

A MANIFESTATION OF LANGUAGE POLICY IN HUNGARY – THE BILINGUAL EDUCATION OF MINORITY LANGUAGE SPEAKERS

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ABSTRACT

The present study focuses on the aspect bilingual education in Hungary when bilingual schools use one of the minority languages for teaching. The bilingual education for students whose native language is different from the majority language of the country is essential for the equal chance of academic achievement but for the better career perspectives majority language development has an equal importance. Therefore, bilingual schools are necessary for those students who live in an ethnic minority group in the country. Though most minority groups have chance to attend bilingual education, many, especially one of the largest minority groups in Hungary, the Gypsy population have access only to language lessons as a counterpart of monolingual education that does not provide the same chances of academic success and the preservation of native language and culture. This study gives an insight of the availability of bilingual schools for the minority language speaker students both in respect of languages involved and their location and investigate how the presence of bilingual schools correspond to the educational needs of minority groups.

Keywords: minority, ethnic groups, language politics, bilingual education, native language

INTRODUCTION

Bilingual education in terms of minority language involvement as one of the languages in teaching is part of the language policy manifestation in a country. Language politics in Hungary has very diverse realization in the minority bilingual education. According to the Declaration of Human Rights all people have the right to education, however the right to native language education is not explicitly involved (KONTRA, 2010) There were attempts to enforce the Native Language Human Rights (SKUTNABB-KANGAS, 1997) according to which all students taking part in education would have the right to receive it in their native language, however this declaration is still not in force (KONTRA, 2010).

Bilingual education has different levels according to the strength of native language use and it was well demonstrated by MAY (1997) and CHRISTIAN (1994), though in the present study the focus is on the presence of Hungarian bilingual education instead of the type it provides. In many countries the bilingual education and its effect on academic performance is one of the most popular educational research topics (LESZNYÁK, 1996), especially in the United States where minority language speakers live together and receive education together with majority language speakers. In Hungary the bilingual education is also getting into the center of educational research attention (LESZNYÁK, 1996). ISTVÁN KEMÉNY (1996) investigated the effects of the lack of bilingual education for the Gypsy students in Hungary as it is reflected in the dropout and unemployment rates. The data of the census of 2001 processed by TÓTH (2004) from the perspective of ethnic minority group presence is used in this study to see their proportion.

My aim with the present study is to shortly discuss the importance of native language education and to provide an overview of how the Hungarian bilingual schools reflect the educational need of ethnic minority groups in the country.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

For the present study data of the 2001 census was used to elaborate the proportion and locality of ethnic minority groups in Hungary as the 2011 census data is not fully processed at present. Internet database of the minority ombudsman was used as complimentary database for the location and language learning possibilities of minorities and report on bilingual schools from the national and ethnic minority rights parliamentary representative was used to gather information about ethnic bilingual schools and the education they provide (<http://www.kisebbsegiombudsman.hu/data/files/217986220.pdf>). To analyze the ethnic minority groups and the presence of bilingual schools data were collected from the internet (http://w3.kir.hu/intezmenylista2/lista.asp?lst_id=28&kat=17).

RESULTS

The importance of native language education

From the viewpoint of ethnicity as mother tongue the language that a person learns as his or her first language at home and the one the person assimilates with is regarded (KÁLLAI, 2011). The primary reason for bilingual education was well articulated by KRASHEN (1997): 'when schools provide children quality education in their primary language, they give them two things: knowledge and literacy.' The fact that minority speaker students cannot even start the education in their native language is parallel with the academic achievement and the educational level that determines their life possibilities. For this reason, bilingual education has a special importance in the earlier stages of education as primary or even nursery school level. The right to minority language education is one of the most important components of the cultural autonomy of minorities (MÁRKUS, 2007). For bilingual children whose first language is a minority language differing from the majority language, the monolingual school imposes extra learning difficulties sometimes in a degree that it places students in a disadvantageous situation depriving them from the possibility of the equal academic achievement and thus better career prospects in the future.

According to the studies of SKUTNABB-KANGAS (1997) bilingual education enhances academic achievement in school. For the successful education of minority language speakers the term 'bilingual' is crucial: though it is students' native language that helps them in understanding and learning the material to be acquired in school especially in the early stages of education, without the proper majority language competence they would have little chance for workplaces or career building in their adult life. (KONTRA, 2010) Therefore, native language education must always come together with majority language learning for an equal chance in school and working life. The UNESCO also recognized this necessity thus asserted that 'the best teaching language is a child's mother tongue' (BIANCO, 1997).

There are different degrees in incorporating native language in bilingual education. According to the definition in SKUTNABB-KANGAS (1997), bilingual education is 'the use of two languages as media of instruction in subjects other than the languages themselves'. MAY (1997) makes this definition more precise by stating 'bilingual education involves instruction in two languages' to deliver the curricula content and not simply taught as a subject itself. Bilingual education can have a 'weak form' and a 'strong form'. The aim of the weak form is the strong dominance of the majority language (SKUTNABB-KANGAS, 1997). However, the strong form includes 'mother-tongue maintenance or language shelter programs, two-way bilingual (dual language) programs and plural multi-lingual programs.' It is important to

highlight MAY'S (1997) assertion that not the language itself is taught in schools as a second language can be regarded as bilingual education.

Ethnic groups with minority languages in Hungary

In the beginning of the 21st century about the 10% of the Hungarian population belong to a national or ethnical minority group, most of them still preserving and speaking their original native language. It is important to point out that during the census of 2001 only 3% of the population declared themselves as part of a minority group, expert say that the real rate is about 8-10% of the population (TÓTH ET AL., 2004).

In the sense of this law, Bulgarian, Gypsy, Greek, Romanian, Rusyn, Serbian, Slovakian, Slovenian Croatian and Ukrainian are officially resident minority groups in Hungary. Their geographical location is sporadic; they live in about 1500 settlements and usually form a minority group within the settlement.

In the first *Table* the number of ethnic groups living in Hungary is presented as recorded in the census of 2001. It is important to point out that the data was recorded acknowledging the fact that 95-96% of the population gave evaluate answer to the questions of ethnic belonging. Altogether 4.34 % of the population taking part in the census indicated the belonging to the 13 listed ethnic groups.

Table 1. The number of ethnic groups living in Hungary

Minority group	persons	% of the population	% of the minorities
Bulgarian	2316	0.02	0.52
Gypsy	205720	2.02	46.47
Greek	6619	0.06	1.50
Croatian	25730	0.25	5.81
Polish	5144	0.05	1.16
German	120344	1.18	27.18
Armenian	1165	0.01	0.26
Romanian	14781	0.14	3.34
Rusyn	2079	0.02	0.47
Serbian	7350	0.07	1.66
Slovakian	39266	0.39	8.87
Slovenian	4832	0.05	1.09
Ukrainian	7393	0.07	1.67
All	442739	4.34	100.00

Source: (TÓTH; 2004).

From all the 13 groups of minorities 71% declared themselves to belong to the minority group, however only slightly more than 30% declared the minority language as their first language. It is important to point out that 2/3 of those minority group members who were born abroad originally declared themselves belonging to the group by their native language. For instance, 92% of the foreign-born Bulgarians, more than 90% of the Polish, 81% of the Greek speak their native language as their first language, while in case of those born in Hungary this rate is 30%, 21% and 16%. This phenomenon is similar to the United States where first generation immigrants primarily speak the minority language.

In *Table 2* the rate of minority language speakers among the foreign-born and Hungarian-born minority population is shown.

Table 2. The rate of minority language speakers among the foreign-born and Hungarian-born minority population

	minority altogether	first language speaker altogether	%	foreign born	foreign born first language speaker	%	Hungarian born	Hungarian born first language speaker	%
Bulgarian	2316	1299	56.09	977	895	91.61	1339	404	30.17
Gypsy	205720	48438	23.55	932	439	47.10	204788	47999	23.44
Greek	6619	1921	29.02	1290	1047	81.16	5329	874	16.40
Croatian	25730	14326	55.68	2050	1154	56.29	23680	13172	55.63
Polish	5144	2580	50.16	2162	1955	90.43	2982	625	20.96
German	120344	33774	28.06	9756	6817	69.87	110588	26957	24.38
Armenian	1165	294	25.24	366	213	58.20	799	81	10.14
Romanian	14781	8482	57.38	7286	3912	53.69	7495	4570	60.97
Rusyn	2079	1113	53.54	1142	829	72.59	937	284	30.31
Serbian	7350	3388	46.10	2808	1395	49.68	4542	1993	43.88
Slovakian	39266	11817	30.09	2360	1130	47.88	36906	10687	28.96
Slovenian	4832	3180	65.81	307	139	45.28	4525	3041	67.20
Ukrainian	7393	4885	66.08	3668	2503	68.24	3725	2382	63.95
All	442739	135497	30.60	35104	22428	63.89	407635	113069	27.74

Source: (TÓTH; 2004).

Minorities' presence territory is the highest in Baranya County above 10% with about half of them being German, one quarter Gypsy ethnic group. In six counties the number of minorities is above 5%: in Szabolcs-Szatmár Bereg County 92%, in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County 87%, in Nógrád County 67% of the minority population is Gypsy. In Tolna County the two-third of the minority population, in Komárom-Esztergom County half of the population is German, while in Békés County 42% is Slovakian, 23% Gypsy and 21% is Romanian. As it can be seen there are remarkable differences in the distribution of the ethnic minorities in the country. The Polish population in Hungary is mainly concentrated in Pest County and in settlements near Miskolc; the Croatian minority presence is high for instance, in Baranya County while Slovenians mainly live in the Őrség area near the Slovenian border. Bulgarians are present mainly in the area of Budapest, Miskolc and Szeged.

Bilingual education institutions in Hungary that involve minority languages

Ideally, the location and number of bilingual schools where one of the languages is a minority language should reflect the territorial distribution of the minority children. As it was previously mentioned there are different degrees in bilingual education. In this study, however, only the presence of bilingual education is registered regardless to the form it provides.

In Hungary the following bilingual schools provide minority language education to students from nursery to secondary school level: Croatian Nursery, Primary School and Grammar School and Hostel (Budapest), Hriszto Botev Bulgarian-Hungarian Primary and Grammar School (Budapest), Hungarian-Chinese Bilingual Primary School (Budapest), Koch Valéria Hungarian-German Secondary and Primary School, Nursery and Hostel (Pécs), Miroslav Krleža Croatian Nursery, Primary and Secondary School and Hostel (Pécs), General Culture Center of the German Living in Hungary (Baja), Croatian Language Education Nursery, Primary School and Hostel (Hercegszántó), Primary School and Nursery teaching in Beas (Gypsy) and Hungarian languages (Magyarmecske), N. Bălcescu Romanian Grammar School and Primary School and Hostel (Gyula), Kocsis József Bilingual Primary School and Nursery (Felsőszőlőnk, Slovenian-Hungarian), Slovakian Primary and Grammar School and Hostel in Békéscsaba, Tolnai Lajos German Ethnic and Bilingual Secondary and Grammar School and

Hostel (Gyöngyös), Baross Gábor Regional Primary Bilingual and Basic Art School offering Polish-Hungarian education (Parasznya)

Those minorities, who do not have bilingual education program, though are provided an education form where they can at least learn their language. In spite of the Greek minority presence, Greek language is not taught in bilingual education form, only taught as language in Zuglói Hajós Alfréd Hungarian-German Bilingual Primary School (Budapest), similarly to the Rusyn in Komlóska Ruthenian Ethnic General Culture Center (Komlóska), Polish in Budapest is also taught as a language in National Polish Language Teaching School, Armenians have the possibility to take part in language classes in Budapest, Szeged, Székesfehérvár, Győr and Debrecen. There are Sunday schools for the Ukrainian minority students in Budapest, Szeged, Komárom and Várpalota.

Considering the fact that Békés County has the largest Slovakian and Romanian minority population the location of the two bilingual schools well reflects the needs. In Baranya County and Tolna County the rate of German minority is high, thus the Hungarian-German Bilingual School are also favorably located. In case of the bilingual schools, they are primarily situated in areas with the highest percentage of the minority population and most of them function as student hostel as well thus catering for the need of the students who want to participate in the bilingual education from further locations. It can also be concluded that majority of the bilingual schools offer education from the very early ages: nursery and primary school and some of them provide education on secondary level, too. The Polish population is mainly centered in Pest County and around Miskolc and in Parasznya, near Miskolc bilingual education is offered on primary level. The Croatian minority presence is high for instance, in Baranya County, where Pécs provides bilingual education. Slovenians mainly live in the Őrség area where Felsősözlök has bilingual school. Bulgarians are mainly present in the area of Budapest, Miskolc, Szeged and can take part in native language education in Budapest. Serbians though do not have bilingual schools, they are provided with full Serbian language education at Nicola Tesla Serbian Language Nursery, Primary and Grammar School and Hostel in Budapest.

However, a deficiency in bilingual education becomes overt upon examining the ethnic languages involved: though there is a high rate of Gypsy population (whose first language is not unified, but can be either Lovari or Beas, for instance), their possibilities of receiving education in both their mother tongue and the majority language is lagging behind any other ethnic minorities. Though schools are operated for Gypsy students (Hunyadi János Primary, Secondary and Grammar School and Hostel in Jánoshalma with Gypsy ethnic education teaching Lovari language, Szent József Catholic Primary School Kiskunhalas Gypsy education without Gypsy language teaching Kodolányi János Secondary, Vocational Training and Primary School and Nursery in Bogádmindszent offering Gypsy education without language) they either do not provide bilingual education or teach a Gypsy language within the framework of language lesson that, as May asserts it, cannot be regarded as bilingual education.

In Hungary a great proportion of ethnic minority is formed by the Gypsy population with a first language distinct from the majority language and hardly any chance to bilingual education. According to ISTVÁN KEMÉNY'S study (1996) the dropout rate among Hungarian speaker Gypsy students below 8 grades is 22.9%, among Romanian speakers 41.6% and 48.2% among those Gypsies whose first language is one of the Gypsy languages. It is concluded that the high unemployment rate among the Gypsy population is due to the educational language 'discrimination' (KONTRA; 2010).

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that in Hungary most ethnic minority groups with a native language different from the majority language have the chance to take part in bilingual education in their own language and the majority language thus they are able to preserve their own language as part of their culture, have equal chance in achieving academic success and at the same time master the majority language for better career possibilities later in life. The majority of these schools provide the bilingual training at the early stages of education when it is the most crucial for students to study in a language they understand the most. However, one of the biggest minority group, the Gypsies are hardly provided with the equal chances of bilingual education as other ethnic minority groups that can affect the dropout rates and the lack of academic success thus stabilizing or even increasing the unemployment rate of the group.

Among the thirteen ethnicities in the census of 2001 eight have the possibility for bilingual education; however the Chinese who were not listed at that time also have bilingual schools. Other minorities are not represented in bilingual education programs. Ethnic groups like Ruthenian, Serbian, Armenian or Greek can learn their first language only within the framework of language lesson at school or at culture centers as a result of local initiatives.

In Hungary, though bilingual schools in general cater for the educational needs of most ethnic minority groups, it would be useful to extend them to other minority languages to provide their children with the possibility of maintaining their language and achieve success in the society in which they live.

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