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As a Foreign Student of Hungarian Descent in Hungary

Introduction

The cultural complexity of our world is extremely diverse. Meetings of people from different backgrounds can shape, transform, and add to the individual's social and personal attitude and way of life. In our country, especially in the capital, which is very popular in terms of tourism, we can observe this phenomenon the best. We can meet many foreigners on the streets of Budapest, but in many cases, we do not have the opportunity or need to find out about their personal life history and background. Since many visitors come to our country only for tourism purposes, most people do not even think that some of them who speak a foreign language return home to Hungary somehow. In my research, I examined Western young people from abroad with a Hungarian language background. However, the students participating in my study do not stay in Budapest to tour: they participate in a one-year training aimed at developing their Hungarian language and identity. I examined four students studying in the same class of the same institution in more detail. The study of their personal history, their attachment and relationship to our country, their social integration, and the change in their identity came into my research focus. In my study, I gained a deeper insight into the everyday lives of these young people from different cultures, with different backgrounds, with different mother tongues, but studying in the same facility. During these students' studies, the main goal was to improve their Hungarian language skills and strengthen their identity. Still, in addition to all this, friendships were formed through the professional college and the joint cultural programmes provided to them. The central question of my research is the following: How does the linguistic identity of young people of Hungarian descent living in the diaspora change as a result of the institutional impact of Hungarian minority policy during their stay in Hungary? I conducted my research by combining the methods of ethnographic analysis and sociolinguistics.

An Overview of History

Throughout history, Hungary has tried to help its neighbouring countries. In recent decades, however, they have been open to overseas nations, providing several essential opportunities that support minorities with a Hungarian background across the border. These second- and third-generation students all grew up in Western countries where their Hungarian ancestors moved out. The subjects of my research came from mainly South America, Australia, Canada, and European countries not neighbouring us. The diaspora has historically developed in these nations. At the 2006 Canadian Census, 315,510 people considered themselves to be of Hungarian descent, and in 2011, 69,160 people in Australia. In Latin America, the census does not discuss ethnicity, so there are various estimates that there are about 12,000 people of Hungarian descent in Argentina, 8-10,000 in Brazil, 4,000 in Venezuela, and 2,000 in Chile (Tolcsvai 2017). Living under the conditions of bilingualism, life is characterized by constant vulnerability; the use of the Hungarian language is increasingly being pushed into the background as with their own educational institutions, they use it only in fragments (Bartha 2000). The other term typically used in relation to Western Scattered Hungarians in the diaspora. This term refers to those geographically fragmented communities of migratory origin that have integrated into the society around them. Still, assimilation has not taken place completely, so they interact

symbolically or objectively with related communities living in other areas but of the same origin (Gazsó 2019). After the regime change, Hungary began to deal more seriously with Hungarian communities living abroad. Initially, however, these steps were directed only at neighbouring countries. Laws and programs supporting diaspora communities not neighbouring Hungary only came into being after 2010. This year, the Hungarian Parliament passed the law on dual citizenship, which allowed foreign Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin or beyond to acquire Hungarian citizenship. A year later, these citizens also received the right to vote, and the Hungarian Diaspora Council was formed, and at their annual meetings, they deal with Hungarians who lived abroad. In the following years, several programs were launched which aimed at the diaspora, such as Julianus, Sándor Kőrösi Csoma and Kelemen Mikes Programs (Gazsó 2019).

An Introduction to the Research Context

Balassi Institute

The students I examined are students of the Balassi Institute in Budapest. The institution of the international relations system of Hungarian culture plays a central role in learning and teaching Hungarian as a 'language of origin'. Its main task is to spread and popularize Hungarian culture. There are similar facilities in 21 countries, which also aim to strengthen our culture throughout the world like Bálint Balassi spread the good reputation of Hungarians in contemporary times with his humanist education and poetry. The young people who studied in my paper are members of the group living in the Western scattering. All of the students who studied in our country is part of a scholarship program. Students also include Chilean, Dutch, Australian, Canadian and Argentine nationalities. Each of the students is studying in our country through a scholarship program. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade announced an application called the Áron Márton Scholarship for a period of 10 months. Young people of Hungarian origin, aged 18-35 living in a diaspora, can apply for the training. Applicants must have foreign citizenship but may also have Hungarian citizenship. When assessing students' applications, it is an advantage to carry out community work, to submit a university recommendation, or to participate in an activity related to culture and art in social circles (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2019).

The students studied

Most of the students I observed were scouts in their homelands. According to the Argentine participants, this is due to a large percentage of their knowledge of the Hungarian language. Although only their grandparents spoke Hungarian, they still acquired a significant part of their language skills in scouting. In the institution, therefore, the refinement of grammatical knowledge plays a greater role for them. During our time spent together, the subjects recalled their scout years countless times. They sang Hungarian folk songs, which were performed with precise pronunciation, knowing all the verses of the song, and this period left a strong imprint on their vocabulary: they often used archaic words, such as *mondottam*, *ostor* or frequent use of the conjunction *s*. Mária Aldea, a former lecturer at the Balassi Institute, puts it this way: 'Whether a young person has joined a scouting community is also very important in terms of language level and awareness. Scouts can only speak Hungarian in camps and weekend classes, learn many folk songs, learn about the most important figures in Hungarian history and literature, and commemorate our national holidays. All this shape and enrich their vocabulary, especially their verbal expressiveness. In the Zrínyi Circle in Argentina, grammar and spelling are taught as well. However, students who do not join the Scout community or other Hungarian cultural communities often do not even familiar with a single rhyme or folk song, cannot

read a single Hungarian poem and have no knowledge of Hungarian history before participating in the training' (Aldea 2005: 133). Among the young people I observed, there were several who performed other cultural tasks: a Dutch girl whose native language is Dutch was an assistant teacher at a folk university. He taught the Hungarian language to the adults studying there and later assisted in a similar job in the classes of the local Hungarian primary school. Moreover, a girl from Chile served as an event organizer at the Hungarian House there.

Description of the studies carried out by the students studied

Students who are admitted receive an extensive educational program. The Institute provides useful knowledge from language school teaching methods to the acquisition of Hungarian and translator skills. The young people living in the Western scattering I examined took part in the Hungarian knowledge training in 2019/2020. Its purpose was to strengthen the identity of young people with a Hungarian background living in the diaspora, their attachment to our country and culture, and their preparation for cultural organizing work in various ways among the scattered Hungarians. We achieved this by greatly improving language skills and passing on modern knowledge about Hungarian culture. At the end of the 2020 semester, an internationally recognized, intermediate or advanced ECL language exam was taken from Hungarian. Our education follows two different curricula, adapting to the different language skills of the students admitted:

	Type A training	Type B training
language skills	beginner	advanced
grammar lessons	high number of lessons	lower number of lessons
first semester	grammar lessons only	Hungarology lessons
second semester	Hungarology lessons	Hungarology lessons
classes starting in the 2019 semester	level A1: 1 class level A2: not started	level B1: 1 class level A2: 1 class
language exam at the end of the year	B2	C1

As there is a transition between groups B1 and B2, students have the opportunity to learn Hungarian at a level appropriate to their language skills, concerning their teachers and fellow students, without the need for compliance. This passage was justified by the case of one of the boys, who needed to pass the intermediate level exam in order to achieve a higher rank as a scout. He felt that he was not doing well enough to take a higher-level exam at the end of the year, so he attended Group B1 classes in the second semester. In general, instructors try to make sure that everyone takes the exam according to their abilities, so at the end of the school year, the level and type of the language exam is decided by the language level assessment committee. The students I examined, except for the abovementioned boy, all performed at C1 level.

Although the subjects of my analysis were the members of the second group, the students of the other group also played an important role in my study, as most of the times, I did my research when they were also present. A close friendship developed between the classes 'in different hierarchies'; they helped and supported each other in terms of both language skills and social relationships. In many cases, I was also expected to receive confirmation and help, especially from students in type A training. The members of this class came to our country in such a way that they barely spoke our language, so the first semester was all about learning Hungarian. While at first they hardly dared to speak in public at all, by the second half of the year, they were expressing themselves more and more boldly in Hungarian. Based on my observations, the positive change was clearly seen in Canadian and South American girls over time. They acted more and more in Hungarian communities and made more and more efforts to use our language as many times as possible. During a board game, the Hungarian members of the company were asked to have a conversation between them in Hungarian. When Hungarian native speakers had to paraphrase a word, students from abroad said when to speak more slowly, perhaps to articulate better, or to express themselves in other words. In the turns where they had to explain, students in the advanced group helped them translate the words. The process of paraphrasing happened in English, but everyone guessed in Hungarian. The development of their knowledge of the Hungarian language was also due to the folk dance practised and liked by both girls. They took part in dance events created several times a week in order to nurture Hungarian folk culture.

Content elements of the training

The curriculum included the topics of the following compulsory lectures and seminars:

- history,
- fiction,
- linguistics,
- folk traditions,
- history of art and music,
- natural geography,
- society,
- economy,
- culture,
- political system.

In order that the students can successfully master the Hungarian language, they take part in 14-28 language lessons a week. Hungarian' language of origin'-education takes place in groups of 5-10 people, and the language level calculated on the basis of the results of the grammar test written at the beginning of the year determines the depth at which they start their studies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2019). The concept of the language of origin' in the present case means the minority migrant language, as Hungarian cannot be called a mother tongue in their case according to the general interpretation of the mother tongue, so it is not the dominant language we speak best' (Csire-Laakso 2014: 20). Five of the students in my research started the semester, but after a few months, there were only four left because a Brazilian girl could not meet the language requirements that would have

corresponded to the group level, so she agreed with the instructors to continue her studies one level lower thus she dropped out of the subjects.

During the Hungarian language lessons, the checking of the students' language competence is continuous: the test is written in modules in order to realistically assess the students' current knowledge. They also make written and/or oral presentations that require independent work. They only have to lecture one or two of them within a semester on different topics related to the subject of 'Hungarianness'. The members of the group also spoke about the poetry of folk customs (regölés in Hungarian), today's health care, as well as Hungarian athletes of the past and present. In addition, students write two papers during the lessons. The title to be submitted in the first semester was My Cultural Identity. Depending on the language level, the training ends with a final exam. Students can choose from any topic related to Hungarianness. There are people from group B2 who studied the phenomenon of migration in our country, and there are those who made researches on midwives or mental illnesses, others studied the Hungarian worldview after the 1956 revolution. To conclude the course, students take a written and/or oral exam from each course.

Experiences of class visits

During my research, I was given the opportunity to attend classes at the institution. In addition to the lessons related to the Hungarian language, culture and history reminiscent of high school education, the teachers place great emphasis on strengthening the students' Hungarian identity. This phenomenon is more noticeable in the second semester, when, in addition to the development of the foundations acquired in the first semester, philosophical, psychological and cultural issues come to the fore. The professional seminars are held with a lot of conversations, expressing the opinions of the students. At a seminar on Hungarology at the beginning of March, for example, the lesson got the title Personal. Fates in the history of the XX. Century. The lesson was interactive, the atmosphere was 'relaxed' and cheerful. The exercise began with a quiz to repeat the previous material, and then, in the context of a fictional story, the situation of the Jews living in the contemporary ghetto was the subject of the lesson. The instructor brought in various old items, including personal (a photo, a poem volume, a medal) and other 'necessities' (a coffee grinder, sugar). The task of the students was to fit these things into the different life situations of the young Jewish boy, invented by the teacher. In conclusion, they finally formulated together with the role that these otherwise insignificant objects could play in difficult times and that how many private objects could have been helpful in the bitter periods of the past. This was followed by recent interviews in which an elderly Jewish man recounted situations that the instructor had previously described to the students and whose solutions the students could come up with, thus confronting them with the real story behind the objects. After the video recording, however, the educator did not ask about the content but about the interviewee's behaviour. Emotions, moods, ways of recalling lived moments came to the fore. Concepts such as discrimination, stereotypes or exclusion have emerged. The students had to find a definition for them, and their suggestions were clarified in a joint discussion. In another class on Hungarian studies, the teaching material was entitled Lyric and Philosophy. Students could read excerpts from Sándor Márai's *Füves Könyv* and Sándor Weöres's *Towards Completeness*. It was about the universe, faith and getting to know ourselves. The instructor was curious about the opinions of young foreigners, and they analyzed and discussed various texts, which are often difficult for even a native speaker to interpret. The readings evoked thoughts from students about the importance of experiencing love, positivity, and pain and shared them meaningfully and honestly with each other and with the instructor. Nor did the history lesson took

place regularly within the walls of a grammar school. Although the Hungarian War of Independence and Revolution came to the fore, the emphasis was on the instructor's understanding of the state of mind of the Hungarian warriors and the people suffering the battles at that time. He asked many times what they could go through, what emotions they could evoke from people in the state, and repeatedly highlighted the moments that could be sore points for the people, making students better understand them and more easily put together the war of independence processes.

Educators try to pay attention to each student; this is also helped by the small size of the group; they return to and revise together the most/more difficult and complex words several times during the lessons. Seminars are interactive, so there are often video screenings that are subtitled in cases where the recordings do not have good acoustics or contain difficult words. Texts used in the class are usually read by students, but if the text is in a more strenuous language, teachers try to present it slowly, well-articulated, and clearly. Although the Hungarian language skills of the students participating in the study were extensive when they arrived here, they greatly improved during their studies at the institution; in addition to vocabulary development, proficiency in speaking genres is also taught in the classes. Students gain practice in argumentation, discussion, lecture, etc., in Hungarian. Overall, the teaching style can be said to be practical, the language of teaching is mundane, yet students have to master many technical words. The atmosphere is intimate and calm, and the methods do not match the patterns experienced by the average Hungarian student during their secondary and tertiary studies. In addition to the application of modern pedagogy, the teachers try to emphasize the strengthening of the students' Hungarian identity, as well as provide assistance in integrating into Hungarian communities.

Strengthening the attachment to Hungarian culture in training

In addition to education, students have the opportunity accompanied by their teachers to participate in various pre-organized cultural events, exhibitions and dance houses. The themes of each program are related to what has just been learned and, of course, to the Hungarian people. The students I interviewed first approached these cultural programmes with ambivalent feelings, as mandatory events organized in educational institutions are generally not very exciting for students.

Exhibitions

Nevertheless, the exhibitions were explicitly enjoyed. The only negative case that occurred was the guided tour, which was conducted in Hungarian, so comprehension was difficult for beginner students, who signalled this to the museologist, who, however, did not comply with their request and did not change her pace and wording.

Theatrical plays

Of the theatrical pieces, the more modern ones were preferred, but they also liked the classic Stephen the King. One of the students of the Hungarian knowledge group also made a shocking remark to the actor. In her native country (the Netherlands), theatrical performances are often interactive, dealing with current social problems interwoven with personal stories, and after the drama, questions can be asked of the playwright and director countless times. Knowing all this, it is understandable why the conservative, more puritanical pieces were less enjoyable for her. At the end of the performance, however, she became aware of a certain phenomenon unusual to her, along with her groupmates. As the audience began to applaud, they observed that the process changed from slow to fast and then slow again, with everyone doing it at once. On the first piece, they thought it was just a coincidence,

but the second time they found the phenomenon strange, they told me their observation. The theatrical applause that was clear and unquestionable to us filled them with shock. The Dutch girl said there is no such kind of applause in their country, they are simply pounding their palms together fast, and they do not understand why people do not do that here. At the third performance, however, they already knew that this event was not accidental, so they could already consciously apply the 'Hungarian applause custom'.

Excursions

However, according to the program concept, a domestic and a 'foreign' trip are part of the school year. In the year studied, the destination of the former trip was Eger, which was attended by all students of the grade. In the historic city, students could visit the castle, churches, caves, baths, participate in wine tastings, and spend a lot of time in nature. In addition to all this, they were involved in continuous team-building games, during which they had the opportunity to get to know each other's personality and culture better. The students really enjoyed this multi-day trip. Based on their accounts, after the return, their relationship had even been strengthened with each other.

College

The Institute also provides a professional college for students from abroad, thus participating in the implementation of the international mobility programs of the European integration process (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2019). In addition to the public specialist library, the college provides a number of community rooms for those coming from abroad. Most of the classrooms are on the same level as the living rooms, so students can feel more at home in class.

Summary

The subjects of my research within the framework of this institutional system included residents of the professional college as well as the participants of the advanced level B2 Hungarian language training. As Hungary provides more and more opportunities for teaching students with a Hungarian background from abroad, more and more students are being informed and taking advantage of the forms of education provided by the country. Also, this learning process shapes and strengthens both their identity and their language, and the Balassi Institute plays a significant role in this. The students studying there all have positive attitudes towards the institution. The facility, which brings together different cultures and forms them together, has enriched the lives of students with unforgettable experiences.

Teachers' disciplined but attentive style positively influences the course of lessons as well as students' behaviour and skills. The lessons give a comprehensive picture of Hungary, its history, culture and language. In addition, the various school programs and the time spent in the dormitory strengthen both their Hungarian linguistic and social identity.

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