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THE LANGUAGE USE OF HUNGARIAN COMMUNITIES IN MAJORITY CONTEXTS

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Abstract: *The present study summarises the findings of sociolinguistic research based on a questionnaire, and it discusses the situation of Hungarian as a community language in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. The aim of the study is to investigate the language use of the communities in informal encounters and in public sphere in order to provide valuable insight into the functions and status of the Hungarian language in the above mentioned countries, which is an important facet of language maintenance.*

Keywords: *sociolinguistics, bilingualism, minority language use, domain.*

1. Language Choice

Language choice in bilingual communities has been a favourite topic in recent sociolinguistic work (Winford 106). Ferguson (435) introduced the notion of "diglossia" to delineate situations where two related language varieties are applied in complementary distribution across different situations. In diglossic communities, one of the varieties, also known as the H(igh) language, is employed in more official, public domains such as education, government, literature, etc., while the other, designated as the L(ow) language, is used in private informal domains such as family, neighbourhood, friendship and so on. The varieties involved in diglossia, while related, are still quite divergent in structure and lexicon, and only one of them, the L variety, is typically acquired as a first language, while the H variety has to be acquired as a second language, usually at school. Additional characteristics of diglossia are summed up in the following definition:

'Diglossia is a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation' (Ferguson 435).

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According to Myers-Scotton (49) diglossia refers to the rather rigid and supplemental allocation of the varieties in a community's repertoire to different domains. In spite of Ferguson's rather strict definition of diglossia, the concept has been extended to situations where any two languages are in contact and even to cases where two or more varieties of the same language are used in various social settings. The concept now extends to the coexistence of all forms of speech in a society, whether the forms are different languages, different dialects, or different social varieties of the same language. This separation of varieties applies elsewhere also to non-related varieties.

2. Domains of language use

Fishman (441) introduces the concept of "sociolinguistic domains" to delineate the contexts of interaction into which social life is organised, and which have an impact on the language of interaction. Fishman (1972: 441) defines domains as *'institutional contexts and their congruent behavioural co-occurrences'*. The five domains of language behaviour for a community are: family/home, friendship, neighbourhood, work/employment and religion (cf. Fishman 441; Winford 111; Fenyvesi 283; Myers-Scotton 2006: 42). As Breitborde (18) notes: *'A domain is not the actual interaction (the setting) but an abstract set of relationships between status, topic and locale which gives meaning to the events that actually comprise social interaction'*. Winford (111) states that *'domains are abstract constructs, made up of constellation of participants' statuses and role relationships, locales or settings, and subject matter (topic)'*. Winford (111) also adds that the correlation between domain and situations is equivalent to that between a phoneme and its allophones. In Mioni's (170) words, a domain is *'a cluster of interaction situations, grouped around the same field of experience, and tied together by a shared range of goals and obligations'*. The most obvious effect of bilingualism on individuals themselves is that they generally compartmentalize their use of the different varieties in their repertoires: one variety is mainly used in certain domains, and another is used in other domains. Myers-Scotton (2006: 77) is of the opinion that the way bilinguals allocate the languages in their repertoire reflects how stable their bilingualism is. Myers-Scotton (2006: 77) introduces the notion of allocation, which means that the choice of the languages on behalf of the speakers in different domains is an important clue in terms of language maintenance. However, she argues that domain analysis is not a theoretical model, and research results based on it are not explanations on their own, but a potential field of proposed explanations. Myers-Scotton's other concern is that bilingual situations generally cannot be regarded entirely stable, and in case of a minority community language use when a shift is in progress, uniform language use is difficult to find in a given domain. Csernicskó (108) however states that *'the organizing principles behind language use according to domains of language use provide valuable insight into the functions and status of a given language and the relationship of the language within a bilingual or multilingual setting'*.

3. Language use in minority context

The research was carried out on the basis of a questionnaire, which was filled out in 2007, 2008 and 2009 by people ready to react by internet to my as well as my students' requests, consequently the survey results do not reflect the language use of the entire Australian-Hungarian, Canadian-

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Hungarian and English-Hungarian community, since they are not wholly represented. Altogether 148 people answered: 60 Australian-Hungarians, 35 Canadian-Hungarians and 53 Anglo-Hungarians. The questionnaire – available both in Hungarian and English – is a slightly modified version of the one used in the sociolinguistics research project called the *Hungarian Outside Hungary Project*, the findings of which were published in Fenyvesi (2005).

4. Language Maintenance Efforts

Pauwels (730-731) states that *'the ultimate survival of a language depends on intergenerational transfer'*. She also adds that the habitual ways as to how parents, grandparents and other relatives use languages are determinative in laying the fundamental principles for the maintenance of a minority language among imminent generations. This is of significant importance particularly if members of a minority community are restricted in their use of the minority language in public domains due to sociopolitical or other environmental factors.

In what follows the percentage of the results are listed in the order of the mentioned countries, namely Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom.

The answers provided by the 148 subjects show that members of the Hungarian minority communities in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom use mainly the Hungarian language in communication with family members (74%, 64% and 86% respectively). Interestingly Myers-Scotton's (2006: 77) argument related to the lack of uniformity in minority language use is well supported by the answers provided by the question tackling the use of the majority language, which turned out to be 28%, 60%, 56% respectively. If we compare the two sets we can see that the use of the dominant language in the home domain is relatively high, especially in Canada; in addition, there is no significant difference between the use of the languages that are at the disposal of the Hungarians in Canada (64% vs. 60%).

When comparing the language of communication between friends, on the one hand in Australia and Canada the dominant language shows higher preference related to minority language use (88%, 100% vs. 82%, 79% respectively). As to the UK however, respondents prefer Hungarian as the main communication language (98% vs. 95%). Nevertheless, this is a domain where there is no considerable difference between the preference of the minority language and the dominant language.

As far as the neighbourhood domain is concerned the majority language of the respective country has developed into the predominant language of communication (100%, 100%, 98%), consequently the use of Hungarian with neighbours is extremely low (6%, 0%, 18%) in every country (cf. Kovács 328; Fenyvesi 276; Forintos 116). I agree with Pauwels (731-732) who states that the occurrence of private enterprises, marketplaces and small shops run by minority community members – who are able to use the minority language with their customers – can contribute to the language maintenance outside home. Undoubtedly, the neighbourhood can only have a considerable effect if the members of a particular minority community live together in a relatively significant concentration. Although for instance, shop-keepers, restaurant owners, doctors, lawyers advertise their businesses in the only weekly published newspaper of the Hungarian community in Australia titled "Hungarian Life" (Magyar Élet) as well as in the Journal of the National Federation of Hungarians in England (Angliai Magyar Tükör) where

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participants can speak Hungarian, a significant majority of our subjects (97%, 96%, 97%) indicated the dominant language of their countries as the language of communication in these public places.

As for the church and religion domain, the following can be stated: the language used for praying, which is also regarded as an inner or cognitive domain, is basically Hungarian (88%, 67%, 97%) although almost half of the subjects in Australia and Canada (43%, 50%, 3%) admit that they also pray in the dominant country language. According to the responses of the subjects both the Hungarian language and the dominant language of the respective countries are used in church services with the exception of England there is not much difference in the ratio (70% vs. 68%, 67% vs. 63%, 78% vs. 44%). One may conclude that the reason why the ratio is almost the same between the two languages in Australia and Canada is that although generally there can be found Hungarian churches of all the main denominations all over the world where Hungarian minority communities exist, they are perhaps not within reachable distance for many. The Bible and other religious texts are generally read in the minority as well as the dominant languages of the respective countries; nevertheless Hungarian is basically preferred (74% vs. 66%, 64% vs. 50%, 86% vs. 52%).

All the subjects involved in the research in Canada and England use the dominant language of their country with colleagues at workplaces (92%, 100%, 100%), some of them however add in Australia and England that Hungarian can also be the language of communication in the workplace-domain (12%, 0%, 22%).

Although Hungarian national TV channels (e.g., Duna TV) are available in some parts of the world, practically all the subjects prefer watching dominant language programs on television (91%, 92%, 92%). Mention must be made of the fact however, that approximately one third of them are also interested in watching Hungarian television programs, paying special attention to films, and news, which must mean that they want to be familiar with what happens in Hungary (37%, 31%, 40%). A new and different approach to this field would be worth investigating in the future, as basically all Hungarian TV channels are currently available via internet. But this would generally be closer to the younger generation, who might not be as fluent in the minority language as their parents.

In Australia and England the majority of the respondents use Hungarian for writing informal letters (85%, 64%, 98%), subjects belonging to the Hungarian community in Canada seem to prefer the dominant language when writing private letters (68%, 75%, 77%). An overwhelming majority of them write formal letters, e.g., letters addressed to administrative offices and work-related documents in the dominant language of their country (96%, 100%, 86%). The usage of Hungarian in this field is quite popular as well (24%, 0%, 68%).

The preference of the Hungarian language in terms of fiction reading and reading the news is relatively high (64%, 52%, 68%), the majority of them however (82%, 84%, 85%) read fiction in the majority language as well. Scholarly literature is generally read in the dominant language (90%, 82%, 89%) with 34%, 26%, 59% reading it in Hungarian, too.

5. Conclusions

The results of the survey show – similarly to the findings of other researchers (cf. Kovács 329; Clyne 67) – that the most important domain in language maintenance for Australian-Hungarians and Canadian-Hungarians as

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well as Anglo-Hungarians is the home. Both Hungarian and the dominant language of the respective country are used with friends. Although Hungarians in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom are settled in the major towns, they do not seem to have many opportunities to use Hungarian in the neighbourhood domain because they do not live in larger concentrations in the towns (cf. Kovács 324; Clyne 151). Consequently almost exclusively the majority language is the means of communication with neighbours and in the neighbourhood domain.

The domain of church and religion appears to be varied. The inner domain of praying is dominated by the use of the Hungarian language in the case of every minority group, and this dominance is also a characteristic of reading the Bible and other religious literature. Every minority community visits both Hungarian and English church services.

The use of the Hungarian language is the least prominent at the workplace; it is generally the dominant language of the relevant country that is preferred.

The results show that the use of Hungarian in terms of written discourse is basically preferred only in informal, private letters. As for the reading of Hungarian language newspapers, periodicals and fiction the commonly used language is the majority language, but the occurrence of the minority language cannot be considered negligible.

All in all, it can be stated that fortunately Hungarian language is still present in a high percentage in the home domain when communicating with family members. It is interesting to note that although respondents prefer the dominant language of their country while communicating outside the home with friends, there is a tendency to use Hungarian almost as often as the minority language, which can be a positive clue in language maintenance. Nowadays it is very fashionable to be "different" in many ways, so foreign language use might be appealing to many.

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APPENDIX

	AUSTRALIA		**CANADA**		**UNITED KINGDOM**	
	Hungarian	**English**	**Hungarian**	**English (French)**	**Hungarian**	**English**
Home/family	74%	28%	64%	60%	86%	56%
Friends	82%	88%	79%	100%	98%	95%
Neighbours	6%	100%	0%	100%	18%	98%
Neighbourhood	12%	97%	40%	96%	20%	97%
Religion - praying	88	43%	67%	50%	97%	3%
Religion - church	70%	68%	67%	63%	78%	44%
Religion - Bible	74%	66%	64%	50%	86%	52%
Workplace	12%	92%	0%	100%	22%	100%
TV programs	37%	91%	31%	92%	40%	92%
Informal letter	85%	68%	64%	75%	98%	77%
Formal letter	24%	96%	0%	100%	68%	86%
Reading news, literature	64%	82%	52%	84%	68%	85%
Reading scholarly literature	34%	90%	26%	82%	59%	89%

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QUESTIONNAIRE

I would like to investigate the language use of the Hungarians in Great Britain. Would you, please help my work by filling out this questionnaire. Thank you for your co-operation.
(Forintos Éva (PhD) Institute of English and American Studies, University of Pannonia, Veszprém

1) Date of filling out: ……..……..……..

2) Address. …….……..….

3) Gender: male female

4) Date of birth: ……..…

5) How long have you been living in Great Britain? …….

6) Where do you come from originally (town, region, country)? ……..

7) Which generation Hungarian are you in Great Britain? (1st, 2nd, 3rd) ……

8) What is your highest qualification? Please put an X after the appropriate answer.

1, primary school 2, secondary school 3, college, university

9) As which nation's member do you regard yourself? 1. Hungarian 2. British 3. other

10) What is your mother tongue? 1. Hungarian 2. English 3. other

11) What is your wife's/husband's mother tongue? 1.Hungarian 2. English 3. other

12) Which language do you usually use when you speak to the following people? You may use more than one Xs if it is necessary.

	Hungarian	English	other
parents			
grandparents			
your children			
your husband/wife			
friends			
neighbours			

13) Can you read and write in these languages?

	Hungarian	English	other
I can both read and write			
Just read			
None of them			

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14) Which language do you use when you write…?

	Hungarian	English	other
a personal letter			
a document for a bureau			
a document in connection with your profession			

15) Which language(s) do you usually use when you read …?

	Hungarian	English	other
news, periodical			
Bible, religious literature			
poem, novel			
bibliography			
others (contract, form, directions)			

16) In which language do you usually watch these TV programs?

	Hungarian	English	other
films			
series, shows			
sports programs			
news			
weather forecast			

17) Which language do you usually use in these places?

	Hungarian	English	other
in church			
in a shop			
in a restaurant			
at your workplace			
in a surgery			

18) Which language do you usually use … ?

	Hungarian	English	other
while praying			
while counting			
while using swear words			
while thinking			
when you are dreaming			

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