

## Book Review

### Ildikó Vančo, Rudolf Muhr, István Kozmács & Máté Huber (Eds.), *Hungarian as a pluricentric language in language and literature*

(*Österreichisches Deutsch - Sprache der Gegenwart* 22). Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020,  
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The volume is an extensive overview of Hungarian as a pluricentric language, focusing on the language use of the autochthonous Hungarian minority groups in the countries neighboring Hungary. Due to the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, one third of Hungary's population became citizens of the neighboring states, and thus the Hungarian language developed multiple norm-setting centers. To this day, there are substantial autochthonous Hungarian minority groups in the neighboring countries, and understandably, the language use of these speech communities differs from the Hungary Hungarian standard.

One of the points of departure for the contributions to the volume is the heated debate between purist, prescriptivist language cultivators vs. sociolinguists. Prescriptivists believe that the homogeneity of the Hungarian language is what maintains national unity and togetherness, and therefore the hegemony of the Hungary Hungarian standard should not be disrupted. Their views are standard-centered and monocentric. Sociolinguists, however, highlight that the differences between the dominant Hungary Hungarian variety and the non-dominant varieties (Transylvania [Romania] Hungarian, Vojvodina [Serbia] Hungarian, Transcarpathia [Ukraine] Hungarian, Slovakia Hungarian, Slovenia Hungarian, Croatia Hungarian, Austria Hungarian) are natural, as the political borders form a barrier between these varieties, which inevitably results in divergent development. The latter approach is what the authors and editors of the volume support. They accept and encourage the pluricentricity of the Hungarian language, and understand that criticizing and invalidating non-dominant varieties will not lead to national unity, but rather to the acceleration of assimilation and language shift in non-Hungary Hungarian communities.

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The volume contains 19 contributions, grouped in five sections of the book, all describing and explaining different aspects of the pluricentricity of Hungarian. The first section is titled *Hungarian as a pluricentric language*, which contains three introductory entries describing the present situation of the Hungarian language, giving evidence for its pluricentricity, linking language rights to human rights, and highlighting the role of language use in identity formation.

The first contributor, Máté Huber gives a concise historical overview of the pluricentric development of Hungarian, and describes the approaches to this diversity. He argues that the prescriptivist approach is counterproductive, as it does not support language maintenance in non-Hungary Hungarian communities. In most regions outside Hungary where Hungarian is spoken as a minority language, it does not have a proper official recognition, e.g. as a regional official language. He believes that this situation might be resolved through an acceptance of pluricentricity, as the neighboring countries might be more willing to grant linguistic rights to varieties that are separate from the Hungary Hungarian standard, because that way they do not have to fear territorial claims on Hungary's part. His approach presents a new trajectory for supporting Hungarian speech communities in the neighboring countries.

Miklós Kontra focuses on the concept of linguistic human rights, that is, linguistic rights that are necessary for one's mere survival and well-being. One such right is learning one's mother tongue. The frequent unavailability of Hungarian mother tongue education in the neighboring countries on the secondary and tertiary level, and the processes of forced assimilation and forced language shift violate minority Hungarians' linguistic human rights. Based on previous works concerning minority language education, and the 1948 criteria of the United Nations, Kontra warns that present day practices often fulfill the criteria for linguistic genocide.

Ildikó Vančo discusses the identity forming nature of language use. She draws on the understanding that, while in Western Europe, people tend to define their national identities based on their citizenship, people in Eastern Europe tend to consider language as the most important element in their national identity construction. That is the reason why language shift should be avoided in Hungarian communities in the neighboring countries, as language shift is very likely to lead to assimilation and the loss of these speakers' Hungarian identity. Vančo carried out her research among Slovakia Hungarian university students, who, as she notes, have the potential to become the future Slovakia Hungarian learned elite. Their responses show that they primarily conceptualize themselves as Slovakia Hungarians, and they do not consider Hungary their 'native land'. Actually, they seem to have multiple affiliations, with Hungary being the last in the list of places that the respondents consider their 'native land', preceded even by Europe. This does not mean, however, that the Hungarian identity is of lesser importance to the respondents. The majority of the participants find it important that their future children learn Hungarian, and they also agree that minority affiliation can be a conscious decision. Emotional aspects of 'being Hungarian' were

emphasized by the participants, and they even stated that knowing Hungarian culture was more important than speaking the language. Using Hungarian in multiple domains, and having access to Hungarian language media were highlighted as vital aspects. Contrary to previous studies, Vančo's respondents did not rate their vernacular negatively, and the majority preferred using their vernacular to the Hungary Hungarian standard. However, the researcher notes, the respondents might have given idealized answers that may be different from their real, everyday experiences and practices. Vančo stresses in her conclusion that the acceptance of one's own vernacular can lead to language maintenance, while negative opinions about the variety (in schools, in textbooks, or in the society in general) might lead to alienation and language shift.

The second section, titled *The effects of pluricentricity on administrative terminology, toponyms, and family names*, consists of five papers, and gives a detailed description of everyday language use issues of non-Hungary Hungarian speech communities. Réka Máté and István Csernicsekó address the issue of the use of family names in Transcarpathia, Ukraine, with a special focus on women's married names. Patronymics are used in Ukraine, unlike in Hungary, which means that people have a third name in addition to their given and family names, which is formed by adding a gender-specific suffix to the father's given name. In addition, Ukrainian names follow the given name, family name order, whereas Hungarian names use the family name first. The most common married name option for women in Hungary is the addition of the *-né* [wife of] suffix to their husband's full name, but this option is not available in Ukraine. This causes conflicts between Ukraine Hungarians and prescriptivist Hungarian language cultivators, who believe that the Ukrainian use of women's married names is too foreign and un-Hungarian, not taking into consideration the fact that Hungarian forms are not legally possible options in Ukraine. Name use in official documents is another important issue in Ukraine. In official documents, such as ID cards or international passports, people have some of the following name forms indicated: the Ukrainian Cyrillic form, the Russian Cyrillic form, and the English transliteration of the Ukrainian form, which distort the original Hungarian spelling of the name considerably. Their Hungarian-style names typically do not appear in official documents.

János Bauko's paper continues the topic of personal names in non-Hungary Hungarian communities, but this time the focus is on Slovakia Hungarians. He explains that Slovakia Hungarians typically have two different name forms: a Hungarian and a Slovak (e.g. *Czigle Tamás* and *Tomáš Czigle*, *Gőgh Jázmin* and *Jázmin Gőghová*, respectively), and both tend to be important for their identity construction. They use the two forms in different situations with different interlocutors, depending on factors such as the linguistic proficiency of their interlocutors, the formality of the situation, or the desired effect of their choice. In certain situations, they might even use hybrid forms, where the Slovak first name is followed by the family name and the Hungarian first name, such as in *Ernest Kocsis Ernő* and *Juraj Mészáros György*. It is common for

exogamous families to give both a Hungarian and a Slovak given name to their children to signal their dual ethnic background (e.g. *Hajnalka Zlatica* and *Balázs Imrich*). Code-switching in the use of personal names can also be observed, e.g. in referring to a woman as *Zuzana Nagyová* [Slovak official name form] first, and later calling her *Zsuzsa* [Hungarian nickname]. Slovakia Hungarian nicknames, although predominantly Hungarian, often show contact phenomena, which sometimes stem from translations, such as in the case of the Hungarian family name *Csontos* [bony], where the person was given the nickname *Kosztý*, as the Slovak word for bone is *kost*.

The controversies surrounding Hungarian toponyms (place names) in Slovakia are highlighted in Gizella Szabómihály's contribution. She discusses the multiple different forms of toponyms that are in use due to multiple standardizations on both the Slovak and the Hungarian part. These, in many cases, resulted in several versions of the name of the same municipality with Hungarian inhabitants. It is common that multiple Hungarian allonyms and differences between the Hungarian and Slovak names exist, and these forms are often in use simultaneously, causing confusion. For example, the toponyms *Ipolybalog*, *Balog*, *Blh nad Ipl'om*, and *Balog nad Ipl'om* designate the same village near the river Ipoly/Ipel'. When official documents, encyclopedias, and maps, for instance, do not use the names uniformly, the reader might not realize that two sources using different names refer to the same municipality. For travelers, it can be difficult to find the target settlement on a map if they are not familiar with the history of toponym standardizations in both Hungary and Slovakia. This way, "the identifying function of toponyms [is] weakened", which "leads to uncertainty in the system of Hungarian toponyms in Slovakia" (p. 104). Szabómihály also stresses the significance of having bilingual place name plates in Slovakia Hungarian settlements, for both clarity- and identity-related reasons.

Attila Benő raises the reader's awareness of the importance of terminology planning and specialized language planning in Transylvania, Romania. He considers the field of specialized language planning a public affair, as items of specialized languages often become part of everyday speech (e.g. medical, legal or commercial terms). According to the author, the most important feature of specialized terminology is that their meaning is uniform, and, therefore, professional information can be transmitted without the uncertainty of meaning. As specialized languages do not tend to be standardized in non-Hungary Hungarian speech communities, often multiple terms exist with the same meaning, contact phenomena can be observed, and there are meanings that can only be expressed in the majority language due to the limited use of Hungarian in high functions or the lack of referent in Hungary. For this reason, Benő proposes that schools should be the primary venues of specialized language instruction, and the compilation of Hungarian technical textbooks for Romania Hungarians is necessary. He presents standardized Hungarian terminology for the new Romanian police ranks, as proposed by the Szabó T. Attila Linguistic Institute. One of the proposed terms is *főrendőrügynök*, stemming from the Romanian *agent principal de poliție*, which does

not have a Hungary Hungarian counterpart. The consistent use of one standardized term is necessary to avoid miscommunication and to encourage the use of a Hungarian term instead of the Romanian one in order to preserve more functions of the Hungarian language in Transylvania. For specialized language planning to be successful, both the standardization of existing terminology and the creation of new terms are important.

Károly Presinszky describes the language of local self-government documents in a Slovakia Hungarian setting. The language of administration is generally expected to be the standard variety, but the Hungarian language experiences a loss of functions in Slovakia, especially in the professional registers, which are increasingly taken over by the Slovak language. In the examined data, spoken utterances contain more features of the regional variety, such as *akkó* [then] instead of the standard form *akkor*, and *vini* [to carry] for *vinni*. Written official texts primarily follow the rules of standard Hungary Hungarian, but some features of the regional variety (e.g. *lakosság* [population] for standard *lakosság*) and some contact phenomena (e.g. *mobilkamerák* as a literal translation of the Slovak term *mobilné kamery* instead of the Hungary Hungarian standard term *térfigyelő kamerák* [CCTV cameras]) also occur. In written documents, one-word code-switches into Slovak can be observed to facilitate the readers' understanding of professional terminology, which tends to be more readily available for Slovakia Hungarians in Slovak. The influence of the Slovak language is the greatest in administrative terminology, and for this reason, the author, similarly to Benő, calls for professional lexicon planning to preserve the professional functions of Hungarian in Slovakia.

The third section, *Contact phenomena and the use of features of regional varieties in the national varieties of Hungarian*, is a collection of four papers focusing on various regional varieties of Hungarian outside Hungary. Anna Kolláth describes the situation of the Hungarian language in Slovenia's northeastern Prekmurje region, where Hungarians have traditionally lived. She laments that while the language enjoys a high level of legal protection as a regional official language, and positive discrimination, assimilation is still increasingly present, and the number of people who identify with the Hungarian minority is shrinking. The majority language enjoys a considerably higher prestige, which results in more and more domains of language use being taken over by Slovene in the lives of Hungarian–Slovene bilinguals. Although the current bilingual education model is uniquely supportive, as both those students whose mother tongue is Hungarian and those whose mother tongue is Slovene go to Hungarian–Slovene bilingual schools in the bilingual Prekmurje region, this tends to lead to functional bilingualism only in the case of Hungarian students, for whom a high level of Slovene proficiency is inevitable. Slovene students typically only learn to understand Hungarian, but rarely become competent speakers of Hungarian. The bilingual education model in Slovenia's Prekmurje region is a visionary one, as the reciprocity of language learning has the potential to enhance the status of the minority language, but it needs further development to become more effective in terms of language maintenance.

Réka Sólyom examines Hungarian language use in a daily paper in Vojvodina, Serbia, titled *Magyar Szó*, and the related Facebook comments. She explains that differences from the Hungary Hungarian standard can be observed at multiple levels, e.g. lexicon, morphology, and structures. However, the most stigmatized linguistic phenomena only appear in the Facebook comments, while the language use of the daily paper, which is a more formal medium, remains closer to the Hungary Hungarian standard. For instance, the phenomenon of *süksükölés*, that is, substituting the declarative verbal suffix for the imperative suffix, which results in highly stigmatized non-standard forms, only appeared in the Facebook comments but not in the articles of *Magyar Szó*.

The language use of the Nitra/Nyitra language island of Slovakia receives central attention in Anna Sándor's paper. Sándor explains that the northernmost continuous Hungarian speaking speech community has developed in isolation for centuries, and thus contains numerous archaisms and contact phenomena. Even though the vernacular is the community's link to its rich folklore and is part of their identity, it is now being threatened by stigmatization, advanced assimilation, and the hegemony of standard Hungary Hungarian and Slovak in (not exclusively) formal settings. Many speakers in the Nitra/Nyitra region are not bidialectal in standard Hungary Hungarian and their vernacular, but speak only the regional variety of Hungarian. When people do not use the standard in those situations which call for it, they risk being stigmatized and considered less competent language users. Sándor highlights that when speakers experience stigmatization due to their vernacular, they might feel compelled not to learn Hungarian at all. In very disadvantaged settlements from the perspective of language maintenance, it is common to hear grandchildren answering in Slovak to their Hungarian-speaking grandparents. Sándor argues that the overemphasizing and forced teaching of the Hungary Hungarian standard leads to the stigmatization of the local varieties, which is counterproductive, as instead of promoting the use of the Hungary Hungarian standard, it hinders Hungarian language maintenance altogether and accelerates the displacement of the Hungarian language in these speakers' lives.

Szilvia Rási investigates language attitudes towards the Eastern Palóc variety of Hungarian in Včelince/Méhi, Slovakia. She stresses the vital connection between language attitudes and language maintenance: if the speakers connect favorable attitudes to their variety, they will find it worthy of imitation; whereas if they attach stigma to the variety, its use will decrease. Her study shows that more respondents have been made to feel ashamed of their language use by others than who are actually ashamed of it themselves, which is a partially positive finding. However, 71% of the respondents consider the Hungary Hungarian standard more beautiful than their own vernacular, which entails that the majority of the respondents seems not to consider their own vernacular worthy of imitation, which will probably have negative consequences for language maintenance there.



The fourth section, *Pluricentricity in Hungarian language education*, contains three papers and concentrates on teaching Hungarian as a mother tongue in non-Hungary Hungarian speech communities. Edith Kádár's paper is a very strong critique of the standard-centered nature of teaching Hungarian as a mother tongue in schools in Romania. She examined 27 textbooks that are used for this purpose, and her results show that dialectal features almost never appear in them, and when they do, they are presented as bad examples or mistakes that need to be corrected (*deviance model*). She argues that "being 'exposed' to other varieties could enhance tolerance" (p. 201) and expand the students' linguistic repertoire.

István Jánk presents his application of his own modification of the verbal guise technique for language attitude research. Teachers of Hungarian were given a text, and then listened to students' recorded retellings of the information given in the text. In the recordings, Jánk controlled for the variety (standard or regional [Eastern Palóc]), mode of language use (elaborated or restricted code) and the percentage of the vitally important information that was retained (100% or 60 %). Based on an investigation with the participation of 550 teachers and teacher trainees of Hungarian from Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Subcarpathia, he has established that oral student performances of the same content receive, on average, an evaluation which is lower by one grade if the speaker uses their regional variety. This tendency, in the long run, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, as non-standard speakers will stop trying to be high achievers if teachers evaluate them based on their language use and not how well-prepared they are.

István Kozmács and Ildikó Vančo examine the presence of the notion of the pluricentricity of Hungarian in textbooks published in Hungary which are used in the Hungarian public education system. Their investigations show that, in the examined grammar textbooks designed for primary school students, language change and variation is first discussed in eighth grade, with only one chapter (five pages) being dedicated to the topic. This means the span of only one class designated to ideas of pluricentricity throughout the students' eight years of primary school education. Although the 12<sup>th</sup> grade grammar school textbook the authors examined has a 40-page-long chapter on the topic of 'language and society', the chapter only discusses that regional standards differ from the Hungary Hungarian standard, but it fails to include information on the social stratification of these non-dominant varieties, such as the influencing potential of the speakers' socio-economic status or profession, and differences in the use of slang. The authors conclude that the information on the Hungarian language presented in these textbooks is monocentric rather than pluricentric, non-dominant varieties are scarcely mentioned, and the social stratification of these varieties is completely ignored.

The final section in the volume, entitled *Pluricentricity in Hungarian literature*, explores the use of non-dominant varieties for literary purposes through four papers. Zoltán Németh offers a theoretical categorization of the three levels of representation of the pluricentricity of Hungarian in literary works. The first level involves self-reflective

awareness, which means an understanding of the position of the non-dominant variety, and the difficulties its speakers face. The second level concerns the inclusion of the characteristics of the non-dominant variety in the standard literary language, for the intensification of meaning or a more dramatic effect. The third level is reached when the use of the non-dominant variety in the literary work surpasses the stylistic function and becomes an integral part of the hybrid text, resulting in a loss of meaning for those who are not from the same speech community. The third level of inclusion has the potential for exploring infinite poetic possibilities and rearranging the hegemonic standard language. Therefore, it has a transforming force by challenging standard-centered views of what counts as literature and what is conceptualized as ‘proper’ literary language.

Gabriella Mádi explores language contact phenomena in a Trascarpathia Hungarian novel by Éva Berniczky, titled *Méhe nélkül a bába* [The midwife without her womb]. Mádi explains that the language of the novel is predominantly Hungarian, but the use of Slavic (Ukrainian and Russian) words can also be observed, typically in the case of the names of the characters, specific referents which do not have a Hungary Hungarian equivalent, or Slavic expressions that have a special layer of meaning which is not available in Hungarian. Although the novel is mainly directed at a bilingual audience, explanations are offered for the monolingual Hungarian reader as well. There are a lot of direct borrowings in the novel, for which Berniczky offers explanations in the glossary, and other guiding information is provided throughout the novel which involves more than mere translations of the unknown words, as the readers need more complex guidance to be able to interpret the unknown, multicultural world in which the story unfolds. Mádi supports the publication of minority language novels, as they can capture and present the linguistic reality of the speech community. She argues that in a multilingual and multicultural setting, homogenized standard language use cannot offer a powerful and true representation of the linguistic and cultural behavior of the speech community. The main challenge is to preserve the authenticity of the linguistic experience of the speakers depicted, and still make the novel comprehensible and enjoyable for Hungarian audiences who belong to other speech communities.

Anikó N. Tóth’s paper is the first contribution to the volume which specifically focuses on the topic of diglossia, although the idea appears throughout the volume without being termed as such. In situations of diglossia, there is a functional distribution of languages or varieties, where one is not used for fulfilling functions typically carried out in the other. The high variety, the Hungary Hungarian standard in our case, has official, formal functions, while the low (regional) variety is used in private, everyday communication, but neither is used in the function of the other. N. Tóth examines the language use of a Slovakia Hungarian novel, *Klára*, by György Norbert. *Klára*, similarly to the previously discussed novel by Berniczky, disrupts the expectation of using only the high variety in literary works. The regional variety and hybrid language use are often employed in the novel, in spite of the fact that contact varieties are often viewed as inaccurate, distorted or foreign-like even by the speakers of these varieties.



Slovak words appear in the text with Hungarian suffixes, and Slovak borrowings are often phonetically spelt, which indicates that the speech community has made these words their own, and now they use them as Hungarian words. N. Tóth explains that the hierarchy of Hungarian and Slovak is presented in the novel through the example of one of the main characters, Ikrek, whose first language is Hungarian. He becomes a ticket inspector, which indicates a metaphorical position of power; however, the language of power in Slovakia is Slovak, which causes insecurity in Ikrek. Interestingly, English borrowings also appear in the novel, phonetically spelt and complemented with Hungarian suffixes, which indicates the growing importance of the global lingua franca in the everyday experiences of Slovakia Hungarian youth. N. Tóth highlights that the novel “draws attention to the series of cultural and linguistic crossings” (p. 265) that happen in the daily lives of Slovakia Hungarians, and argues that the language use of the novel “can be considered as a specific Hungarian language self-representation in Slovakia” (p. 265).

The last contributor to the volume, Gabriella Petres Csizmadia, also analyzes language use in a Slovakia Hungarian literary work, Pál Száz’s phytolegendry titled *Fűje sarjad mezőknek* [Grass grows on meadows]. The name of the genre ‘phytolegendry’ was coined by Pál Száz as Petres Csizmadia explains in the footnotes, and refers to “a collection of readings about plants” (p. 269). The analyzed work is highly multilingual, and very specific to the linguistic environment of its creation. Slovak, Czech, Russian, English, German, Romani and Latin elements are sewn into the Hungarian text, which reflects the cohabitation of several nations and the ease of code-switching. Petres Csizmadia argues that the dialectal and foreign language elements increase the authenticity of the work, and using the non-dominant variety for literary purposes raises the status of the variety. The spelling of the text reflects live speech and dialectal accent, such as in the expression *istentuggyahun* [God knows where, standard: Isten tudja hol]. In this example, a complete thought is merged into one expression reflecting speech pace, and the phonetic spelling of the expression reveals a non-standard accent. The story of the phytolegendry highlights the feeling of linguistic inferiority on the non-standard speakers’ part, as their language use is stigmatized by many Hungary Hungarians, because they experience the Slovakia Hungarian variety as a threat to the unity of their nation.

The volume is a unique contribution to the research on Hungarian as a pluricentric language. It is also a multidisciplinary endeavor, as the topics covered by the 19 papers contain elements of research on bilingualism, language contact, language attitudes, linguistic discrimination, first language acquisition and education, identity studies, discourse analysis, literary studies, etc. The publication of this volume is an important step in Hungarian linguistics, as it highlights the importance of a pluricentric approach for Hungarian language maintenance outside Hungary. As English, the global lingua franca, is also a pluricentric language, the findings presented in this volume can have implications for studying English as a pluricentric language as well. If more researchers

come to accept non-dominant varieties of Hungarian, English, and other pluricentric languages as valid and legitimate varieties, it can have a profound impact on the lives of the speakers of these varieties. More positive language attitudes, more diversity in course books, acceptance of students' vernaculars, grading academic content and not the 'standardness' of language use, and other benefits will follow from the single decision of allowing more space for pluricentric approaches.

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