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HUNGARIAN  
STUDIES

*Ignác Romsics: Hungarian Society and Social Conflicts before and after Trianon*

*Maren Hobein: Das Fotogramm – Moholy-Nagys Schlüssel zur Fotografie*

*Mihály Szegedy-Maszák: Kosztolányi et la tradition stoïque*

# HUNGARIAN STUDIES

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VOLUME 13, 1998/99

CONTENTS

NUMBER 1

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<i>Gábor Tolcsvai Nagy</i> : From the Ideal of Unity to the Practice of Heterogeneity: Modernization Processes in the Hungarian Language Community .....	1
<i>Csaba Fazekas</i> : The Dawn of Political Catholicism in Hungary, 1844–1848 .....	13
<i>László Kósa</i> : Adlige Mentalität – bürgerliche Mentalität (Alltagsleben in Ungarn, 19. Jh.) .....	27
<i>George Bisztray</i> : Nineteenth-Century Hungarian Pioneers of Higher Education .....	37
<i>Ignác Romsics</i> : Hungarian Society and Social Conflicts before and after Trianon .....	47
<i>János Szávai</i> : Jonas selon Babits ou la trahison des clercs .....	59
<i>Éva Martonyi</i> : Denis de Rougemont et la Hongrie .....	67
<i>Mihály Szegedy-Maszák</i> : Kosztolányi et la tradition stoïque .....	77
<i>Maren Hobein</i> : Das Fotogramm – Moholy-Nagys Schlüssel zur Fotografie .....	83
<i>Tibor Zs. Lukács</i> : <i>The Hungarian Quarterly</i> 1936–1941. Hungarian Propaganda for Great Britain before the Second World War .....	95
<i>Miklós Lojkó</i> : The Failed Handshake on the Danube: the Story of Anglo-American Plans for the Liberation of Central Europe at the End of the Second World War ..	119
<i>Éva Figder</i> : British Political Attitudes towards Hungary through the Workings of the British Component of the Allied Control Commission, 1945–1947 .....	129
<i>Tibor Valuch</i> : Toward the Middle Class – with Detours? (Social Changes in Hungary 1945–1995) .....	139

# FROM THE IDEAL OF UNITY TO THE PRACTICE OF HETEROGENEITY: MODERNIZATION PROCESSES IN THE HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE COMMUNITY

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In recent years the history of language has meant the history of sounds, words and rules. We know that tremendous efforts, such as the concept of *Lautverschiebung*, have been made to interpret language as the history of regular changes. Meanwhile the grammar of language has meant the representation of language in timeless models of structures, *langue* or universal grammars. Both types create special scientific frames, or I could say narratives intentionally independent of individual speakers and communities. This independence was meant to be the basis of the objectivistic standpoint necessary to describe language *an sich*. But in this long process language has been deprived of something essential, of speaking and understanding man and community. Beginning in the 1970s and with growing influence, the necessary balance has started to be restored in the works of sociolinguistics (Labov 1972, Hymes 1974, Romaine 1982), functional linguistics (Halliday 1985, Givón 1984), and in the cognitive approaches (e.g. Schwarz 1992). This change has made clear the distinction between grammatics and linguistics as formulated by Ralph Fasold (Fasold 1992).

The information system, which is the basis of this latter view, not in a mechanistic manner but rather in a communication system where representation and cognitive processes of text creating and text understanding are the central factors always within a setting and a situation, makes evident the fact that language can be interpreted as a functional entity in an ecosystem (Strohner 1990). This theoretical trend, which has its origin in the views of Humboldt, Peirce and Eco, was elaborated by Halliday and Givón in grammar, by Hymes, Labov and others in the concepts of language variety and variable, speech community, domain, network, and by cognitive scientists (McClelland-Rumelhart [editors], 1986, Strohner 1995, Taylor 1995) particularly in the ideas of representation and connectionism.

In this respect the self-referential and the self-reflexive nature of language and semiosis in general is uncovered, however not entirely as in the frame of

autopoetics elaborated by Valera and Maturana. Thus, the delicate balance between the community and the individual, between convention and creation, or self-creation, can be experienced.

The ideas mentioned here have their historical character and significance as well. These primarily descriptive theories have dynamic aspects making it possible to see language as a historical phenomenon connected to setting, situation, general interaction, and consequently to community. When investigating the relation between the Hungarian language and language community on the one hand, and social, economic and cultural modernization on the other hand, we have to take these ideas into consideration.

In the present frame by modernization I mean the metamorphosis slowly advancing from the middle of the eighteenth century in which feudal features in the economy, society and culture were changed into new ones. In this process of integration every man and woman as members of the people were declared to be free from all kinds of authority, to form a national society, to have a political state on a given territory with economic and cultural traditions (Szűcs 1974: 205). Here, in connection with language I would like to concentrate mainly on social mobility, social contacts, literacy, *Bildung*, publicity of everyday life. Language community means the community of those people who speak one and the same language. (I do not want to discuss the questions concerning the marginal cases of such a simple definition, since these problems do not influence the theme presented here.) In the case of a concept with historical character the history of the concept itself gives the interpretative definition.

Perhaps one of the main features of the history of Hungary's civilization (*Kulturgeschichte*) is that language did not become a simple means of communication in most of the influential interpretations during the last thirty years of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century. The era of the Reformation was the first crucial period when Hungarian as a language was considered to be a substantial part of culture; and knowledge, both secular and religious, and identity, as well as this early interpretation of vernacular language were linked with the beginnings of a kind of modernization (cf. Bárczi 1963). Nevertheless, another 250 years passed before language, the Hungarian language, was again approached as something substantial (cf. Benkő 1960).

This attention to the Hungarian language had two sources in the second half of the eighteenth century. The first was political: among middle and lesser nobility the demand was growing to declare Hungarian as the official language of Hungary. At that time the official language was Latin, which was still spoken by many people, had lingered as a relic of late medieval traditions, and stood as a symbol of the independence of Hungarian nobility. For nearly one hundred years this demand to make Hungarian the official language of the kingdom was repeatedly rejected by the court in Vienna. Finally in 1844 after numerous stormy debates and controversies at the diet Hungarian was declared to be the

official language. This act in itself had an important effect on the Hungarian language community, society, culture, and of course on the Hungarian language itself. Law and jurisdiction, public administration, secondary and higher education, science and other domains were converted from a classical, not vernacular, privileged sphere into an everyday, vernacular and democratic sphere. Certainly this change was not completed in the legal act itself but came about gradually during the decades that both preceded and followed 1844. Nevertheless, the act had its significance, since the official language came to be used as a part of public symbolism.

Central to this process appears to be its inner structure, which reveals several no uncertain paradoxes. Latin was an inalienable part of the traditional constitution and the sociocultural system of Hungary. Nevertheless, Latin came into conflict with the national awakening, which arose within the same social strata and cultural circles that had themselves cultivated the use of Latin. At the same time, the Austrian Empire had maintained Latin as the official language in Hungary, albeit German might have fit its goals much better. Joseph II had wanted to germanize the empire in the 1780s, but he failed. Thus, the situation in Hungary departed from the typical pattern where a political and linguistic minority fought against the majority and against the official language of the majority. Instead, the Latin–Hungarian conflict depended partly on a third, external group: the Germans in Vienna.

The other main source of the attention to the Hungarian vernacular was the process of standardizing the Hungarian language, which began in the 1770s. The claim to establish a standard version of Hungarian originated partly from the political background. It had to be demonstrated that Hungarian was good enough to be an official language, that it had all the features necessary to satisfy the different demands, especially the multifunctionality required of an official language (cf. Milroy and Milroy 1985, Garvin 1993). After 1790 this complex process embodied two main trends. The first trend included writing. Between 1790 and 1846 more grammars of Hungarian were written than in the previous one to two hundred years. The grammars had a double aim. First, they sought to describe Hungarian to the extent that it was possible; and this included the formation of modern linguistic methodology and terminology. Second, the grammars described Hungarian in ideal terms and provided the norms, as well as the correct patterns, to be used. Seeking to find the proper basis for evaluation the authors of these grammars united description and prescription, *ist* and *soll*, in the same sphere. But the theoretical limits that completed this unification were different. Sámuel Gyarmathi held that there were only slight differences among Hungarian dialects; and thus with only a few modifications the desired unity could easily be achieved. The authors of the *Debreceni Grammatika* asserted that the pure grammar of the people, the vernacular, constituted the only valuable pattern. Elaborating a very abstract ideal, they specifically favored those

varieties that had not had any contact with foreign languages or with the varieties of Hungarian that had been influenced by foreign patterns. Ferenc Verseghy also relied on the vernacular; but he put custom, or convention, at the center of his explanation. On the other hand, Miklós Révai, perhaps the greatest linguist of the age, sought the orienting patterns in the past, in the historical forms of Hungarian.

Nevertheless, all grammarians tried on sociolinguistic grounds to formulate the basis of their judgments in the language shaping acts of selection, codification, and elaboration (Haugen 1966, Neustupny 1970, Fishman 1974). These grounds were formed by theoretical considerations that referred to a set of national features attributed to the Hungarian people as an ethnic and cultural entity and the Hungarian community as a society, which needed to be educated on a more demanding level.

Ferenc Kazinczy, the chief organizer of the movement to promote the Hungarian vernacular after 1805, came to elaborate the other, the aesthetical, trend. Although he himself contributed to their work, Kazinczy was not content with the efforts of the grammarians at better codification. Instead, he concentrated on the question of different styles and desired to create the new language of literature by following foreign, particularly German and French, patterns. Some of his works, primarily his translations, were rejected; but his views on taste and quality proved to be immensely influential. He concentrated on the language shaping problems of elaboration and differentiation.

This process, which has been briefly outlined, took place in a society not completely ready for the changes. The demand for the development of an official form of Hungarian came from and was well understood by relatively broad segments of the contemporary society and language community; but the need for standardization was recognized only in narrow circles of the middle nobility and *lateiners*. Nevertheless, the changes introduced from the top penetrated the society relatively quickly; and in about fifty years the new standards became well known. Standard Hungarian was codified on the basis of the northeastern dialect, but it was also based on earlier attempts at forming a written standard version, such as the Bible and psalm translations of the Reformation era. The codifiers used phonetic and grammatical forms from other dialects as well and created a balanced standard. Thus standard Hungarian is not a type of artificial language but the result of a partially self-reflexive process, which came to be accelerated during the first decades of the nineteenth century.

The Hungarian language community, or the society of the Hungarian kingdom, was both the object and the subject of the modernization processes beginning at this time. This community was certainly heterogeneous. The basic varieties were local dialects that formed dialect types. The dialects were the emblems of local identity; and they formed a coordinated system. But no variety achieved superior prestige, since public opinion was also being formed during that same

period. In everyday practice language appeared to be a completely natural phenomenon. Nevertheless, reflections had been made earlier, and the basic standard omitted the most prominent dialectal features in pronunciation, spelling, and especially written language. The most important characteristics were very closely related to the sociological structure of Hungarian society in which the vast majority of people worked in agriculture and maintained a rural culture. The system of settlement reinforced these features as well. The village was the typical settlement and the basic sociological, economical and cultural unit of dialect. Thus, the number of domains (typical situations of verbal interactions) were relatively low; the networks (the communication systems) of native speakers were transparent; a closed system of styles (formal and informal) was used; and since family and work were not separated, everyday activities formed one continuum. Mobility and migration were at a low level, and urbanization had just begun. However, the efforts at standardization were not clearly urban acts either. The intellectual and spiritual center of all these processes involving the development of the Hungarian language was in Széplakom, a small village near Sátorlajújhely in northeastern Hungary, where Kazinczy organized the work through his correspondence during the two decades that followed 1805.

At this time standardization in the cultural sense spread from the top to the bottom and slowly put language at the center of political and cultural thought. But since the formal political decision remained blocked, it became a cultural movement to implement the standard variety of the Hungarian language particularly in law, public administration, commerce, science, and literature, and to raise the cultural *niveau* of the population. Due the demands of political life the ideal of "unity in unity" explicated in the works of the grammar writers became more influential. It emphasized the community as a whole, as a nation, as an ethnic entity with a homogeneous language, and not the ideal of Kazinczy, which was "diversity in unity" within a heterogeneous language and concentrated on the individual and his relation to the community. Thus, rationalist views, combined with the romantic awakening of historicity, became the basis of recognizing language as a force that formed community, and the orienting patterns were relatively closed to individual initiatives. Correct (i.e. standardized) language was becoming the indicator of being highly intellectual and of loyalty to the community, to the nation. Standard (reformed) Hungarian was becoming the prestigious variety primarily in formal situations, or domains, but later in informal ones, too. It was one way to start a modernization process in which members of the nobility or other social groups were able to become the members of the educated middle classes (*Bildungsbürgertum*) that were still to be created.

As far as we know the debates on the standard forms and the spread of the codified language were engaged mostly in written forms: in correspondence, periodicals, books, and later newspapers, as well as at the Hungarian theater in



Pest. Only later did they take a conversational form. The spoken mode demanded a new, public, urban way of life. Beginning with the 1820s this development came to be concentrated particularly at Pest and Pozsony, as well as some other towns such as Kassa. The cultural and free enterprise standardization changed into an academic one during the 1830s. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences was founded in order to maintain and cultivate the Hungarian language; and during the 1830s, the first decade of its history, the academy produced the most important handbooks, including a German–Hungarian dictionary employing the reformed lexicon, an orthography, and a descriptive grammar demonstrating the new standard Hungarian, in order to turn its ideals into practice. In short, from that time on there was a “single unquestioned source of authority, which was generally recognized and obeyed” by educated people (Garvin 1993), whose numbers steadily increased along with the expansion of education and literacy.

The appearance of a standard language created a new inner structure and introduced hierarchy into the Hungarian language community. As we have seen, dialect had been a natural phenomenon without much reflection. Standard language on the other hand has generally different features. It emerges as an entity with a minimal variety of form and with a maximal variety of function (Milroy and Milroy 1985). Garvin (1993) enumerates five main functions of a standard language. First, it has unifying function to serve as an integrating bond in spite of dialectal and other differences. Second, it exercises a separatist function to differentiate it from other language communities. Third, it enjoys a prestige function conferring a certain authority on a speech community that possesses the standard language and on the individuals who master it. Fourth, it provides a participatory function to allow a language community to use its own language in order to take part in the cultural, scientific, and other developments of the modern world. Fifth, it establishes a frame of reference function to clarify matters of language correctness.

After the great debates on correctness during the first two decades of the nineteenth century a growing illusion spread among Hungarian intellectuals, later among the members of the middle classes, and finally among other social strata that the standard variety could be, or already was, fully developed in grammars, dictionaries and the rules of orthography. In folk linguistic judgments even today this remains one of the most common opinions.

As a result of this change a clear, cultural and ethical institution established the foundation for all of the previously mentioned functions of the standard language. The whole system had a double structure. On the one hand, since no inherited privileges played a role in the hierarchy, it constituted a step toward modernization. On the other hand, the accessibility of education and culture (*Bildung*) of course remained limited. Albeit only in restricted form, these fea-

tures promoted social mobility and migration and helped to transform the closed communication system of settlements into more open ones.

Thus the hierarchy among the varieties included a standard language with high prestige, codified forms, and literature. The other varieties were characterized by lower prestige, uncodified forms and largely restricted to the oral medium. As we know from sociolinguistic investigations, which were first performed by Ferguson (1959) through the concept of *diglossia*, this hierarchy has several particular features. According to Haugen (1966) and Wardhaugh (1986: 33) the norm of the standard "is likely to be – or to become – an idealized norm, one that users of the language are asked to aspire to rather than one that actually accords with their observed behavior".

Since the standard language is usually used by the elite, Milroy (1985) as well as others have noted what Wardhaugh (1986: 34) described in the following manner, "the chosen norm inevitably becomes associated with 'power' and the rejected alternatives with the lack of 'power'". Also significant for the history of the Hungarian language and its language community was the circumstance that this elite was initially a cultural elite. During the 1830s the elite expanded to include parts of the political leadership. The economic elite on the other hand only came to be included about fifty years later. No less significant was the situation that this hierarchy was maintained by an attitude of solidarity and loyalty. Furthermore, it was also associated with a general ideal of teleological development in which the uneducated people could be improved without serious conflict through education and culture (*Bildung*). However, we ought to be aware that in the case of the Hungarian language this hierarchy did not develop into a clear system of *diglossia* in the same sense as Ferguson had outlined.

The political struggles before 1848 and the revolution of that year demonstrated the vast importance of these transformation processes and also made them more explicit and rapid, or more reflexive. However, the Austrian oppression after 1849 interrupted the developments and brought their first phase to an end. The modernization of the Hungarian language was suspended by a dictatorial political system, which employed German as its official language. On the whole language and its respective language community usually do not immediately follow political changes. Consequently the extensions of standard Hungarian throughout the entire society continued at a slower pace.

The next period began with the Compromise (*der Ausgleich*) of 1867 between the Austrian emperor and the Hungarian opposition. During this phase we can observe the acceleration of the modernization in the economy, politics, public administration, and culture. This constituted a period of extended social mobility, migration and urbanization. Although it still retained some significance, the local dialect was no longer basic. Other domains, larger networks in everyday speech, had sprung into existence. With the growing opportunity, indeed

necessity, to travel and study the communication system of the villages became more open. Education, newspapers, literature, theater, and everyday conversation in different domains all played a decisive role. Among the most important changes one can enumerate the emergence of new urban dialects, which totally reorganized the value system of the Hungarian language community. In terms of prestige they were situated, and remain even today, somewhere between the standard language and local dialects. The other change deserving of attention concerned the further elaboration of colloquial standard Hungarian, which was spoken typically in towns, particularly in Budapest, by the middle class. In this was the standard written language continued to extend from the top of the society to the bottom and received a certain amount of feedback.

The middle classes played a significant role in maintaining this new hierarchy, but the hierarchy was no longer embedded in an implicit as well as explicit political teleology, which aimed at national independence. Rather it came to be directed at achieving a state where a language community used its own language in order "to participate in the cultural, scientific, and other developments of the modern world". And although the standard language enjoyed very high prestige, there seemed to be a basic contradiction between the ideas of the earlier grammar writers. Unity in unity might have been achieved according to those of the cultural elite who dealt with language, but it could only be accomplished through diversity in unity. After a short period of extensive German interference the purity of the Hungarian language again became a central question during the 1870s, 1880s and 1890s. According to the views of the positivist linguists, purity could be found best in local dialects free from foreign influence. But these local dialects were not the same as the standard variety. Based on correctness, the positivist theory of rule, Zsigmond Simonyi, the most outstanding linguist of the age, attempted to resolve the dilemma through a theoretical unification of dialects (*Folksprache*) and the standard language (*Literatursprache*). But his efforts proved to be insufficient. At the beginning of World War I, the Hungarian language community still remained a very complicated structure with many varieties, many public and private domains, complex networks, as well as different but interconnected rural and urban styles.

This modernization process was once again interrupted by the peace settlements and the two revolutions following World War I. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy was dismembered, and Hungary lost seventy-five percent of its territory and sixty-six percent of its population. In respect to the Hungarian language community the most serious consequence was that more than thirty percent of native Hungarian speakers were forced to live as minorities in newly created states. Nevertheless they lived homogeneously in continuous Hungarian ethnic territories. The value system developed during the previous decades came to be replaced by the simple value of speaking Hungarian and maintaining Hungarian in an overtly hostile political environment. The structure of the Hungarian lan-

guage community changed in several ways. First, new defence strategies were developed to suit the new circumstances. Second, the hierarchy of prestige became more rigid, particularly in academic circles and in education. By the time the chaotic situation concerning the Hungarian language community was eased to some extent, and the value system created at the turn of the century was restored, the great depression struck and hindered further modernization.

The efforts at modernization had haltingly begun again during the 1930s but after World War II were interrupted once again in 1949. After the communist takeover the bolshevik ideology tried to homogenize Hungarian society in many ways. In respect to the Hungarian language community this attempt was motivated by the desire to extinguish all social strata along with the differences in property and education. The homogenization included the teaching of standard Hungarian to everybody, either through the school system or through the centrally directed adult education program. Furthermore, between 1949 and 1989 publishing houses operated only in Budapest, the capital. On the other hand, the language varieties of the middle classes and upper middle classes were condemned and stigmatized as bourgeois jargon. Interestingly, Hungarian academic linguistics assisted in this process by sanctioning the general belief in the extinction of local dialects and advocating the overall teleology of language development as a chain of changes approaching the perfect state of language, which would be available to every member of the language community. Language varieties different from the average standard were condemned in everyday interactions as well as in literature. Again unity in unity was propagated; and language was thought to be grammar. The primitively planned and rudely executed ideological transformation led in the cultural sense to the relative rise of the lowest social layers, but also to the lowering of upper classes. As is well known, this kind of modernization generally failed.

Nevertheless, the worst impact on the Hungarian language community was not this process in itself, which gradually turned slowly into its own opposite from the mid-sixties till the mid-eighties, but the fact that this ideologically based artificial transformation was limited to Hungarian speakers within Hungary's border. The Hungarian minorities, consisting of at least three million people living in neighboring countries, came to be "forgotten" and were deliberately not taken into consideration. According to bolshevik ideology, "socialism automatically solves the problem of minorities". In view of the language policy struggles of the last ten years, we now know that this is not the case. Even today Hungarian minorities have to fight for minimal language rights. Beginning with 1949 the Hungarian language community was physically divided by the borders of Hungary and its neighbours and also by the borders of the neighbouring countries with each other, as well as by the iron curtain. Villages were cut in half, and families separated. While in Hungary varieties of the language and styles were artificially decreased, at least in the public domains, in the neigh-

bouring countries Hungarian was forced completely back into the private sphere. In Czechoslovakia the use of the Hungarian language was banned in public places between 1945–1948. The same development could be observed in Rumania later (cf. Lanstyák 1991, Kiss 1995). These circumstances were slowly relaxed but have not been entirely eliminated even today.

Nevertheless, the Hungarian language community has survived. After 1990 it reorganized itself and has begun once again elaborating its inner structure and values. In this new period of modernization, the basic principle has once again become one of diversity in unity. When the process of self-creation and convention will possibly acquire a new balance without further interruption.

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