the shore. She had a green glass bottle in her hand. "I found this on the beach," she said. We looked at the bottle and then opened it. To our surprise, there was a piece of paper in the bottle. When we at last took it out of the bottle we saw a message and read: *Who finds this piece of paper, gets a new big house with a swimming pool as a Christmas present for his or her birthday at 10, Sesame Street, London. Lawrence McLeod, 1st April 1924.* We couldn't believe our eyes! A new house and a swimming pool for us!

Later that afternoon, we all went to the library to find out about 10, Sesame Street. Unfortunately, there was no Sesame Street in London or a Lawrence McLeod. We were unhappy! Then Vanessa said, "Look at the date! It says 1st April!" So, it was not a mystery any more. It was just an April fool's joke!

2. Reading

Read the letter and answer the questions in Hungarian.

Dear Ann,

I'm having a fantastic holiday in London with my Mum and Dad. It's just great! There are so many beautiful places to see and Mum buys an ice-cream for me every day.

Yesterday we went to Buckingham Palace in the centre of London. It's a nice grey building with lovely parks near it. It has got 600 rooms and big windows. The Queen and her family live there. There is a flag on the Palace when the Queen is at home.

Today we were in the Tower of London. Now it is a museum but in the past the Kings and Queens of England lived there. It's near the River Thames. Tower Bridge over the Thames is just beautiful.

Tomorrow we're going to the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben. You know, the tall clock we saw in the picture in our textbook.

At home I'll show you the photos.

See you soon.

Yours,

Kati

1. Kinek ír Kati levelet? _____
(Who does Kati write her letter to?)

2. Kivel van Londonban? _____
(Who is she in London with?)

3. Ki lakik a Buckingham Palotában? _____
(Who lives in Buckingham Palace?)

4. Mit lehet látni a palota tetején? _____
(What can one see at the top of the palace?)

5. Melyik folyó mellett van a Londoni Tower? _____
(Near which river in the Tower of London?)
6. Mit készülnek megnézni másnap? _____
(What are they going to see the next day?)
7. Minek a fényképét látták a gyerekek a tankönyvben? _____
(What picture did the children see in their textbook?)
8. Készített-e Kati fényképeket? _____
(Did Kati take photos?)

A-19 Acta Beregsiensis. Науковий вісник Закарпатського угорського інституту ім. Ф. Ракоці ІІ. – Ужгород: ПоліПрінт, 2010 – 248 с.
ISBN 978-966-2595-01-7

«Acta Beregsiensis» є науковим виданням Закарпатського угорського інституту імені Ференца Ракоці ІІ. Даний том вміщує дослідження угорською, українською, англійською та німецькою мовами за перше півріччя 2010 року. До випуску ввійшли публікації викладачів та студентів інституту, а також закордонних науковців у сфері мовознавства, літератури, історії, педагогіки, біології, економіки та інших наук.

УДК 001(477.87)

ББК 72.4(4УКР-43АК)

Наукове видання

Acta Beregsiensis

Науковий вісник
Закарпатського угорського інституту ім. Ф. Ракоці ІІ

2010/2

Том ІХ, № 2

РЕДАКЦІЯ: *Козут А., Пенцкофер І.*

КОРЕКТУРА: *Г. Варцаба І.*

ВЕРСТКА: *Гороній А.*

ОБКЛАДИНКА: *К&Р*

Відповідальні за випуск: *Орос І., Шовш К.*

Здано до складання 14.04.2010. Підписано до друку 17.05.2010.

Папір офсетний. Формат 70x100/16.

Умовн. друк. арк. 19,9. Тираж 250. Зам. 428.

СП "ПоліПрінт", м. Ужгород, вул. Тургенева, 2.