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## **The dominant language of bilingual speakers in South Slovakia<sup>1</sup>**

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### **1. Introduction**

Speaking more than one language is natural,<sup>2</sup> as it also was in Hungary before 1918 and in wider Central European contexts.<sup>3</sup> The political changes 100 years ago resulting in the substrate situation of Hungarian in the surrounding countries motivated focusing research on this language situation. Several works have been published in studies on bilingualism of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia<sup>4</sup> – especially because of the importance of assimilation processes.

The dominant method of these researches is extralingual, tracking the social circumstances of the bilingual language situation: the minority school system, language rights, language policy, language ideology, the linguistic landscape, and features and attitudes influencing the choice between languages.<sup>5</sup> Studies on intralingual aspects were published regarding adaptation of loanwords, interference,

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an output of the project KEGA 001UJS-4/2018.

<sup>2</sup> Vančo 2011, 387–404.

<sup>3</sup> Bi- and multilingualism is attested by older lexical borrowings, see Newerkla 2011; Kopecká/Lalíková/Ondrejková et al. 2011, 36–41, 176–187. For more details about Central European convergence, see Newerkla 2014, 11–27; Tóth 2012; Bláha 2015, 147–152; Tölgyesi 2017, 303–310.

<sup>4</sup> Péntek 2017, 179–180; Ondrejovič 1996, 142–146; Dolník/Pilecky 2012, 3–30.

<sup>5</sup> On language situation, see Győriová Baková 2015, 161–174; on minority school system, see Lanstyák/Szabómihály 2011, 511–514; Simon 2017, 9–31 and Vančo 2017, 357–442; on language rights, see Szabómihály 2011, 11–26; on language policy, see Sebők 2015, 196–212; on language ideology, see Lanstyák 2017, 9–37; on linguistic landscape, see Satinská 2014, 157–167; on attitudes influencing the choice between languages, see Lanstyák/Simon 2011, 355–368 and Tušková 2016.

code-switching and the scope for variability in the Hungarian-Slovak linguistic relation.<sup>6</sup>

The most important, evergreen question of Hungarian sociolinguistics in South Slovakia is in which stage we find the language shift<sup>7</sup> of the speakers on the way from Hungarian to Slovak,<sup>8</sup> because bilingualism does not mean equally distributed use of both languages.<sup>9</sup>

The hypothesis is that speakers who use Slovak as a dominant language due to social factors of language usage (school, the administrative situation, family, work, etc.) find translation easier and less strange than those with Hungarian dominance, because they have a stronger Slovak in their language repertoire.

The aim of this paper is to present a part of the research outputs of the project *Sociolinguistics in Slovak-Hungarian relation*<sup>10</sup> focusing on the control of traditional sociolinguistic variables (place and method of language acquisition, language usage in several situations) with cognitive methods.<sup>11</sup> We present the correlation of social factors of language usage with the strangeness of Slovak and Hungarian language units as words or syntactic constructions.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> On adaptation of loanwords, see Lanstyák 2013, 3–26.; on interference, see György 2017, 60–96; on code-switching, see Szabó Mihályová/Lanstyák 2008, 91–102 and Huťková/György 2017, 211–223; on variability see Lőrincz 2016.

<sup>7</sup> On language shift of the minority communities in Hungary, see Borbély, 2011; Uhrinová 2008, 71–88.

<sup>8</sup> Persinszky 2011, 229–241; Lanstyák 2011, 253–267.

<sup>9</sup> Borbély 2015, 155–179 and 2016, 63–73.

<sup>10</sup> KEGA 001UJS-4/2018.

<sup>11</sup> On interrelation of bilingualism and cognition, see Paradis 2003, 186–187 and Albertazzi 2007, 63–97.

<sup>12</sup> The term *cudzost'* used by Dolník 2015 and Dobřík 2018 is translated here as *strangeness*.

## 2. The field work

In 2018, a representative amount of 350 questionnaires<sup>13</sup> were filled out in South Slovakia's bilingual area in small or midsized towns and villages (not in the Hungarian communities of Bratislava or Košice, because these cities represent a strong Slovak-dominant type of language situation). 62 of the questionnaires were identified as not usable, because they were not filled out completely or the respondent obviously misunderstood the question. 288 questionnaires were selected for evaluation. The age of the respondents was significant only from one aspect: adult age was preferred, because it was not the aim of the survey to research the school type of bilingualism or the efficiency of Slovak education in schools with Hungarian as a teaching language in Slovakia. The other reason is that this age group has already been confronted with more language situations, such as several levels of education, workplace, and official or administrative situations. The first part of the questionnaires contained direct questions about the sociological background of the language usage of the respondents of three aspects: 1.1. the locality of residence, 1.2. where he/she learned Slovak (family / school / work /other), and 1.3. which is the dominant language in certain situations (family / work and school / friends / official situations).

The most interesting data acquisition was in part two, where the task of the respondents was the translation<sup>14</sup> of Hungarian expressions into Slovak. The linguistic example material was drawn from two Hungarian/Slovak comparative monographs on morphosyntax.<sup>15</sup> The 122 units to be translated by the respondents were chosen on the base of symmetry and asymmetry in both languages: there were less and more problematic examples, too, but the questions were randomised, so that the grades of difficulty were not recognisable for the respondents. The examples to be translated were chosen

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<sup>13</sup> For a sample of the questionnaire, see appendix. The author would like to say thank you to Milica and Jadranka Škipina for the help at the quantitative evaluation of the questionnaires.

<sup>14</sup> Following Pederson 2007, 1024–1027 and Drager 2018, 83–84, translation is a useful method when combining cognitive and sociolinguistic aspects.

<sup>15</sup> Misadová 2011, 18–129, and Tóth 2017, 50–241.

from morphosyntactically grammaticalised cognitive domains<sup>16</sup> of the language, e.g., possession, gradation, number marking, negation, reciprocity, case marking, intention of the verb. Translation as a cognitive process<sup>17</sup> was a task stimulated by a paper-based text to be filled out by pen, but not given as “homework”; the field worker always had to be present at the filling-out of the questionnaire, to guarantee avoidance of help from other persons, handbooks or the internet.<sup>18</sup> The originality of the data was ensured in this way.

During translation a self-evaluation of the feeling of strangeness<sup>19</sup> was a parallel task for respondents, where it was possible to choose from one of the following values:

A: same logic in both languages;

B: some thinking needed in translation, different construction of grammar;

C: totally strange for me, I have problems expressing this in the other language.

The subjectivity of these three categories can cause a weakness of the research; respondents are, of course, not linguists or translators and can misunderstand the above scale. However, this level of subjectivity can still be tolerated in sociolinguistic methodology; therefore the questionnaire had a sufficient reliability.

### 3. Data analysis

The short preview of the extralingual factors summarises the place of language acquisition and the present scenes of language usage. The presence of more than two factors of Slovak impact in language acquisition and language usage serves to divide the questionnaires into

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<sup>16</sup> Hegedűs 2010, 201–228, and Tóth 2018, 15–27.

<sup>17</sup> Meant by Hegedűs 2012, 124 as a switching of images of the world according to the different logic of the other language.

<sup>18</sup> The field workers were tutored and instructed by the author.

<sup>19</sup> Šenkár 2008, 83, describes bilingualism as a basis for cognitive transfer: “A person using more than one language in everyday contact, is somewhat different from those using only the mother tongue. ... The language usage of bilinguals, their norms and conventions differ from those who live in a monolingual milieu.”

groups: SD: Slovak-dominant bilinguals, S-H where Slovak and Hungarian are used in balance and HD: Hungarian-dominant bilinguals. The italicised numbers show where Slovak dominance is represented only by one factor – this means a balanced ratio between Slovak and Hungarian, especially in the case where the place of Slovak language acquisition is the school and the scene of the usage of Slovak is only the official, administrative sphere (these numbers are crossed out); however, when the respondent learnt Slovak in the family, it means Slovak dominance. Bold numbers show a significantly high number of answers.

SK → learnt ↓ used	FA- mily	Sch- ool	Work	X other	FA+S	FA+W	FA+X	S+W	S+X	X+W	3/3+	Σ
Family	2											2
School+Work	1			<del>1</del>				1				3
FRiends												
Official situ.	8	<del>27</del>	<del>2</del>	<del>7</del>	12	1	3	1	2	5	1	69
FA+SW												
FA+FR	1											1
FA+OF	8	1		2			1					12
SW+FR	1						1				1	3
SW+OF	12	<b>23</b>	9	1	4	1	1	14	3	2		<b>70</b>
FR+OF	5	2		1	1				1			10
3 / 3+	8	5		1	7	1		6	1			<b>29</b>
Σ	<b>46</b>	<b>57</b>	11	13	<b>24</b>	3	5	<b>22</b>	7	7	2	

Table 1. Slovak as dominant language in the correlation of language usage and places of acquisition

Due to the above correlation, in the case of 37 respondents (12.8 %) we are confronted with a balanced type of bilingualism (S-H), within which the type acquiring Slovak in school and using it in official situations<sup>20</sup> is particularly. These numbers were crossed out and not counted in the 162 respondents (56.2 %) who can be considered as clearly Slovak-dominant (SD). The rest, 89 (31 %) Hungarian-dominant (HD) bilinguals, are not in the table because in their questionnaires we found no factors of any Slovak dominance. The bold numbers show that family, school, official spheres and work were the most important places where respondents came into contact with Slovak, while friends and other factors are marginal. The

<sup>20</sup> About the limited possibilities of Hungarian language usage in the administrative sphere in Slovakia, see Misad 2017, 33–52 and 2018, 35–50.

combination of more than 3 factors is also rare. Most respondents learned Slovak at school or in the family; a combination with work is secondary. In the usage of Slovak official situations are dominant, often combined with the workplace. Generally we can conclude that Slovak is not dominant in the family or friend sphere of usage, even if it was learnt already in the family. This is a big difference between the above sample and the conclusions about the bilingualism of the Slovak minority in Hungary, in whose case the language of the majority is used in the familial sphere, while the minority language is used mostly at schools and cultural or religious events.<sup>21</sup> Of course one of the reasons for these differences is that this survey was not focused on the diasporal enclaves of Hungarians in Slovakia, e.g., the Nitra region or the above-mentioned big cities.

The data exhibited a territorial differentiation, too, so that the percentage of HD / SD speakers can be presented in the following regions of Slovakia with Hungarian communities:

DS = Dunajská Streda / Dunaszerdahely;

KN = Komárno, Štúrovo / Komárom, Párkány;

GA = Galanta, Šaľa, Nové Zámky / Mátyusföld, Vágmente;

LV = Levice, Poiplie / Léva, Ipolymente;

NO = Novohrad / Nógrád;

GM = Gemer / Gömör;

AB = Abov, Turňa / Abaúj-Torna;

ZP = Zemplín / Zemplén.

	DS	KN	GA	LV	NO	GM	AB	ZP
SD	45,1%	47%	<b>87,5%</b>	<b>72,7%</b>	46,1%	31%	<b>62%</b>	<b>70%</b>
S-H	5,8%	11,8%	6,25%	9%	23%	22,4%	19%	10%
HD	49%	41%	6,25%	18%	30,7%	46,5%	19%	20%

Table 2. The dominant language of bilingual speakers in relation to regional distribution

The regional distribution of Slovak as the dominant language of bilinguals shows that Slovak has greater influence in the Galanta and

<sup>21</sup> Tóth 2008, 224–263; Szabó 2008, 150–170; Uhrinová 2011, 47–93; Tušková 2015, 168–173; Uhrinová 2018, 294–311.



Levice regions and in East Slovakia (bold numbers). In the Galanta and Abov regions we can suspect the influence of the cities with a Slovak majority which were excluded from the research but remain influential as centres of administration and the economy (Galanta – Bratislava and Trnava, Abov – Košice). The case of the Levice and Zemplín regions is special due to greater mixing of Slovak and Hungarian inhabitants. The above four regions are more affected by assimilation and language shift (Hungarian to Slovak) is in a more advanced phase than in those regions with compact Hungarian communities (DS, KN, NO, GM).

The most important part of this research is the control of the sociolinguistic data with the help of a cognitive process, the translation. Changing lexical and grammatical units to those of another language make the respondents feel the strangeness of the structures.<sup>22</sup> The hypothesis was that the self-confidence of the translation confirms the assignment to HD/SD categories based on the data in table 1 so that more A responses should be found in SD-category questionnaires and more C answers in HD-category questionnaires. Table 3 presents the results:

	A: same logic in both languages	B: somewhat different construction	C: totally strange, I can't translate	Number of C answers between 0–1
SD 162	65%	25%	10%	27%
S-H 37	50,8%	38,9%	10,3%	16%
HD 89	51,8%	30,56%	17,63%	16,8%

Table 3. Degree of strangeness in translation in relation to the dominant language

The only significant result is in the group of the Slovak-dominant speakers: they find Slovak and Hungarian structures of language similar when translating (65.1 %). The amount of zero to one C answers is the highest in this group, signalling a self-confident language usage. The groups S-H and HD have converging numbers, so from the view of further research studies they can be connected into one group.

<sup>22</sup> Hegedűs 2012, 219, refers to the feeling of strangeness during learning a second language.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The survey had two main dimensions: the conventional sociolinguistic one, and as a control, the cognitive side. Due to sociolinguistic factors, bilingual speakers of Hungarian and Slovak in Slovakia can be divided into three groups: the smallest one contains those whose bilingualism is balanced, while the other two have a significant dominant language. These aspects were related to a geographic distribution featuring assimilation areas exhibiting greater progress of language shift among the Hungarian minority.

Checking the results another way, with self-evaluation of translation tasks, showed that the differences between bilingual speakers are not extreme. 50–65 % of the respondents are confident translators. 25–38 % of them find Slovak lexical and morphological structures strange when confronted with Hungarian through translation and the percentage of unconfident second-language usage is between 10 and 17.6 %. Bilinguals who have only one source of Slovak language acquisition (e.g., school) and one scene of language usage (e.g., official situations or work) have the same results as totally Hungarian-dominant speakers.

The paper showed how a cognitive method can complete traditional sociolinguistic survey methods. Prospectively, the next step of the research will be the evaluation of variability of the translated units by coding and the presentation of their correlation with the self-evaluation of the strangeness.

## 5. Appendix

A sample of the first side of the questionnaire used in the field work.  
Group of Hungarian dominant bilingual speakers.

Anonim kérdőív a világ nyelvi képe a szlovák és a magyar nyelvben c. projekthez

Cél: a szlovák és a magyar nyelv néhány szerkezetének logikai eltéréseit vizsgálni.  
Köszönöm együttműködését!

1.1. Település és járás ahol leggyakrabban tartózkodik: Repasovňa

1.2. Hol tanult meg valójában szlovákul? Karikázza be a legjellemzőbb 1 vagy 2 választ!  
A: már a családban, B: iskolai órákon, C: munkahelyen, D: egyéb helyen:

1.3. Értékelje az alábbi betűkkel két nyelvűségét különféle nyelvi szituációkban:  
A: inkább szlovák dominancia B: kiegyensúlyozott C: inkább magyar dominancia  
Családban: C Munkahelyen/isk.: C Baráti közösségben: C Hivatalos szituációban: A

2. Adja meg az alábbi magyar szószerkezetek szlovák megfelelőjét és értékelje 1 betűjellel, mennyire váltja ki az idegenség érzését Önből:  
A: megegyezik a magyar nyelv logikájával, a szlovák és a magyar egy kaptafára megy  
B: kissé el kell gondolkodnom, mert a magyartól eltérő a szerkezet  
C: teljesen idegenül hangzik, koncentrálnom kell rá, furcsa érzés, hogy így van szlovákul, gondot okoz, hogy megjegyezzem, gyakran hibázok

A/B/C öt szív. <u>pät srdc</u>	A/B/C két gereblye. <u>du brobk</u>
A/B/C házaimban... <u>v mojich domov</u>	A/B/C féllábú. <u>p-lachy</u>
A/B/C házak... <u>domy</u>	A/B/C Nem találom a szemüvegem...
A/B/C jó – jobb. <u>dobrý - lepš'</u>	A/B/C szép versek. <u>pekné básne</u>
A/B/C ember – emberek. <u>človek - ľudia</u>	A/B/C Kassa metropolisz... <u>metropola Kassa</u>
A/B/C bátyám háza. <u>bratov dom</u>	A/B/C A szemtanúk eltűntek... <u>Svedkovia emista</u>
A/B/C lila kabát. <u>fialový kabát</u>	A/B/C Júlia párttag... <u>Júlia je členkou strany</u>
A/B/C szuper akció. <u>super akcia</u>	A/B/C Katinka sikeres sportoló.
A/B/C kenyéret süítő pék.	A/B/C a ház ablaka. <u>okno domu</u>
A/B/C nevetni jó. <u>smiať sa je dobré</u>	A/B/C a ház magas. <u>dom je vysoký</u>
A/B/C csodálkozni szabad. <u>je možné radosť</u>	A/B/C férfivé válik... <u>stane sa mužom</u>
A/B/C szájkosár nélkül. <u>bez nádobky</u>	A/B/C szlovákul tanul... <u>učím sa po slovensky</u>
A/B/C főtér. <u>hlavná námestie</u>	A/B/C hajóként szolgál. <u>služba ako loď</u>
A/B/C apai szeretet. <u>otcovská láska</u>	A/B/C Jutalmul kap 50 eurót.
A/B/C két fiú. <u>dvaja chlapci</u>	A/B/C Nyaranta hétszer fürdünk tóban.
A/B/C írhatnának. <u>mohli by sa písat</u>	A/B/C annyival utazik. <u>cestuje s autkom</u>
A/B/C sok – több. <u>veľa - viac</u>	A/B/C gyertyával világít. <u>svetí sa sviečkou</u>
A/B/C Az ég kék. <u>nebo je modré</u>	A/B/C busszal utazik. <u>cestuje autobusom</u>
A/B/C A kék jól áll neked. <u>Modrá ti sedí</u>	A/B/C autót javít. <u>opravuje auto</u>
A/B/C Ne főztek valamit? <u>Ne vaříte nic?</u>	A/B/C háza van... <u>ma dom</u>
A/B/C Ne lidd meg a kávéml! <u>Ne pít kávu!</u>	A/B/C Megivott egy pohár bort... <u>Popíjal som pohár vína</u>
A/B/C nem ismerem... <u>neznám</u>	A/B/C Az asztalra vagy a földre tegyem? <u>Na stôl alebo na podlažu?</u>
A/B/C Senki sem tud semmit. <u>Nikto nevie nič</u>	A/B/C Jövőre hova járunk ebédelni?... <u>na obed?</u>
A/B/C Nincsenek otthon. <u>Nie sú doma</u>	A/B/C mértéktelenül inni... <u>Piť bez obmedzenia</u>
A/B/C Péter olvas és tanul. <u>Peter číta a učí sa</u>	A/B/C A kutya az asztal alá búj... <u>pes sa ukrýva pod stôl</u>
A/B/C Péter és Anna tanul. <u>Peter a Anna sa učia</u>	A/B/C A törököző a mosógép mögé esett... <u>čakal spadol za pračku</u>
A/B/C Péter olvas meg Anna tanul. <u>Peter číta a Anna sa učí</u>	A/B/C Egy nap alatt megjavították a motort...
A/B/C Közleleg a nyári szünet... <u>často sa kúpeľ</u>	

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