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**LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING:  
STATE LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR MINORITIES**

**EDITED BY ILDIKÓ VANČO AND ISTVÁN KOZMÁCS**

Nitra 2015

All the articles in this book have been peer-reviewed by  
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### About the project

PaedDr. Mária Alabánová, PhD.: – PhDr. Marcel Olšiak PhD.: O projekte Nitriansky model skvalitnenia vyučovania slovenského jazyka a literatúry na školách s vyučovacím jazykom národnostných menšín metódou vyučovania cudzích jazykov (s dôrazom na školy s vyučovacím jazykom maďarským) ..	151
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## TEACHING UKRAINIAN AS A STATE LANGUAGE IN SUBCARPATHIA: SITUATION, PROBLEMS AND TASKS

ISTVÁN CSERNICKÓ

The efficiency of state language (Ukrainian) teaching is poor and unbalanced in the Transcarpathian Hungarian schools for several reasons.

### 1. The status of modern-day Transcarpathia over the last 150 years

The territory of the administration unit that we call Transcarpathia today did not exist neither as a geographical, nor as a geopolitical entity. Throughout the 20th century it belonged to several countries (Csernickó and Ferenc 2014: 402). The state language has changed six times during the 20th century and accordingly changed the compulsory language taught in the schools of the region. The compulsory state language role was fulfilled by the Hungarian, “Czechoslovakian”, Russian and Ukrainian nations in a relatively short period.

There were always generations left out from compulsory language education during the state- and state language-changes. The “Czechoslovakian” language, for example, was introduced as a compulsory subject in every Transcarpathian school, but those who graduated before this year had never come across the language at school. After the power shift in 1938/39, a generation was, again, excluded from Hungarian language teaching. Although, after WWII, the teaching of Russian was emphasised by the Soviet authorities, those who left school earlier had no chance to learn Russian at school in an instructed way. Then, when suddenly compulsory Russian language teaching was replaced by Ukrainian, many people did not study Ukrainian because of the above mentioned reasons, not to mention those who attended school during the transitional periods. Students, for example, who were in the 5th form in the academic year of 1990/1991 in a Transcarpathian Hungarian school learned Russian for

the first 5 years, then commencing on 1 September 1991 they were taught in Ukrainian.

The efficient teaching of Ukrainian is hindered by many factors.

## 2. The lack of qualified teachers

In the academic year of 1997/1998 60 % of teachers teaching Ukrainian in minority schools of Transcarpathia had no qualification in Ukrainian language teaching (Beregszászi, Csernicsekó, and Orosz 2001: 57), while in the academic year of 2008/2009 40% had (Motilcsak 2009: 42). In the summer of 2009, Viktor Juschenko called it shameful that in some schools with a minority language as the language of instruction, there are no qualified Ukrainian language teachers<sup>1</sup>. The president instructed the leaders of the county state administrations to assess how many Ukrainian language teachers were needed in the schools of the country and to ensure that by 1 September 2009 every school had qualified teachers<sup>2</sup>. The presidential order couldn't be executed fully. In 2011 in the Hungarian schools of the city of Beregszász, 22 teachers taught Ukrainian language, 10 of whom had a Russian language teaching qualification, 6 were elementary teachers and only 6 had a degree in Ukrainian language and literature (Bárány, Huszti, and Fábíán 2011: 146).

Until the academic year of 2003/2004, teachers in Ukraine were not trained to teach Ukrainian as a second language (state language) for non-Ukrainian students, instead it was taught as a mother tongue. In those schools where the language of instruction is the minority language, the state language is taught by teachers who were trained to teach the Ukrainian language to students whose mother tongue is Ukrainian, or teachers with other specializations who participated in a short retraining course. In many small villages the state language is taught by persons who has no qualification in pedagogy but has a good level of language proficiency. Some teachers do not even know the language and culture of those nationalities to whom they teach the Ukrainian language (Gulpa 2000: 189, Póhán 1999, 2003: 52, Milován 2002). However, according

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<sup>1</sup> Lásd például: [http://oktatas.origo.hu/20090807/nincs\\_eleg\\_ukran\\_nyelvtanar\\_karpataljan](http://oktatas.origo.hu/20090807/nincs_eleg_ukran_nyelvtanar_karpataljan); <http://www.nyest.hu/hirek/nincs-eleg-ukran-nyelvtanar-karpataljan>

<sup>2</sup> <http://tsn.ua/ukrayina/yushchenko-vimagaye-znaiti-po-vchitelyu-ukrayinskoyi-movi-dlya-kozhnoyi-shkoli.html>

to The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities and language rights experts (e.g. Skutnabb-Kangas 1990) the state language should be taught by bilingual teachers.

### **3. The lack of appropriate course books**

For many years after the introduction of the Ukrainian language as a mandatory subject in schools, the necessary curriculum and course books were not provided by the state. When finally they became available in the minority schools, teachers heavily criticised them (Gulpa 2000, Koljadzsin 2003, Póhán 1999, 2003). The reason of the critics in the first place was that they were composed by teachers and scholars who didn't know the minorities, their language or culture (Gulpa 2000, Koljadzsin 2003, Póhán 1999, 2003). The other rightful critique in connection with the course books was that they were too grammar-centred, focusing on the theoretical teaching of grammar, and they did not include any communication perspectives (Bárány, Huszti, and Fábíán 2011).

The curriculum and the course books do not take into consideration the language background of the students: expectations exceed possibilities. The Ukrainian language curriculum does not build on the knowledge already gained in the mother tongue and foreign language classes: it requires the acquisition of grammatical categories that have already been learnt in mother tongue classes. For instance, students already know the parts of speech (in Hungarian lessons they have learnt about verbs, nouns, adjectives, numerals, pronouns, etc.), but they have to learn them again in elementary classes in Ukrainian with their definitions, instead of focusing on speaking skills. The necessity of grammar teaching has long been debated in the language teaching literature, and recently Singleton and Cook (2014) have shown that it plays an important role in second language acquisition, though vocabulary and phonology may seem more obvious. However grammar is overemphasized in the Ukrainian language course books and one may have the impression that the leaders of education do not expect the acquisition of the Ukrainian language rather the knowledge of the Ukrainian grammar system.

Though the Ukrainian language has been a compulsory subject in the Hungarian schools since 1991, methodological aids haven't been composed yet: there are no teachers' guidebooks, school dictionaries, and

video- or audio-visual aids. The Ukrainian state budget does not provide methodological aids.

#### **4. The lack of appropriate perspectives and methods**

The Ukrainian language as a subject has the same name in the timetable of both, Ukrainian and minority schools, but means something different. In the former case, students come to school with native language proficiency, so the Ukrainian language (mother tongue) teaching, besides writing and reading, means developing knowledge and literacy in the mother tongue, awareness of the norms of the standard language variation and a grounding in foreign language learning/teaching. In the latter case, the main goal is the acquisition of the state language by non-Ukrainian students and the development of communicative skills in that language. If our starting point is the difference between these two aims, it becomes clear that we cannot use the same methods when teaching the Ukrainian language in Ukrainian and in minority schools. John Baugh (1999), an American linguist, argues that the teaching of the state language second language) according to the methodology of mother tongue teaching is a pedagogical mistake.

The need to distinguish between the two types of schools in connection with the goals and methods of teaching Ukrainian is also necessary when we look at the difference between the number of classes per week, curricula and course books. Table 1 shows that in the 11th form students of the Ukrainian schools learn the Ukrainian language subject in 44.5 classes, while students attending Hungarian schools learn the same subject in 30 classes per week.



subject/ form	1.	2.	3.	4.	1-4. form	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	5-9. orm	10.	11.	10-11. orm	All
Ukrainian schools															
Ukrainian language*	8	7	7	7	29	3.5	3	3	2	2	13.5	1	1	2	44.5
Ukrainian literature	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2	2	10	2	2	4	14
World literature	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2	2	10	1	1	2	12
Foreign language	-	2	2	2	6	3.5	3	3	2	2	13.5	3	3	6	25.5
Hungarian schools															
Ukrainian language*	3	3	4	4	14	3	3	2	2	2	12	2	2	4	30
Hungarian language*	6	6	5	5	22	3	2	2	2.5	2.5	12	1	1	2	36
Ukrainian literature	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2	2	10	2	2	4	14
Integrated Hungarian and world)-literature	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2	2	10	2	2	4	14
Foreign language	-	2	2	2	6	3	3	2	2	2	12	3	3	6	24

Table 1. Compulsory number of language and literature lessons per week in the Hungarian and Ukrainian schools (academic year of 2011–2012)

\* Language and reading classes together in the 1 – 4 forms

As the aims of the teaching of the Ukrainian language and other conditions and circumstances are different in the two types of schools, it is logical that the learning requirements should also be different. Nevertheless, the same requirements apply to everyone in the Ukrainian language and literature subjects. The same knowledge of Ukrainian is required from those who studied in schools with Ukrainian as a language of instruction

and from those who studied in Russian, Hungarian or Romanian minority schools (Csernicskó–Ferenc 2009, 2010).

#### **5. The lack of clear-cut objectives**

Clear goals and tasks are not set in connection with the academic expectations of students in the Ukrainian language subject.

State requirements with regard to foreign languages (English, German, French and Spanish) are fixed in writing: by the end of primary school (4th form) students are required to reach A1 level, by the end of secondary school A2+ level, and by the time they graduate B1+ level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). The normative documents of education do not define the required levels non-Ukrainian students have to reach during their Ukrainian language studies.

In practice, this means that the Ministry of Education in Kiev expects native-like proficiency from graduating minorities. This is impossible from linguistic, psychological and pedagogical points of view.

#### **6. The homogenization: universal curricula, coursebooks and methods**

The Ukrainian education policy homogenizes language learners. It approves universal curricula and coursebooks, even though the linguistic and language ecological situations of Ukrainian language acquisition are different for students living in cities in residential areas compared to those living in small villages. In the teaching of foreign languages it is normal to create small groups of beginners, advanced students, etc. and they proceed according to their level and are provided with teaching materials. In the case of state language teaching in Ukraine, decree No 461 issued by the Ministry of Education on 26 May 2008 permits small groups in the Ukrainian classes of the minority schools. The decree does not say anything about the principles according to which the groups should be divided or about supporting schools with regard to books and curricula for different language proficiency groups. The language proficiency level of students is not measured at all when students start school.

## **7. Demographic features**

Ukrainian language acquisition is not facilitated by the fact that the language background of students is not considered either when they start school or during schooling. According to census data, Transcarpathian nationalities live in relatively compact settlement areas. Almost half of the Hungarians (46 %) live in settlements where they have a majority of 80 % and 62 % live in settlements where they make up the absolute majority (Molnár and Molnár 2010: 19). Most of the Romanians also live in a relatively homogeneous block close to the Ukrainian-Romanian border. Members of the majority nation (Ukrainians) dominate the area in terms of numbers where they are settled.

## **8. Language preferences**

The Hungarian language is dominant in those settlements where Hungarians make up the majority. The main (or exclusive) language of families, the private sphere, publications and the media (TV, radio, the press) is Hungarian (see Cserniczkó 1998a, 2005 and Cserniczkó ed. 2010).

In spite of all this, the prerequisite of those who plan Ukrainian language teaching is that all children starting school already have some level of Ukrainian language competence and it is assumed that they also have daily opportunities to practise Ukrainian outside school. This is true for some children, but for many this is not the case.

## **9. The deficiencies of language education in kindergartens**

State language acquisition should be grounded in kindergartens. There is no central curriculum or syllabus for teaching the Ukrainian language in the Hungarian kindergartens. Kindergarten teachers are not trained to teach Ukrainian to kindergarten children through different activities.

Proper language training and preparation for Ukrainian language teaching is hindered by other factors in kindergartens. For example, in most of the Transcarpathian Hungarian kindergartens the groups are mixed: children from 2.5 to 6 years of age can be found in these groups, and the number of children in one group varies from 12 to 30. In almost every kindergarten there are 2 activities per week in the Ukrainian language, but due to the size of the groups it is difficult to organise

intensive training sessions. In practice, it is impossible to make an activity plan for mixed-age groups that considers both, the linguistic background and age of the children.

#### **10. Steps to improve the quality of language education**

On 28 January 2009, for the initiation of the city council of Beregszász, a work committee had its statutory meeting in the building of the Transcarpathian Hungarian College named after Ferenc Rákóczi II. The main goals of the work committee were to publish programmes, curricula, coursebooks, methodological aids and teachers' guidebooks that could improve the efficiency of Ukrainian language (as a state language) teaching in the Hungarian educational institutions. The team finished its work in August 2011. It was clear from the beginning that they would not solve all the problems (that the Ukrainian state has not solved for 20 years) in this area, but the members of the team came up with and published 25 educational publications that can effectively support the teaching of the Ukrainian language. Financial support came from the city council of Beregszász and from grants from Hungary (Csernicskó 2012).

#### **11. Tasks**

The attempts described above are very welcome. However, we also have to note that:

- most of these programmes (apart from some exceptions) were not implemented for the initiation of educational policy on the state or Transcarpathian level, but for local social initiation, mostly without state support and with the inclusion of grants from Hungary;
- individual actions can ease the many theoretical, practical, methodological, language pedagogical, linguistic and political problems in connection with the teaching of the state language, but cannot solve them in a professional way.

Based on the above analyses, many theoretical and practical lessons can be drawn. Our starting point is that the problem of efficient and successful Ukrainian language teaching can only be solved within the frame of a school with the mother tongue as a language of instruction. The solution is not education in the majority language or bilingual education. Based

on these claims we briefly try to summarize the tasks that we consider to be important in order to make Ukrainian language teaching more efficient in Hungarian schools.

Do not impose the same requirements on students graduating from Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian schools.

The goal of teaching the Ukrainian language as a subject is different in the majority and in the minority schools, furthermore, the fundament and the number of lessons also differ. As a consequence, methods of teaching the subject should also be different. In order to teach the Ukrainian language effectively – with Ukrainian state financial support – special curricula should be composed for Hungarian schools and, based on these, coursebooks, workbooks, methodological aids and dictionaries should be provided.

Curriculum frameworks, that define the goals, tasks, requirements and content of state language acquisition, should be revised. In the revised versions (similar to the requirements of foreign language teaching) the required language proficiency levels should also be clearly stated for the different levels of education (primary, grade and secondary school). These requirements cannot be identical to the requirements of students studying in schools where the language of instruction is Ukrainian.

Ukrainian language and literature teachers for Hungarian schools should be trained with the prerequisite that they speak the Hungarian language too. The financial problems of the ongoing training programmes should be solved in the long run by the state from the budget.

Possibilities should be created to acquire the state language for those who left school before the political revolution and couldn't learn the language. Adult education programmes with the necessary educational materials are needed.

## 12. Conclusions

According to international linguistic human rights experts (Skutnabb-Kangas 1990, Phillipson, Rannut, and Skutnabb-Kangas 1994), the right to learn the state language is an essential right of every minority citizen. *The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities* clearly states that official state language acquisition is needed for the successful societal integration of minorities. If we accept

the fact that everybody has a mother tongue and we acknowledge the right to learn (a) the mother tongue and (b) state language as a school subject, then we have to realize that: in the case of Ukrainian students the *Ukrainian language* subject covers the right of (a) and (b), however in the case of minority students point (a) means the *mother tongue* and point (b) means the *Ukrainian language* subject. So, the workload of Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian students is different: while the Ukrainian student is relaxing, playing games or preparing for the university entrance exam, his/her minority peers are learning the state language. It is a big luxury to invest time, energy and money in the children's state language acquisition when, due to the present conditions and circumstances, they master it to the required level.

If a Transcarpathian Hungarian student learns the Ukrainian language as a subject for 11 years (from 1st form to the 11th) and he/she cannot speak it to the required level, then we can be sure that the educational system does not work in the right way. The solution is not to study in the majority language but to find those possibilities within the frame of the present minority language school system, that lead to good language proficiency and to additive bilingualism.

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