DE GRUYTER OPEN

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **8**, 2 (2016) 35–47

DOI: 10.1515/ausp-2016-0016

Regionality – Language – Internet

Mária PÁSZTOR-KICSI
University of Novi Sad (Serbia)
Department of Hungarian Studies
manyi@ff.uns.ac.rs

Abstract. The Internet has a strong influence on our daily communication and language use. Its continuous growing makes us face the world characterized by networks of connections that span multi-continental distances. The metaphor of global village seems to be not merely a futuristic theory, but pure reality. People can communicate worldwide with each other, reach all kinds of information to get up-to-date, as long as they respect the basic demand of globalization, which means the use of a common language (i.e. English). But this tendency hides a serious issue if we try to observe globalization from the aspect of local and regional cultures and languages, especially those in minority position. The study deals with the language use of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, with special focus on Netspeak and the regional features of language forms used on the Internet. It also analyses the attitudes of a group of students towards the influence of the Internet on speech and language. This part of the survey is based on questionnaires.

Keywords: regionality, minority, globalization, Internet, Netspeak

1. Internet – communication – language use

In the last two or three decades, IT and communication technologies have been developing with great speed, and due to this fact communication between people has changed a lot. IT systems and global networks of communication that keep pace with more and more complex models – the Internet, especially the web and web 2.0 as well as their development – resulted in people's ability to communicate various contents worldwide without any IT or programming skills (with a mere user's competence).

According to Zoltán Bódi, "at the beginning of the World Wide Web, one could see only the connection of documents, today, the connection of users is also present. This is the era of web 2.0. [...] There are a lot of definitions for the web 2.0 phenomenon, but their common basis is that innovation that web 2.0 has brought into the web creates new, various technologies and opens up for broader

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)

public to create contents for masses without any deeper technological insight. In other words, in the era we are living in and in the environment of communication that surrounds us, texts, linguistic and non-linguistic content are more and more various and changeable. [...] Dialogue within communities becomes even more intensive, so global phenomena become more intense, too" (Bódi 2009: 40).

This is the world of blogs, wikis, YouTube, and social media, where basically anyone can post their textual and/or multimedia contents they want to share with their acquaintances ("friends") or with a broader community of users. It is a global phenomenon, at least in the sense that posted contents may be seen by anyone around the world – if they know the given language. It is global also from the point of view that English language as the main holder of globalization is gaining in power even at the local level and first of all through popular products (music, video clips, games, etc.). It gets into the everyday life of social communities that live outside the Anglo-Saxon language areas, bringing unique contact-phenomena and mixed-language products (mostly Anglicisms). At this point, one has to mention more recent forms of communication, which have been created during active messaging and data transferring on the web (e.g. personal e-mails, newsletters, chats, social media, etc.), which have in common that they are written forms of communication; however, their language is closer to spoken language, so they belong to the written parole (performance).

David Crystal, the world-famous British linguist, calls this form of communication *Netspeak*. This term refers to the unique language use of the new global medium, the so-called '*third medium*' (Crystal 2004: 48), or the *Internet* (or the *Net*). In his book *Language and the Internet* (first published in 2001), Crystal carries out research on how this form of communication affects language, comparing written and face-to-face communication with characteristics of online messaging. He states that the new speech-form contains elements of both written and spoken discourse, while it has some additional characteristics which come from the physical characteristics of the channel, i.e. electronic communication, e.g. the lack of instant feedback (Crystal 2004: 30) or slower rhythm of Internet communication compared to direct human communication (Crystal 2004: 31). In this way, Crystal literally treats utterances of *Netspeak* as speech acts (Crystal 2004: 29), which can be analysed from the point of view of Grice's Conversational Maxims (Grice 1975).

In Hungarian linguistics, Zoltán Bódi calls this form of communication written spoken language,[1] which has been created by mixing spontaneous speech and text, most of the time with the aim to communicate as much information as possible to partners in communication through an electronic channel (Bódi 2004: 35).

1 The phenomenon has also other terms in Hungarian linguistics: e.g. *written dialogue* (Ádám Kis), *secondary literacy or written chatting* (Géza Balázs), *virtual literacy* (Nikoletta Ágnes Érsok), etc.

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)

At the beginning of its use, this form of communication (chat language, informally speaking) was appropriate for quick messaging thanks to English written language (with numerous shortenings, letter words, alphanumeric mosaic words, emoticons, etc.), and it has become widespread in this form all around the world. Its "spelling" is used even in non-English short messaging, so it has become fashionable in the Hungarian language, too. Its uniquely free language use and its way of writing, which ignores traditional writing standards (especially spelling), has created many "enemies" who claim that this is destroying language, making it less Hungarian, and they see this phenomenon as a negative effect of globalization, especially with regard to students who use net spelling more and more, and this becomes visible in their schoolwork, too (l. Veszelszki 2012, Kruzslicz 2013, Simon 2014, and others). However, there are standpoints which emphasize the creativity of net language, and they see it as a means of renewal, refreshing language, by which "the arrival of Netspeak is showing us *homo loquens* at its best" (Crystal 2004: 242). Finally, there are those who do not consider this phenomenon as something that would cause the deterioration of language, as language has its own self-cleaning mechanisms, which continuously eliminate unnecessary, fashionable elements (Pásztor Kicsi 2010: 51).

As opposed to the above mentioned phenomena and the so-called global village, there are real social and language communities, using real (mostly regional) languages, which cannot be left behind by members of these populations when they join activities in the global village while taking up attitudes and behaviour characteristic of virtual space. There are numerous nations who speak "small" languages even in our region, in Central Europe and the Balkans. These nations stick to their language, traditions, and even if they have to follow global tendencies and the dominance of English language in order to reach social-economic prosperity they would not give up their identity even if they experience difficulties as minorities in the given country. This kind of minority are Hungarians in Serbia with their own regional variety of Hungarian language.

2. Vojvodinian Hungarian regional language use and the World Wide Web

Regionality of the Vojvodinian Hungarian language – similarly to regionalities of other varieties of Hungarian outside the mother state – is not merely a regional language variant that has been created by natural integration of dialects that coexist in the given region. On the contrary, it is an isolated variant of Hungarian language, which was created in an environment where Hungarians have been living since they were separated from the mother state and their mother nation.

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)

According to this, characteristics of this language may be defined according to three coordinates, one of which is the general Hungarian linguistic standard, the other two are dialectal influences and language contact with the majority (state) language and other languages in the region (interference) (cf. Kontra 2003: 300).

In earlier studies (Pásztor Kicsi 2011, 2013), I tried to reveal and classify the utterances of Vojvodinian Hungarian regional language characteristics present on the Internet, according to their place of occurrence, position within the language dialect, and linguistic attitudes behind them.

The studies mentioned above showed that webpages in Hungarian language at the *.rs* domain (Serbia) of the World Wide Web are influenced by standard Hungarian language as well as by English, but regional language characteristics are present, too. Individual characteristics vary (get emphasized or grow in number) according to the types of specific webpages, attitudes of the subject who collects and posts various contents to the page. However, it can be stated from this aspect that webpages of settlements and official institutions use first of all standard and regional language with an affirmative and prestige-oriented attitude, even if uploaded documents contain dialects or contact elements characteristic for that settlement, while in public forums and social media attitudes characteristic of the "third medium", playful, ironic, covert prestige attitude may also occur, which – depending on the current social environment – supposes deliberate code-mixing, too (Pásztor Kicsi 2011).

In general, one could state that on social media and public forums communication is not carried out according to traditional rules of communication but according to principles of *Netspeak*. This may result in overruling and relativizing Grice's Maxims, and it is difficult to see through and interpret attitudes hiding behind specific speech acts.

In this analysis, I was mostly looking at how a group of Vojvodinian Hungarian students relate to global language effects that are coming *via* the Internet and what they think about their regional position as Vojvodinian Hungarians. I used questionnaires in order to do this analysis.

3. Motivation and results of the questionnaire

Informants of the questionnaire were undergraduate students of the Department of Hungarian Studies of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad; therefore, it is not a broad sample (60 informants – 13 male and 47 female – who filled in the form). The received results within this realm certainly cannot be considered to be representative for the Hungarian students in Vojvodina in general; nevertheless, they cannot be ignored either partly because of the reasons why some young people in Vojvodina make their decision to study Hungarian language and

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)

literature today, but most of all because of the role they will be able to have in their social environment after completing their studies.

Students of the Department of Hungarian Studies make a specific group of the 18–22-year-old young people who chose this department exactly for its teaching language, Hungarian.[2] One of the reasons for this is that most often students who apply for this department do not speak the state language at an advanced level,[3] and most institutions of higher education have courses exclusively in Serbian. For the same reason, not only those students apply for the Hungarian Department who graduated from grammar school but also those who have other kinds of secondary school certificates (e.g. technical schools), from different parts of Vojvodina, from regions where Hungarians make a majority as well as from the Hungarian diaspora; this way, the sample is noteworthy thanks to the variety of students (stratification and structure).[4]

But much more important is the fact that these students, after finishing their studies, at their future workplace, will belong to the part of human resources where they will be able to positively influence the process of cultivating and developing the Vojvodinian Hungarian identity. This relationship motivates and

2 The Department of Hungarian Studies – in spite of continuing attempts for centralization, cut-backs, and economic restrictions – makes a segment of Serbian higher education, where – except for Serbian and foreign language courses – currently education is organized in Hungarian language exclusively, both at undergraduate and graduate level; moreover, some courses at the PhD school can also be attended in Hungarian. This is important because an autonomous university in Hungarian language could not be established in Serbia so far. As far as higher education is concerned, only the Pedagogical Faculty in Hungarian Language in Subotica offers courses in Hungarian language at an institutional level, except for some faculties within the University of Novi Sad, where some courses are partially organized in Hungarian, e.g. at the Faculty for Architecture in Subotica, Faculty of Economics, Polytechnic High School, the Academy for Art, and High School for Nursery School Teachers.

3 According to their own estimation, only 22% of the informants speak Serbian language at an advanced level and 35% of them claim to be intermediate-level language learners. The rest of the informants have not reached even this level: 38% of them claim to have elementary knowledge of Serbian and 5% of them have chosen the answer "I don't speak Serbian". These results seem to suggest a conclusion that only a fifth part of these students would be able to attend higher education in the state language. Besides, their knowledge of English does not seem to reach the required level either to be able to take an active part in communication or to use information from global sources, e.g. the World Wide Web. (This conclusion is also based upon the answers given by the informants, as only 7% of them claimed to speak English at an advanced level, 42% of them declared themselves as intermediate-level language learners, while 38% of the students who filled in the questionnaire claimed that they were elementary-level learners and 13% of them answered that they did not speak English at all.)

4 For example, 40% of the informants who filled in the questionnaires were from rural areas, 42% from urban surroundings, 15% of them from cities, and 3% of them living in the provincial capital, Novi Sad. However, regarding their surroundings in terms of language, 45% live in settlements where Hungarians make a majority, 30% of them in settlements where Hungarians and Serbs live in a more or less equal number, 8% of them in settlements were Serbs make a majority, and 12% of them in settlements where Serbs make the majority but there are other ethnic groups as well.

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)

justifies this study as it is important to look at how future teachers, journalists, librarians, and organizers of cultural and community life relate to their mother tongue and the foreign language influence that affects it.

In that respect, the closed type questionnaire was looking for the following answers: *1)* what kind of Internet communication do they use the most; *2)* if they consider the linguistic standard of their private e-mails sufficient while communicating *via* the Internet; *3)* if it is important to take care about spelling and style while chatting on the Internet; *4)* if everyday language use is influenced by electronic mailing and the linguistic world of the Internet; *5)* what is their opinion about foreign (mostly English) language dominance on the Internet; *6)* if there are dialectal and/or regional language elements on the Internet; *7)* what do they think may motivate using dialectal or regional elements on the Internet.

3.1. The types of Internet communication

As far as types of Internet communication are concerned (of which more than one could be marked at the same time), as it could be expected, most of them would use social media and chatting to the highest degree. Instead, most of the informants (95%) claimed to use e-mail most frequently, followed by social media (93%) and then chatting (88%). The least of them answered they used blogs (10%) and forums (17%), as well as newsletters (22%). However, only one third (30%) of the informants were sharing content. So, more complex ways of Internet/web communication is used by a smaller percent of the informants.

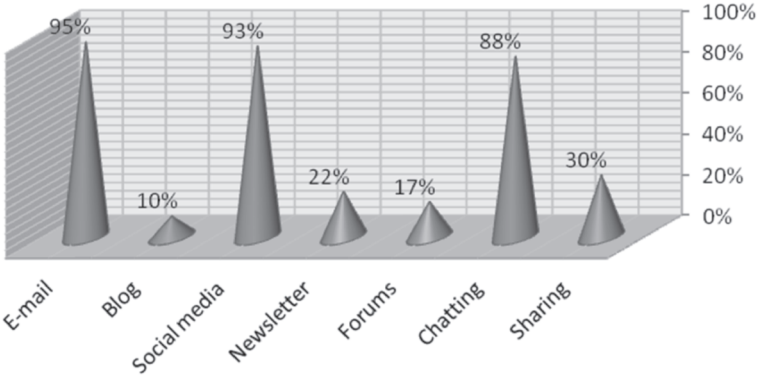


Chart 1. *The most commonly used forms of Internet communication*

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)

3.2. The linguistic standard of private e-mails

With standards of private e-mails only 13% of the informants claimed to be rarely satisfied, most of them (47%) were satisfied in general, but 40% of them were always satisfied, which was not due to the perfection of received e-mails, but rather it suggested that informants had already been born into a world of electronic communication, so they did not have high-standard expectations towards private e-mails.

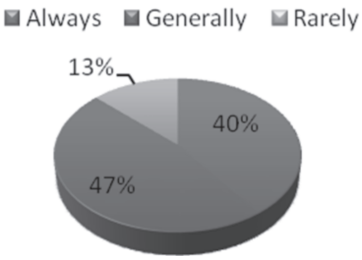


Chart 2. *Are you satisfied with the linguistic standard of private e-mails?*

3.3. Attitudes towards Internet chatting, its spelling and style standards

However, their attitude towards Internet chatting (*Netspeak,* in fact) and its spelling and style standards was rather surprising as 68% of the informants claimed that it was important to pay attention to spelling and style while chatting (even if there is hardly anyone who does so), 25% of the informants said that this was important only to the degree that one understood the written message, and 7% of the students said that it was only the speed that really mattered, there was no time for spelling. It is an essential data that nobody marked the options "it is not important at all" and "I do not chat in general".

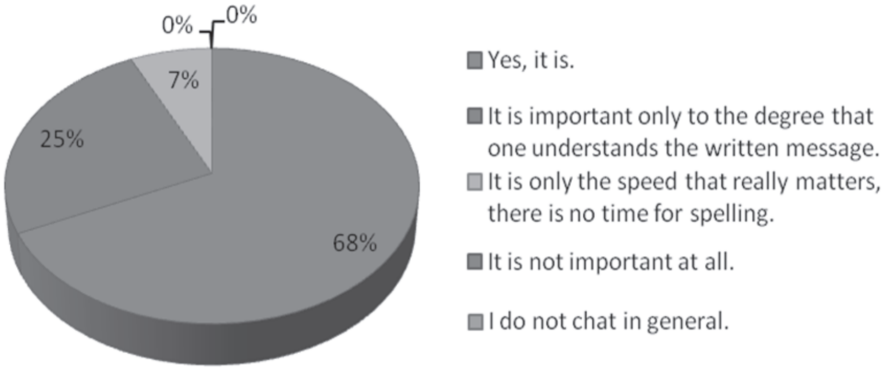


Chart 3. *Is it important to pay attention to spelling and style while chatting on the Internet?*

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)

3.4. The influence of the Internet on everyday language use

To the question if electronic mailing and the world of Internet influenced everyday language use, most of the informants answered with yes (87%). 10% of them said "not now, but later it might be the case", 1% said no, and only 2% said they would not know. However, none of the informants marked the option that this would refer only to IT professionals or to people who were using the Internet regularly.

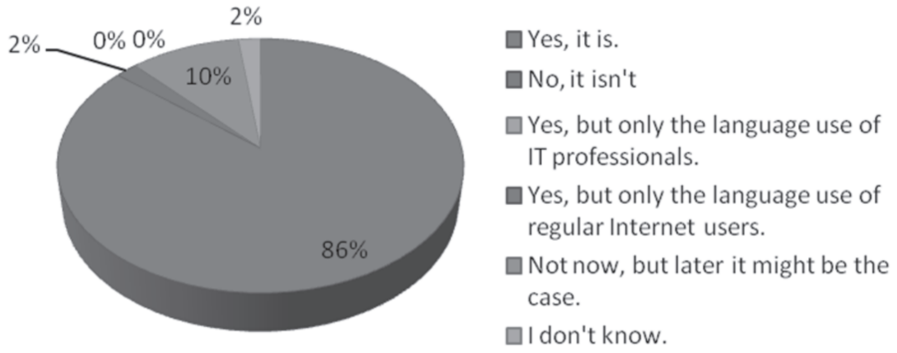


Chart 4. *Is everyday language use influenced by electronic mailing and by the linguistic world of the Internet?*

3.5. The dominance of English

Most of the informants (52%) said that they did not mind the dominance of English language, 2.5% had not even noticed it, 22% said they actually enjoyed it since they learned from it, and only 2% said they really did mind it. 7% were worried about the Hungarian language, 2.5% thought this was an issue that concerned only linguists, 5% did not like the dominance of English since they did not know the language, and 7% claimed that this made communication more difficult. To sum up, only one fifth of the informants (19%) distanced themselves from a more intensive use of English, the others thought that this was natural.

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)

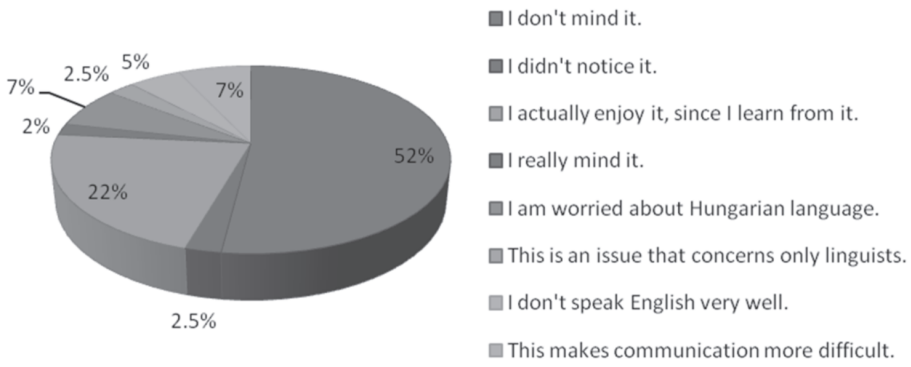


Chart 5. *What is your opinion about foreign (mostly English) language dominance on the Internet*

3.6. Dialectal or regional language elements on the Internet

Dialectal or regional language elements on the Internet – as it was stated in Zoltán Bódi's study (Bódi 2004: 150–156) and later in my research, too – is an evident phenomenon, even if local elements do not harmonize with the global image of the World Wide Web. However, 87% of the students think that these phenomena do occur on the Internet.

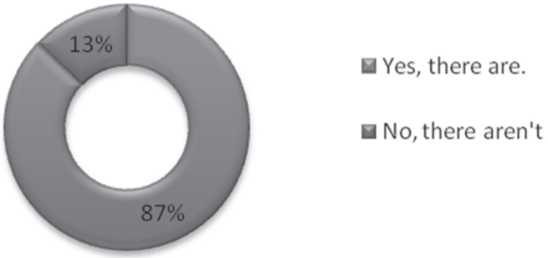


Chart 6. *Are there dialectal and/or regional language elements on the Internet?*

3.7. Motivations for the use of regional language elements on the Internet

Students specified different motivations for the use of the above mentioned elements (sometimes more than one at the same time). 58% of the students thought that this was a natural linguistic behaviour, 12% considered that the best motivation was loyalty to their own (vernacular) language variant. 15% of the students thought that this was showing the lack of knowledge regarding deliberate code-switching. 12% looked at it as an attitude on the Internet (playing roles) and 17% claimed they simply did not know the motivation for it.

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)

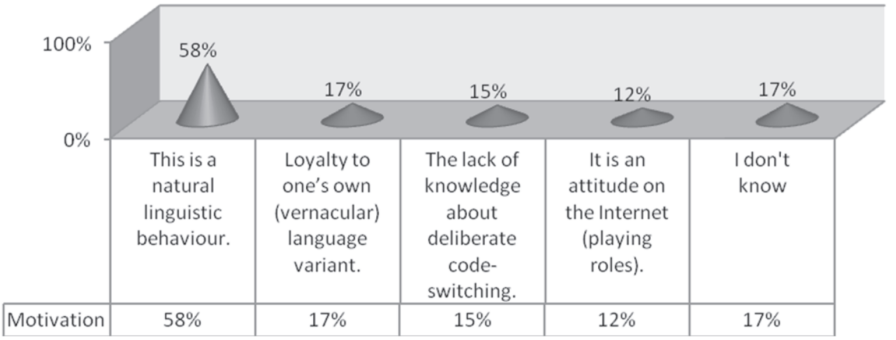


Chart 7. *What do you think may motivate using dialectal or regional elements on the Internet?*

4. Conclusion

Results of the research done by questionnaires show that the Internet has a certain kind of influence on the informants (students of the Department for Hungarian Language and Literature of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad); yet, it does not affect their attitudes significantly, especially those concerned with language.

As we have mentioned, most students who apply for this department do not speak the state language at an advanced level and they also lack an appropriate level of English knowledge. They are unable to take an active part in communication or to use information from global sources in an effective way. (As nearly half of the informants do not speak English at least at an intermediate level – cf. footnote no 3 –, one can hardly expect them to take intellectual benefits from visiting webpages in English.) However, this fact makes us also assume that these students will probably rather stick to their mother tongue and local community than let the global trends assimilate their identity.

The results of the questionnaire concerned with most frequently used types of Internet communication (question no 1) has also shown us that informants generally do not use the Internet/web communication with proper efficiency. In fact, most of them use the common types of online communication – e-mailing (95%), social media (93%), and chatting (88%) – most frequently, while other ways of Internet/web communication – sharing contents (30%), blogging (10%), etc. – are used by a smaller percentage of informants.

However, the most frequently used types of Internet communication are exactly the ones with personal character, where the features of Netspeak could be mostly recognized, so hypothetically the informants should be familiar with this kind of language use. Nevertheless, at this point, students do not seem to be quite aware of their attitudes while answering the related questions in the questionnaire.

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)

However, their answers are sometimes rather surprising, especially in the case of their attitude towards Internet chatting (*Netspeak*, in fact) and its spelling and style standards (question no 3), as 68% of the informants claimed that it was important to pay attention to spelling and style while chatting (even if there is hardly anyone who does so). At this point, one can assume that more than two-thirds of all the informants were trying to give answers that match rather their status as students of the Hungarian Department than their real habits.

It is important that most informants (87%) agree that everyday language use is influenced by electronic mailing and the linguistic world of the Internet (question no 4), and they also recognize the dominance of English language (question no 5); still, it is somehow surprising that only one fifth of the informants (19%) distance themselves from this trend, while others mostly do not mind the dominance of English (54%) or have not even noticed it (22%). Still, there are some students (7%) who state to be worried about the Hungarian language. However, this opinion can be assumed as part of a more or less present attitude of purism, which one can obtain during the earlier phases of education.

However, the presence of local dialectical elements and other regional language characteristics in general terms does not harmonize with the global image of the World Wide Web since 87% of the informants think that these phenomena do occur on the Internet (question no 6). This recognition by itself has no particular importance, yet the answers of students about the reasons which may motivate using dialectal or regional elements on the Internet (question no 7) show an interesting distribution of opinions. Namely, more than half of the informants (58%) consider this phenomenon as the result of a natural linguistic behaviour; however, nearly an equal part of them interpret it as loyalty to one's own (vernacular) language variant (17%) or the lack of knowledge about deliberate code-switching (15%). Yet, neither the loyalty nor the ignorance in code-switching could be considered as a real reason for the presence of local language features on the Internet simply because personal communication through this channel is mostly informal.

According to this, 12% of all informants have recognized this phenomenon as an attitude (playing role) on the Internet. Considering the age of the informants, this percentage is rather low as they belong to the generation who should hypothetically be more familiar with the world of IT (they were all born in the last decade of the 20th century). Nevertheless, the most unexpected result in this matter is that almost one fifth of the students (17%) have answered this question choosing the option "I don't know". Therefore, let us assume that these informants have not even taken an effort to think over the problem, contrary to those who have tried to find even more than one possible answer to this question.

The results of the questionnaire lead us to the conclusion that there is a need for further research of these problems, first of all, with a wider range of informants

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)

to be able to make more accurate conclusions. The range of informants should include the forthcoming generations of students of the Department of Hungarian Studies and more Hungarian students who attend other institutions of higher education in Vojvodina as well.

The results also turn our attention to the fields of knowledge where students of the Department need more information to be able to fit in the global trends yet preserve their local and regional identity. One of the potential tasks in this respect is that teaching and lecturing Hungarian language and literature should involve teaching characteristics of language and discourse of electronic/Internet media to a greater degree. If students gain awareness of differences between the variants of language (standard, regional, dialectical, written, spoken, Netspeak, etc.), they will be able to deal more easily with the global and other trends which threaten with any kind of assimilation.

Acknowledgement

This study was supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (Ministarstvo prosvete, nauke i tehnološkog razvoja Republike Srbije) within the scientific project no 178017.

References

Bódi, Zoltán. 2004. *A világháló nyelve* [The language of the Internet]. Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó.

2009. Webes és webkettes alkalmazások nyelvészeti keretben [Web 1.0 and 2.0 applications in linguistic frame]. In: Gecső, Tamás, Sárdi, Csilla (eds), *A kommunikáció nyelvészeti aspektusai* [Linguistic aspects of communication], 40–44. Székesfehérvár: Kodolányi János Főiskola; Budapest: Tinta Kiadó.

Crystal, David. 2004. *Language and the Internet.* Cambridge: University Press.

Kontra, Miklós. 2003. A határon túli nyelvváltozatok [Cross-Border language varieties]. In: Kiefer, Ferenc (ed.), *A magyar nyelv kézikönyve* [Hungarian-language manual], 301–321. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

Kruzslitz, Tamás. 2013. A digitális kommunikáció hatása a középiskolások nyelvhasználatára [The impact of digital communication on language use of secondary school students].
http://www.irodalomismeret.hu/files/2012_2/kruzslitz_tamas.pdf (accessed on: 5 April 2016).

Pásztor-Kicsi, Mária. 2010. Nyelvújító módszerek a chatelésben [Neological methods in chatting]. *Hungarológiai Közlemények* 2: 44–52.

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)

2011. A közösségi oldalak kommunikációs modelljei [The communication models in social networking]. *Létünk* 4: 92–102.

2013. Internet és nyelvi regionalitás [Internet and language regionalism]. *Tanulmányok* [Studies] 1: 100–111.

Simon, Viktória. 2014. Modern kódkeveredés: az internetes nyelvhasználat hatásai fiatalok írásbeli fogalmazásaiban [Modern code-mixing: the effect of Internet language use on the written composition of youngsters]. http://www.anyanyelv-pedagogia.hu/cikkek.php?id=497 (accessed on: 5 April 2016).

Veszelszki, Ágnes. 2012. Új írásjelek digitális és kézzel írt szövegekben [New punctuation marks in digital and handwritten texts]. http://www.anyanyelv-pedagogia.hu/cikkek.php?id=418 (accessed on: 5 April 2016).

BDD-A25348 © 2016 Scientia Kiadó
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:00:57 UTC)