

**Kesserű Némethy, Judith ed. 2013. *21st Century Hungarian Language Survival in Transylvania*. Reno, NV: Helena History Press. 366 pp. with maps encl.**

**Reviewed by Kenneth Nyirady, Library of Congress**

As a result of the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, approximately 3.3 million Hungarians found themselves to be citizens of foreign states. About half that number, residing in Transylvania, became citizens of a greatly enlarged Romania, and the book under review concerns the survival of the Hungarian language among them. Note that the term Transylvania, both in this book and in this review, is used in the popular sense, including not only what is usually considered historical Transylvania, but also those other areas of Hungary awarded to Romania, namely the Partium (the lowlands adjacent to the current border with Hungary), and the Romanian portion of the Banat. Also, the book covers the Csángós, a small Hungarian-speaking group that lives in Moldavia.

The six essays in the book, written by academics from Hungary and Transylvania, progress from general to specific, from a general history of the Hungarian presence in the Carpathian Basin, the general state of Hungarian-language education, first in the successor states, and then specifically in Romania; then Hungarian language usage in Transylvania, and finally to linguistic analyses of Hungarian language use in the Romanian administration and media. As one would expect, there is some unavoidable overlap among the chapters, but this works for the benefit and not to the detriment of the reader. Overall, one is rather overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of data presented; the casual reader may get lost in the details, but the specialist will find a wealth of information on the issues discussed.

The extensive introduction by the book's editor, Judith Kesserű Némethy, reviews the history of Transylvania, first as part of the Kingdom of Hungary for over 900 years, and then the last 100 years as part of Romania, with a four-year interruption during the Second World War, when Hungary regained the northern part of the region. This history is well known to the readers of this journal and will not be repeated here, but it provides the needed backdrop for the subsequent chapters in the book. Kesserű Némethy concludes that the question of Hungarian language maintenance in Romania remains unsolved, even though the collective rights of the Hungarian minority in Romania have improved.

In "Traditions Shaping Language and Language Instruction Policies in East-Central Europe," Orsolya Nádor reviews the status of the Hungarian language since the Middle Ages, both as the language of the state and, after 1920, the language of linguistic minorities. She points out that the liberal Nationality and Education Acts of 1868 soon were replaced by a policy of linguistic Magyarization in an attempt to assimilate the minorities (collectively a majority) in the pre-1920 Hungarian state. After the partition of Hungary, Hungarians outside of the new borders



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.



This journal is published by the University Library System of the University of Pittsburgh as part of its D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program and is cosponsored by the University of Pittsburgh Press

of the Hungarian state found themselves on the receiving end of assimilationist policies of the successor states. Whether in historical Hungary or in the successor states, the dominant nationality of the state feared what it perceived to be the irredentist aspirations of the linguistic minorities and attempted to assimilate them, by restricting the use of their languages in education and administration. The League of Nation could not or would not enforce the 1919 Minority Protective Agreement. Rather ironically, post-1920 Hungary became the most ethnically homogenous state in Eastern Europe. It enacted a liberal nationality law, hoping that the successor states would do the same. But one could argue that this gesture cost the Hungarians little; the small number of minorities posed little threat to the unity of what was left of the state. In the 1990s and after, Hungarians hoped that the anticipated and actual accession of the region's states into the EU would bring minority rights up to Western standards but this did not happen either. States claimed financial difficulties in supporting dual educational institutions and, in the end, minority policy often depended on the political party in power and, to a lesser extent, the attitudes of the local authorities.

In general, as one progresses from primary to secondary schools, the use of Hungarian decreases. The dilemma facing Hungarian parents is that while they might wish for their children to be taught in their native language, success in life will require mastering the state language. Yet Hungarian students who do attend the state-language schools face a different problem in that instructional methodologies of language teaching are not adjusted to teaching the state language as a second language. Sometimes the final result is that Hungarian students end up with a solid command of neither. Yet, in spite of all of this, Nádor concludes that education in Hungarian is working "reasonably well" but improvement is needed in teaching the state language to Hungarian students.

Attila Z. Papp, in "Educational Policy Concepts in the Carpathian Basin," defines minority education as one encompassing "the full spectrum of instruction in the native language, extending across the whole range of education," thus promoting the use of the native language and acting as a barrier against assimilation. Native-language education is necessary for the survival of the group and for that reason the majority attempts to limit it. But within native-language education there is an inherent problem of what Papp calls equity, that all minority students should receive an appropriate education, regardless of socio-economic background. By using native language as the only criterion for admissions, minority schools therefore are less selective, sometimes leaving parents with the choice of sending their students to a more selective state-language school or a less-selective minority language school.

There are regional variations in the quality of education in minority language schools. On standardized tests the Hungarian-language schools in Transylvania scored higher than the Romanian schools, but in Slovakia the Hungarian schools lagged behind the Slovak ones. Hungarian schools in Ukraine are showing improvement. One must also keep in mind the demographic aspect of these results—in general students in urban areas do better on these tests than those living in rural areas.

Papp compares the educational goals of seven Hungarian political parties in Romania, Slovakia, and Ukraine, and lays out their similarities and differences. Most favor decentralization and education in Hungarian from kindergarten through university. Most do not

deal with the question of the Roma, who, in some areas, form the bulk of the Hungarian-speaking students. Some, but not all, mention the need for effective teaching of the majority language to Hungarian students. Papp notes that not only do various Hungarian groups compete for input into educational policy but also find themselves competing with the Hungarian government which, having centralized education at home, seeks to exert more control over it across the borders. At the moment the Hungarian government provides some support for Hungarian-language education in the successor states through NGOs but these funds are tightly controlled by the donors, there are no standards for the use of the funds, and they can only supplement, not replace, those of the receiving state. Papp laments the lack of research and objective evaluation necessary to improve educational policy.

One of many interesting points brought out in this chapter: while Hungarian schools in Romania tend to be academic, vocational schools are predominantly Romanian, due to legal restrictions, lack of instructional materials in Hungarian, and lack of teachers who have command of the technical vocabulary. This dichotomy contributes to the process of ethnic assimilation, which usually occurs from the bottom up; the lower the socio-economic group, the greater the tendency to assimilate.

If the preceding chapter discussed education policy in the Carpathian Basin in general, the chapter by Rita Fóris-Ferenczi and János Péntek "Hungarian Public Education in Romania, with Particular Attention to the Language(s) of Instruction," limits its scope to Romania. The authors believe that the "one size fits all" approach toward minority education in Romania does the Hungarians—the largest minority—a disservice. The policies of the Romanian government since 1990 have alternated between local initiative and centralization. Initial centralized control over education gave way in the 1996-2001 period to reforms and the hope for decentralization. But after 2001 the trend was again toward centralization. Denominational schools—historically a major component of Hungarian education in Transylvania—likewise were obligated to adjust to changing guidelines from Bucharest and their status is still unsettled. In summary, in the past 25 years the structure of education in Romania has gone through frequent changes and it is difficult for the outside observer to keep track of them. One might envision Hungarian schools experiencing pressure from three sides, with the Romanian government, local Hungarian educational organizations, and international (e.g. World Bank, EU) guidelines all exerting influence to varying degrees at various times. The authors discuss the balance between central and local input in curriculum development and give percentages showing the weight of each. One wishes they would have explained the methodology of how they calculated these percentages.

As mentioned in the previous essay, at the secondary level most Hungarian-language schools are academic, including the denominational schools. Hungarian-language vocational education, on the other hand, has been limited by a combination of government regulations, a shortage of Hungarian-language instructors, and the lack of Hungarian-language textbooks. Even among the academic secondary schools textbooks suffer from a lack of quality control, and the authors estimate that at least 20 Hungarian-language textbooks should be withdrawn from circulation for various reasons. The teaching of Hungarian language and literature suffers from poor translations, no central oversight, and lack of professional guidance and supervision, with

an emphasis on analysis of literary texts instead of spoken and written Hungarian. One indicator of the neglect of teaching the basics of the Hungarian language is that older students are poorer at spelling than the younger.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, acquiring proficiency in the state language is a requirement for career success. Here the authors lament the lack of special methods and textbooks to teach Romanian to Hungarian speakers as a second language. Thus bilingual education in Transylvania often leads to students end up knowing neither language well. Hungarian parents will often place their children in Romanian schools because the quality of Romanian instruction is better. An estimated 25-30% of native Hungarian-speaking students study in Romanian schools, with a lower percentage for the lower grades and a higher one for the higher grades. Instruction in Hungarian is highest in the Székely counties and lowest in southern Transylvania, where the percentage of Hungarians in the population is low. Of the 55-60,000 Hungarian students in Romanian schools, half reside in areas where they have no school choice. All in all, the authors conclude that the Romanian state does not wish to provide the resources necessary to permit Hungarian students to develop a high level of proficiency in both Hungarian and Romanian.

The first half of the next chapter, "The Hungarian Language in Transylvania: Its Existence in the Diaspora and the Possibilities of Revitalization," by Noémi Fazakas, is devoted to discussing systems used to assess levels of language endangerment, including Joshua Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale, as well as the status of linguistic rights in international law. The second half of the chapter examines the situation of the Hungarian language in Romania. Fazakas examines the three types of Hungarian settlements in Romania: the Székely (a large mass of Hungarian speakers inhabiting a compact territory), the "island situation" (those counties and areas where Hungarians constitute a majority), and a diaspora situation (in northeast and south Transylvania, as well as some neighborhoods in certain cities). Hungarian language among the Csángós (i.e. Hungarians living in Moldavia) is the most endangered, but the author also considers the Hungarian language in the "diaspora" situation likewise threatened. Among the diaspora, in mixed marriages between Romanians and Hungarians only a quarter of the offspring are likely to be Hungarian speakers. Also working against Hungarian language retention is that "a significant proportion" of Hungarian children attend Romanian schools and many whose primary education is in Hungarian attend Romanian secondary schools. As mentioned in the previous essays, proficiency in Romanian among native Hungarian speakers is quite often lacking, and the author proposes using the methodology of teaching Romanian as a second language. Parents often choose Romanian schools to ensure that students do well on their final exams and are able to be successful in their careers in the Romanian state. Fazakas calls bilingualism in Romania asymmetric—for decades it was used primarily in unofficial (i.e. family) situations and even today Hungarian speakers are more likely to use Romanian in official (i.e. dealing with government institutions) situations.

Fazakas looks to the media as an important agent in reversing language shift, pointing to the revival of Ainu in Japan and Irish Gaelic as examples of this. Also necessary for preservation and revival are collective language rights. She laments the lack of an independent, state Hungarian university, and that not all university specializations are offered in Hungarian.

Language revival plans need to be tailored to the specific situations in the three areas of Hungarian settlement mentioned above. Fazakas points to need of making Hungarian communities aware of the risks and involve them in devising solutions.

Krisztina Sárosi-Márdirosz' study, "The Official Register of the Hungarian Language Used in Transylvania," is based on an extensive monitoring of Hungarian audio-visual media in Transylvania by researchers from Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania and Babeş-Bolyai University in 2010 and 2011, although only data for 2011 is used for this chapter. She analyzes Hungarian legal and administrative terms used in the media, especially those that have been translated from Romanian. She considers the "official register" (i.e. legal and administrative language) of Hungarian in Romania to be underdeveloped, with incorrect usage stemming from poor translations from Romanian, often resulting in unusable documents. It does not help that Hungarians consider their own language "statutorily inferior" compared with Romanian, the state language. The task for language planners, then, is to develop the language so that it meets all the needs of its speakers and speakers feel confident in using it in official situations.

The journalistic register is "one of the richest" but also subject to much innovation, unlike administrative and legal language. Sárosi-Márdirosz believes its influence is the immense as the electronic media is ubiquitous and subject to imitation by the populace. For this study researchers analyzed news programs for mistakes in phonetics, morphology, lexicology, morphosyntax, syntax, and text analysis. About 10,000 minutes (i.e. approximately 166 hours) of media were monitored, transcribed, and coded. While researchers noted over 40 types of mistakes (norm violations), this chapter concentrates on only five: calques and loan translations from Romanian, tautology, drafting errors, long sentences and phrases, and unintelligible sentences and phrases. Sárosi-Márdirosz provides a table of 57 examples of norm-violating language from various media outlets. The type of errors varied according to the source. For example, the major error observed in the broadcasts of Radio Cluj-Napoca was calques, while for Radio Târgu Mureş it was unintelligible sentences and phrases. The author admits that she is presenting only a "slim slice" of a very complex problem. She concludes that most mistakes result from "inadequate terminology," a task for linguists to correct. Similar problems, she notes, can be observed in Slovakia, Ukraine, and Serbia.

Borbála Zsemlyei's "Language Use in the Hungarian Electronic Media in Romania" provides a more detailed analysis of the data collected and analyzed in the preceding chapter. How closely, she asks, does the Hungarian spoken in the media follow regional norms, and what types of grammatical mistakes are made? She observes that after a hundred years of separation from the Hungary proper, the Hungarian media language in Transylvania is more archaic, reflects dialect influence, and subject to the influence of Romanian. Concentrating on phonology, morphology, lexicology and semantics, syntax; stress, tone and speech pause, and pragmatics (e.g. rules of politeness in Hungarian), she enumerates and provides examples of nearly fifty types of deviations from standard Hungarian heard in the Hungarian-language media in Romania. Her examples are fascinating, but one needs to know Hungarian to fully understand them. Her corpus is based on news, cultural, and public affairs programming. Not surprisingly, mistakes are more often made in live, as opposed to prerecorded, programming.

The influence of Romanian (i.e. the bilingualism of the speaker) seems to have the strongest effect on the Hungarian spoken in the media in Romania, resulting in "a foreign sounding delivery of Hungarian." Every aspect of Hungarian appears to be affected: incorrect agreement of subject and predicate, consonants lengthened, diphthongization, and loanwords from Romanian. In addition, a poor competence in Hungarian also plays a role; speakers seem to be uncertain of their own ability in Hungarian, even to the point of misquoting proverbs that are part of the common knowledge (at least in Hungary). And these mistakes are committed even by native Hungarian-speaking professionals with a high level of education. So it is a self-reinforcing loop: the speech of the media professionals affects the speech of the listeners/viewers, from whose ranks the professionals are drawn.

This is a well-researched publication, with ample notes. An appendix provides explanations of terms used in the book, and indicates on what page these terms are found. It would have been even more helpful to the reader if these terms had been marked in the text and linked to the corresponding entry in the appendix. A general index would likewise have proved useful. The book is well edited; typos are too few to mention.

The book includes, as inserts, five full-color ethnic maps of the Carpatho-Pannonian area for the years 1495, 1784, 1910, 1930, and 2001. While their aim is to show the extent (and contraction) of the Hungarian inhabited areas over time, one cannot help but notice the virtual elimination of the German areas east of the current border with Austria.

In conclusion: can Hungarian survive as a minority language in Transylvania? According to this work the answer is no and yes. No, in that in areas with a small percentage of Hungarians, lacking an education infrastructure to provide education in Hungarian, and due to the effects of intermarriage, the number of Hungarian speakers will decline to the point of being negligible. In other areas, most notably the Székely region and other areas with a high concentration of Hungarians, the outlook is much better. But in this world of globalization and homogenization, who can say what the linguistic situation will be in a hundred years?