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**DIALECTS OF THE PAST?
COMPETENCE OF HUNGARIAN GERMAN DIALECTS AMONG
KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN**

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Abstract

Due to the growing status of the standard language, dialects have become lesser used in Hungary. By obtaining documentation via data-based observation, this study reports the change in the role of German dialects during the past decades. First, the reader will receive an overview of the language-using habits among members of the Hungarian German minority and the historical reasons underlying these phenomena. The study focuses on the dialect knowledge among kindergarten children because this perspective provides a window onto the future while also representing the language usage of families. The study will then discuss the partial results of a large-sample, self-administered questionnaire survey that were processed with an SPSS program. In the concluding chapter, the authors argue for the importance of supporting the use of dialects and the need to address the local social, cultural, and educational contexts for not only using, but also revitalising dialects.

Keywords: dialect, language change, language-using habits, language competences of kindergarten children

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DIALECTS DEL PASSAT?

COMPETÈNCIA DELS DIALECTES ALEMANYS HONGARESOS ENTRE ELS NENS D'ESCOLA BRESSOL

Resum

A causa del creixent estatus de la llengua estàndard, els dialectes són menys utilitzats a Hongria. Mitjançant l'obtenció de dades a través de l'observació, aquest estudi informa sobre el canvi en el paper dels dialectes alemanys durant les darreres dècades. En primer lloc, el lector rebrà una visió general dels hàbits d'ús de l'idioma entre els membres de la minoria alemanya hongaresa i les raons històriques subjacents a aquest fenomen. L'estudi se centra en el coneixement del dialecte entre els nens d'escola bressol perquè aquesta perspectiva ofereix una finestra cap al futur, alhora que representa l'ús de l'idioma de les famílies. Tot seguit, l'estudi analitzarà els resultats parcials d'una enquesta de mostra àmplia, processada amb el programa SPSS. En l'apartat final, els autors argumenten la importància de donar suport a l'ús dels dialectes i la necessitat d'abordar els contextos socials, culturals i educatius locals no sols per utilitzar-los, sinó també per revitalitzar-los.

Paraules clau: dialecte, canvi lingüístic, hàbits d'ús de la llengua, competència lingüística en nens d'escola bressol

DIALECTOS DE PASADO?

COMPETENCIA DE LOS DIALECTOS HÚNGARO-ALEMANES ENTRE NIÑOS DEL JARDÍN DE INFANCIA

Resumen

Debido al creciente estatus de la lengua estándar, los dialectos se han vuelto menos utilizados en Hungría. Mediante la obtención de datos a través de la observación, este estudio informa sobre el cambio en el papel de los dialectos alemanes durante las últimas décadas. En primer lugar, el lector recibirá una visión general de los hábitos de uso del idioma entre los miembros de la minoría alemana húngara y las razones históricas subyacentes a este fenómeno. El estudio se centra en el conocimiento del dialecto entre los niños de jardín de infancia porque esta perspectiva ofrece una ventana hacia el futuro, a la vez que representa el uso del idioma de las familias. A continuación, el estudio analizará los resultados parciales de una encuesta de muestra amplia, procesada con el programa SPSS. En la parte final, los autores argumentan la importancia de apoyar el uso de los dialectos y la necesidad de abordar los contextos sociales, culturales y educativos locales no solo para utilizarlos, sino también para revitalizarlos.

Palabras clave: dialecto, cambio lingüístico, hábitos de uso del lenguaje, competencia lingüística de los niños del jardín de infancia

1. Introduction

On November 10, 1994, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and entered into force on February 1, 1998. The FCNM does not define the term “national minority” as no general definition could be agreed upon by all Council of Europe member states. Although individuals choose whether they wish to be treated as belonging to a national minority or not, their decision must be based on a set of objective criteria related to their identity, the constituent elements of which are religion,

language, tradition, and cultural heritage.¹ When an individual is a member of a minority possessing the characteristics mentioned above, this membership constitutes a social identity as part of the person's self-concept. Individuals strive for a positive self-image and try to distinguish their own group positively from other social groups. If this effort does not succeed, they can either leave the group and search for a more attractive community or accept conflict (Abrams & Hogg 1990). Individuals must have the will to maintain holistically the characteristics that determine their identity. One of these characteristics also proves the most striking: language. The following factors determine whether a national minority behaves as a distinct entity in a given situation (adapted from Bartha 1999: 135): 1) status (economic, political, social, linguistic); 2) demography (number of group members, their territorial concentration and distribution, marriage habits – endogamy or exogamy –, birth rates, immigration or emigration tendencies); 3) institutional background, including (formal) education and state policies or informal factors such as religion, culture, family, or job opportunities. Based on the aspects mentioned in the following sections, the changes in the language usage of Germans in Hungary are described in their social context.

2. The German language in Hungary, through space and time

Since the passing of the constitutional amendment N. XXXI/1989² and the ratification of Law LXXVII in 1993,³⁴ Hungary is officially home to thirteen minority groups. According to the 2011 national census, 644,524 people currently identify as belonging to a minority, totalling 6.5 % of the population.⁵ Out of these citizens, the

¹ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/fcnm-factsheet>, downloaded 19. 07. 2022.

² file:///C:/Users/rendszer/Downloads/MK_09_150_IV.pdf (downloaded 11. 10. 2021.)

³ <https://mkogy.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99300077.TV> (downloaded 11. 07. 2021.)

⁴ <https://mkogy.jogtar.hu/jogszabaly?docid=99300077.TV> (downloaded 11. 07. 2021.)

⁵ One assumes a ratio of 8-10%; this census information was based on the respondents' own answer.

Roma minority (315,583 people) comprises the largest majority while the number of people who identify with the German minority (185,696 people) holds second place.⁶

Germans have lived in the Carpathian Basin since the Middle Ages. In the beginning, German groups mainly resided in Spiš (today: Slovakia) and Transylvania (today: Romania). From the beginning of the 18th century, large numbers of Germans settled within the territory of today's Hungary. Because these areas had been devastated and depopulated by the Ottoman wars, populations had to be resettled in order to make the region usable again. With this reason in mind, settlers were invited from many German-speaking areas, such as Baden-Württemberg, Alsace-Lorraine, Luxembourg, the Palatinate, the Saar region, the Frankfurt and Mainz area, Hessen, Bavaria, and Austria. Subsequently, six new, relatively closed settlement areas emerged: 1) the low mountain range of Transdanubia; 2) south-eastern Transdanubia; 3) Satu Mare County in eastern Hungary; 4) Slavonia and Syrmia; 5) the Batschka region; 6) the Banat region in the south of Hungary. According to statistics, in 1720, German peoples made up 10% of the total population (4 million). They lived mainly in villages and engaged in agriculture and handicrafts. In the beginning of the 19th century, with the end of the settlement period, 1,100,000 Germans populated these areas.

Two tendencies can be observed throughout the following century: on the one hand, the number of Germans doubled, reaching 2,037,435 by 1910. On the other hand, the obvious effects of assimilation appeared. The assimilation process was partly a natural one, especially in the cases of urban centres. Yet it must also be mentioned that assimilation was not only advocated by the state, but also strongly encouraged by means of various existential and economic benefits that could only be accessed when an individual demonstrated allegiance toward the Hungarian culture, such as by speaking Hungarian or adopting a Hungarian surname. First and foremost, the state regarded the school system as the most important means of spurring assimilation. Beginning in 1920, as a consequence of the territorial losses that were brought about by the Trianon Peace Agreement⁷, the number of Germans in Hungary decreased to 500,000. At this time

⁶ https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/idoszaki/nepsz2011/nepsz_09_2011.pdf. (downloaded 12. 11. 2021.)

⁷ On June 4, 1920, the Hungarian delegation in Trianon signed the peace treaty that ended the First World War. Hungary lost two-thirds of its territories to neighbouring countries as well as half of its population.

Germans made up 7.2% of the total population. After the Second World War, their number fell by half, either because many left their homeland voluntarily or were forcibly relocated. Today we can assume the presence of roughly 250,000 individuals of German origin, a number that makes up 2.5% of the total population (Rutsch & Seewann 2014).

3. German dialects in Hungary

Without delving into the details of how to define the term 'dialect', in the present study we will attempt to outline the term according to the following criteria that will, in turn, better aid us in describing the situation of Hungarian German dialects. These criteria include the following factors of 1) the area of use (family-intimate, oral use); 2) the language users (craftsmen, farmers); 3) the spatial extent (location-specific); 4) the communicative range (limited, minimal); 5) linguistic criteria (less elaborate, but functionally contains every element present in the standard variant) (Patocka 2008: 24).

Western Hungary is home to dialect speakers from communities that have inhabited this region since the 12th century. This part of the country belongs to the inner German area and is separated by the Austrian-Hungarian border. Two easily delineated areas contain the language islands of Transdanubia, found in the Hungarian Low Mountain Range, and the area commonly referred to as the 'Swabian Turkey', which contains southern Transdanubia and some parts of the Lowlands in the southwest. The German dialects in Hungary are Central and Upper German mixed dialects that are known as settlement dialects, meaning that they only received their current form after German groups settled in their new homeland and therefore reflect the process of dialect mixing and balancing. "These dialects came about because different dialects integrated into one local dialect after settlement in the 18th century. In the second stage, the further integration of neighbouring local dialects took place within large-scale contexts, also due to a balancing of the local dialects involved. Apart from a few isolated cases, all Hungarian-German dialects are so-called mixed dialects" (Hutterer 1975: 19).

The Germans who settled in Hungary spoke Rhenish-Franconian, Hessian or Bavarian-Austrian dialects. Very few (only 2 %) Germans in Hungary speak a Swabian dialect; in spite of this fact, it is common for Germans to be referred to as 'Swabians' in Hungarian. Most of the German settlements are in southern Transdanubia. In the northern part of this region, Protestant peoples spoke Hessian, while Franconian or Palatine (in the north-east) was spoken by Catholics. In the south of southern Transdanubia, Fuldaic is mostly spoken. East and Lower Franconian dialects can be heard in the Transdanubian low mountain range. East Danube Bavarian-East Franconian characterises the settlements of Szendehely and Berkenye while Rhenish Franconian and Bavarian can be heard in the Danube Bend. In some settlements the transitional dialect of Swabian-Bavarian is spoken. East Danube Bavarian dialects are spoken from the Balaton to the Danube Bend (Manherz & Wild 2002). An archaic South Bavarian-East Central German dialect is spoken in Nagybörzsöny (Márkus 2014).

In the new homeland, a mixed dialect made up of the dialects used in the respective settlements began to emerge as new settlers adapted to the language of inhabitants who had already established communities in the region. Until the beginning of the 20th century, these local dialects served as a means of communication. In addition to these local dialects, several language variants of German were used in Hungary, such as the standard language referred to as Viennese German. It must be mentioned that Viennese German played a role in official language usage, while the local dialects appeared in private communication. The Hungarian language acted as the overarching, 'umbrella' language. However, we can talk about language equalisation in the individual regions, e.g. B. Fuldian in southern Hungary or east Danube Bavarian in the north are among the dialects that are understood by the inhabitants of several villages (Hutterer 1982: 180).

The factors that promoted the preservation of the language of the Hungarian German minority include homogeneity in the family, marital partners from the same nationality, and the circumstances connected to village life, which made it possible to use the German dialect in both the private and public sphere. Out of these, the remoteness of a settlement and endogamy were the strongest factors in language preservation. As a result, the German language was first pushed back to the family level

in large settlements, a trend that was particularly present near the capital. Since the second half of the 19th century, the Hungarian language has exerted an increasing influence on the language used by Germans in Hungary. Possessing limited spatial formation, basic dialects met an elaborate standard language, as a prestige language and the language of social advancement that even belonged to two language systems (Földes 2005: 51). Dialects survived longer in the small, isolated, and exclusively German-inhabited villages in southern Transdanubia, where a relatively closed settlement structure is characteristic.

After World War II, the factors listed above proved insufficient. Village communities became mixed as new settlers arrived. In addition, after the 1948 communist takeover, small family businesses, whether crafts or farms, were privatised, a factor that changed both the working environment and the language. Unfortunately, the other important elements of language preservation, such as German-language education, maintenance of cultural heritage, or the presence of some type of general network of institutions, were completely missing. Since the disappearance of these integral factors in language preservation could not be supplemented or replaced by any new elements, a massive process of assimilation went into effect. In addition, the Hungarian Germans who remained in the country were no longer allowed to use their language in public, which meant that parents did not transmit their German mother tongue to their children.

After Hungary underwent a process of democratic transition in 1989/1990, the erosion of the dialects caused by the discontinuity that was briefly described above could no longer be stopped. The new political climate and the resultant opening of Hungary's borders, however, broadened opportunities for acquiring the German standard variant (Klein 2010). It must not be forgotten that, approximately ten years after World War II, the German language was permitted to reappear in the Hungarian educational system. In the beginning, this reintroduction of German into the educational system occurred very cautiously, with fewer classes held at the end of the school day as an optional subject. Only shortly before and after the 1989/90 political shift did wide-

ranging possibilities appear, such as bilingual or what has become known as mother-tongue teaching in recent years.

In these types of bilingual or mother-tongue institutions, German accompanies children throughout the day. Today, 278 kindergartens have a specific program that, in addition to the transfer of the standard variant of German, also includes education in the culture of Hungarian Germans. Roughly 4.4 % of all children in this age group attend a preschool that is referred to as a minority kindergarten, meaning that it is an institution that provides educational content related to preserving the traditions and languages of Hungary’s historical minority groups. Most of these kindergartens are located in three counties, two of which are in southern Transdanubia while one is near the capital, a dispersal that corresponds with the settlement structure of Germans in Hungary.⁸

4. The language status of Hungarian Germans

Today it can be said that the language transfer function of the families is broken. The conditions that we are witnessing can best be described as the characteristics of a reverse situation: while the language acquisition and learning of standard German is supported and promoted in educational institutions that are intended for the German minority, the dialects spoken as the original mother tongue of Hungarian Germans have almost completely disappeared from the family circle. The following table illustrate these changes.

census (year)	total population of Hungary (persons)	German as a mother tongue	Belonging to the German minority
1941	9,316,074	477,057	303,419
1949	9,204,799	22,455	2,617
1960	9,610,044	50,765	-
1970	10,322,099	35,594	-
1980	10,709,463	31,231	11,310
1990	10,374,823	37,511	30,824
2001	10,198,315	33,792	62,233
2011	9,937,628	38,248	131,951

Table 1 Hungarian Germans in the statistics (Rutsch & Seewann 2014: 176)

⁸ <http://www.kormany.hu/download/5/0a/81000/K%C3%B6znevel%C3%A9s-statisztikai%20%C3%A9vk%C3%B6nyv-2016-%C3%BAj.pdf> downloaded 12. 12. 2021.

Table 1 shows changes in terms of identity and mother tongue usage. In 1941 the number of people who indicated German as their native language was higher compared to those who declared a sense of German identity. Seventy years later, the number of people who belong to the German minority has increased dramatically, yet only a minimal growth in the number of people who speak German as their mother tongue can be observed. As the most striking feature and identity-forming factor, language has an important role, yet the table also demonstrates that this is not the only factor. As Földes (2005: 26-27) points out, language-cultural shifts caused by politics can be observed, a phenomenon that fully supports the statement that the history of language is based on the history of its bearers. In the following table, the language skills of each generation can be examined in more detail.

age group	German as a mother tongue
0-14	7.3 %
15-39	22.7 %
40-59	26.1%
60+	43.8 %

Table 2 Language skills of the generations (Demeter-Zayzon 1999, Appendix: 1)

A gradual language shift has taken place: once language proficiency is defined by age, the younger the members of a community are, the less likely they will be to master the minority language. It can therefore be stated that examining the language skills of children will reveal how far the language loss of a minority has progressed. In a survey conducted in 2007, kindergarten teachers employed by German minority kindergartens were asked about the language skills of children who had started kindergarten that same year. The language skills of children can be used to assess whether and to what extent the language transfer of dialects occurs in the first socialisation environment of the family.

Language skills of kindergarten children upon entry into kindergarten	Number	Percent
a Dialect as mother tongue	14	0,25 %
b Standard German as mother tongue	39	0,7 %
c Understands dialect and speaks a little	84	1,5 %
d Understands standard German and speaks a little	122	2,2 %
e German is not unknown	1,128	20 %
f No knowledge of German	4,249	75,4 %
Σ	5,636	100%

Table 3 Language skills of kindergarten children upon entry into kindergarten (Klein 2007)

Only 0.25 % of children start kindergarten with knowledge of the dialect at native level. The survey confirms the fact that the standard German variant plays a role that is again far more important than the traditional dialects. Whatever its variant, German is still foreign to most children.

Since the children in the family are socialised in Hungarian, the majority encounter a variant of German in kindergartens and schools. The dialect is no longer utilised by even the grandparent’s generation: if at all, the great-grandparent’s language may be present for children. The vast majority of kindergarten teachers are also no longer speakers of a Hungarian German dialect. Another question concerns what attitude teachers and parents possess toward the issue of dialects. The term attitude (Allport 1935; Triandis 1975: 4) is defined as a mental and neural state that is structured by one’s experiences and influences an individual’s reactions to objects, situations, etc. Knowledge, opinions, and “evaluative thoughts” about the properties of the object form the cognitive component while the emotions directed towards the object form the affective component. The combination of emotions and thoughts drives behaviour in relation to the given object (Hunyady 1973, Hendrickson & Chaiken 1993). The chart below summarises the results of a survey that summarises the importance of dialects among the three groups mentioned above on an ordinal scale (the more important the field, the lower the number).

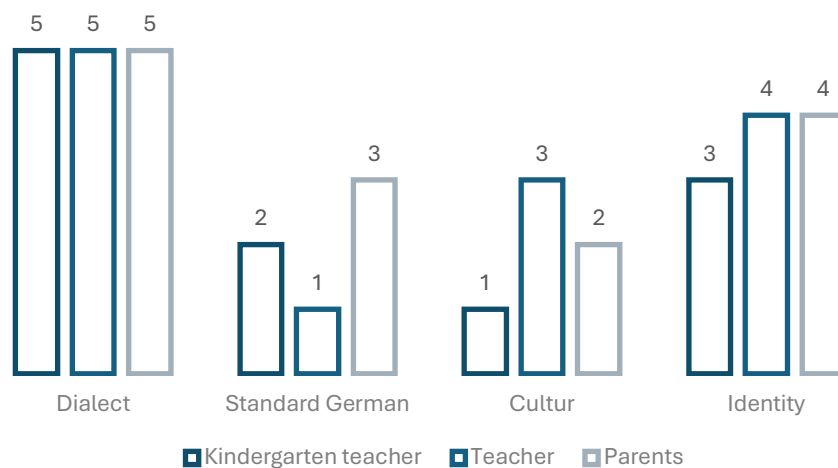


Figure 1. Priority list of the tasks of a German nationality kindergarten according to the opinion of kindergarten teachers, parents and teachers (Klein 2007)

The dialect was classified as the least important element, a result that can be attributed to several factors that are also reported in detail in the relevant research literature. At this point, only two of these elements must be mentioned: the low prestige assigned to knowing a dialect and its limited usability in the labour market. It must also be taken into account that minority kindergartens and schools are also attended by children from families that are not Hungarian German, a circumstance that allows us to conclude that these parents naturally prefer having their children learn the German standard variety.

5. Study design

The authors of this study have launched a new research project to assess what changes have occurred in the past fifteen years. Our study examines the partial results of a large-sample, self-administered questionnaire survey that were processed with the SPSS program. The study was carried out with the participation of kindergarten teachers. The questionnaires were sent in electronic form. The data sheet was easy to read, with multiple choice questions and a few open-ended questions. Out of the 230 kindergarten

that offer special German nationality programmes in Hungary, 85 (37%) returned a completed survey form. To have an in-depth understanding of the research, kindergarten teachers, parents, and kindergarten directors were involved. A total of 38 kindergarten teachers, 140 parents, and 85 directors participated in the study.

5.1 Hypotheses

1. The standard language and dialect competences of the children and kindergarten teacher in German influence the quality and quantity of German dialect usage in kindergarten activities.

2. For kindergarten teachers and parents, the transfer of the standard language is more important than the transmission of the dialect.

3. The majority of teachers consider the teaching of cultural heritage (objects, music) to be important, a phenomenon that is explained by the low level of competence in the dialect.

5.2 Findings

The first diagram aims to pinpoint the areas from which the filled-in samples arrived. Responses from southern of Hungary make up almost half of the data set, followed by Budapest and its surrounding villages. In fact, as was mentioned before, most nationality kindergartens are located in these two areas of the country.

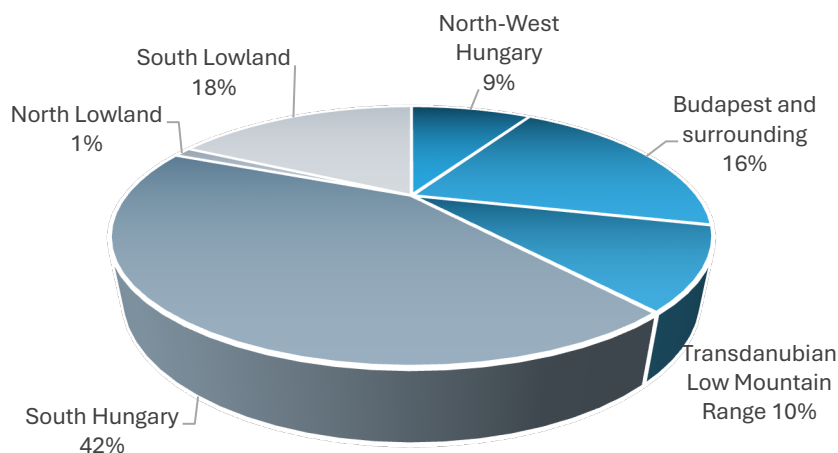


Figure 2. Number of kindergarten children in regions of Hungary

The kindergartens with more than 91 children dominate; it is overall striking that, especially in southern Hungary, a region characterised by small villages and towns, most kindergartens (10) educate more than 91 children. This seems to indicate that parents are interested in language and culture. Of course, stating this does not mean any intent to belittle the pedagogical work of the educators. The area around the capital together with the capital itself comprises 16 kindergartens, a number that again places this region in second place. Here, in many areas, the options for choosing a kindergarten are more varied compared to rural areas and parents can select from a variety of kindergarten types. Kindergartens with 21-30 children are in second place; all in all, out of the 12 institutions possessing this size of student population, nine are situated in the south of Hungary.

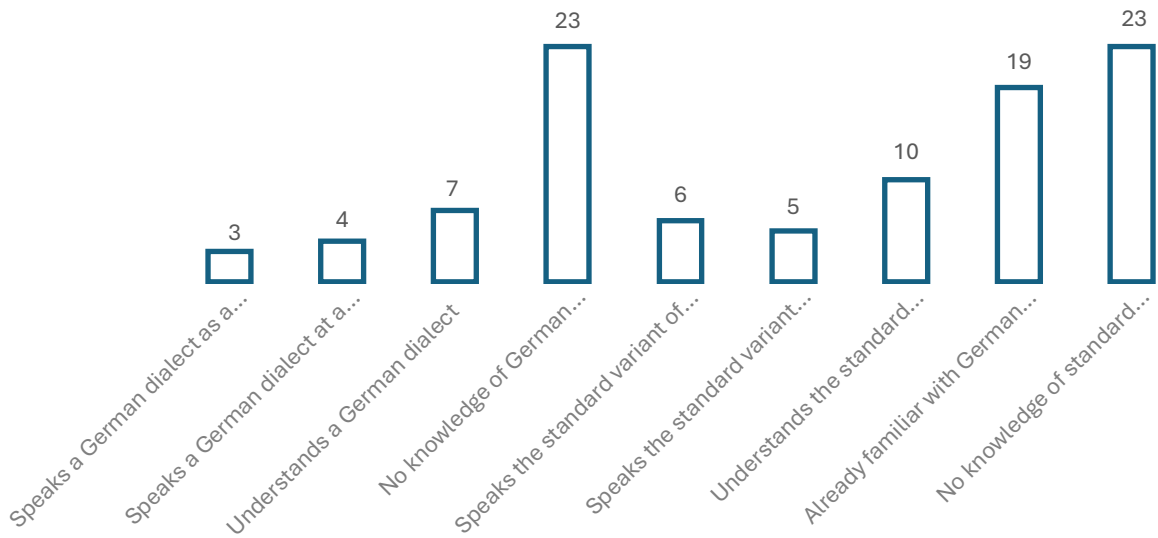


Figure 3. German language competences of kindergarten children (%)

As regards the German language skills of kindergarten children starting preschool, the previous table illustrates the fact that most children have no knowledge of either the standard variety of German or a dialect (totalling 63 each). Ten children speak a dialect as their mother tongue and 18 the standard variety. When comparing these results to those from 2007, it can be stated that the numbers have decreased, even if not necessarily very much. The number of children with native language skills in both varieties has fallen from 14 to ten and from 39 to 20.

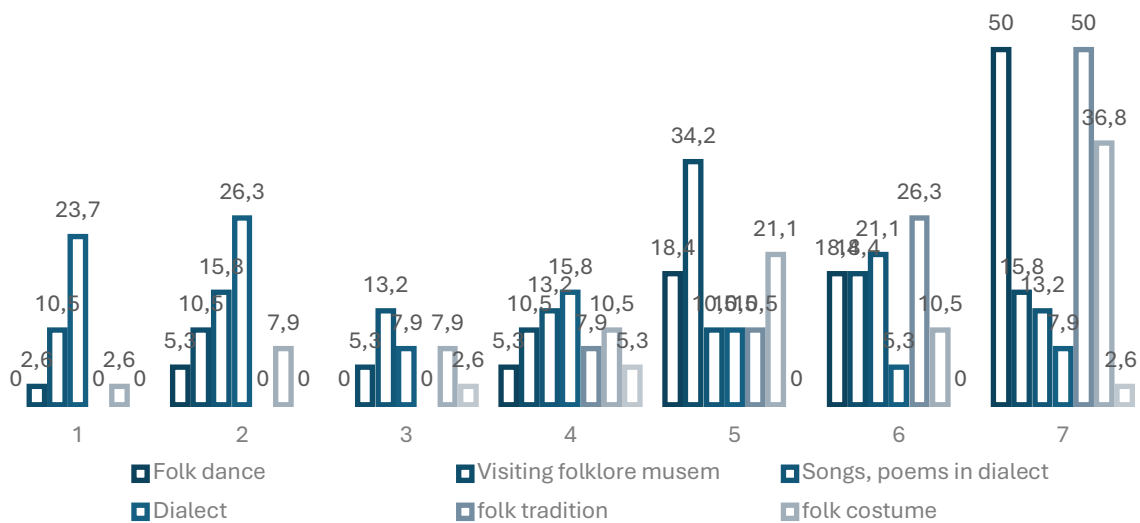


Figure 4. Cultural traditions in kindergarten (%)

We additionally aimed to discover which areas of Hungarian German culture are cultivated in these kindergartens. Responses to this question were analysed using the Likert scale. More than 86.4 % of respondents agreed that folk dancing is a very important area, whereas 5.3 % felt that folk dancing is not very important. In general, maintaining folk traditions was also considered important, followed by folk costumes. These two categories received the most points (7), meaning that out of all the options provided in the survey, folk traditions and costumes are the most important for this group of kindergarten teachers. It is striking that both examples of cultural heritage – whether tangible or intangible in nature – can be passed on without having to use language. Poems or songs that are in dialect feature among the least preferred areas of transmission. Ignoring these resources unfortunately leads to neglecting an important source of language teaching.

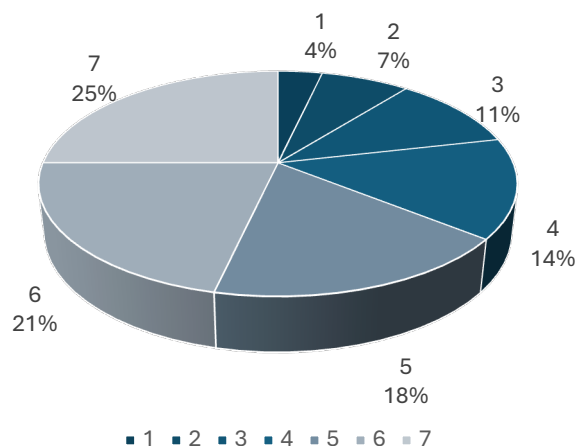


Figure 5. Folk dance in the kindergarten

The above diagram clearly shows the dominance of folk dance and the maintenance of folk traditions. The pedagogical programme of each kindergarten is based on the Hungarian Basic Programme of the Kindergarten Education that is outlined by the government for kindergarten education. The pedagogical programme comprises the document or plan where local specialties can appear, thereby revealing the specific knowledge possessed by a preschool's teachers. Since folk dance occupies such a prominent role, our question aimed to specify the number of kindergartens in which folk

dance appears and this tradition's subsequent importance. A quarter of respondents claimed that folk dance had the highest priority while 26 % felt that it played a very important role after 25 % a quarter also gave an important role in the pedagogical program. At 9 % it plays a minor role but is present in the program.

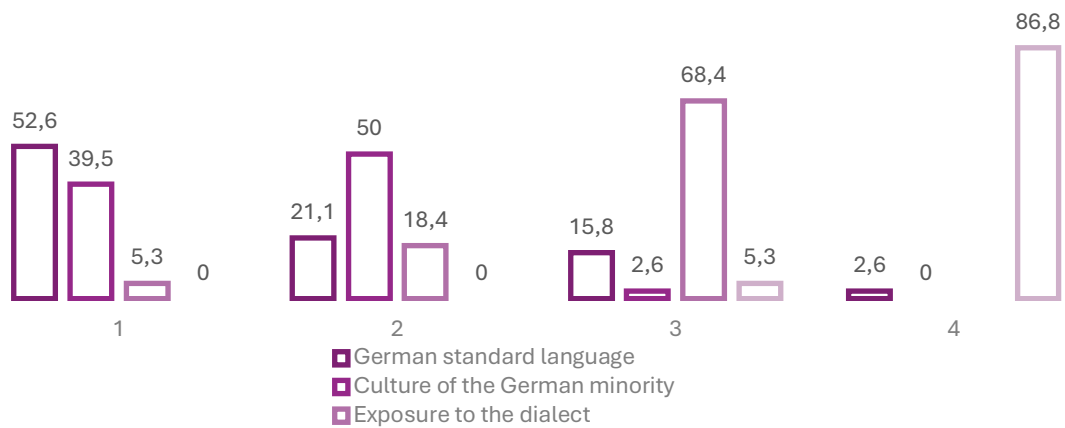


Figure 6. Preferred areas (%)

To evaluate answers to the next question, an ordinal scale was used. For this purpose, kindergarten teachers created a scale by putting the following areas in a row based on a self-designated order of importance: standard German, culture, getting to know the dialect, and acquiring the dialect. The most important area was assigned the number 1 and so on, down to the least important which was the number 4. Holding first position on the scale, the most important result is the acquisition of the German standard variety. This is followed by the cultivation of the German culture, by which it can be assumed that the teachers mean exposure to folk costumes and dancing. The least important factor appears to be the dialect, whether this refers to either becoming familiarised with it or learning it. Based on these results, no change in the attitudes of kindergarten teachers has been found compared to 2007. It seems clear that attitudes towards the role and importance of dialects must be changed before lasting results can be achieved.

6. Results and discussion

The assumption that the standard language skills of the surveyed kindergarten teachers influence the qualitative and quantitative use of standard German in the kindergarten was not confirmed ($p > .05$). In contrast, whether kindergarten teachers possessed knowledge of a Hungarian German dialect showed a significant correlation with the frequency of its use in kindergarten activities. The better the kindergarten teacher speaks the dialect, the more he or she prefers extensive and high-quality use of it in their work ($r = .643^*$ $p = .013$).

In the case of kindergarten teachers, the connection between education and language skills goes hand in hand in several respects.

– Those who have completed at least one BA degree in German speak the local or another dialect at a basic level ($r = .404^{**}$; $p = .02$).

– University graduates speak the standard variety of German language at a higher level than the dialect ($r = .286^*$; $p = .035$).

– Those who do not speak the German dialect do not have a university degree. ($r = .365^{**}$; $p = .006$).

According to our last hypothesis, kindergarten teachers and parents attach greater importance to teaching the standard language than knowing the dialect. The diagrams clearly present the answer to the third question by showing what is most or least important in relation to German language education in kindergartens, including the following factors:

1. Transmission of the standard variety of German
2. Introducing the culture of the German minority
3. Basic introduction of the dialect
4. Transmission of the dialect at a high level

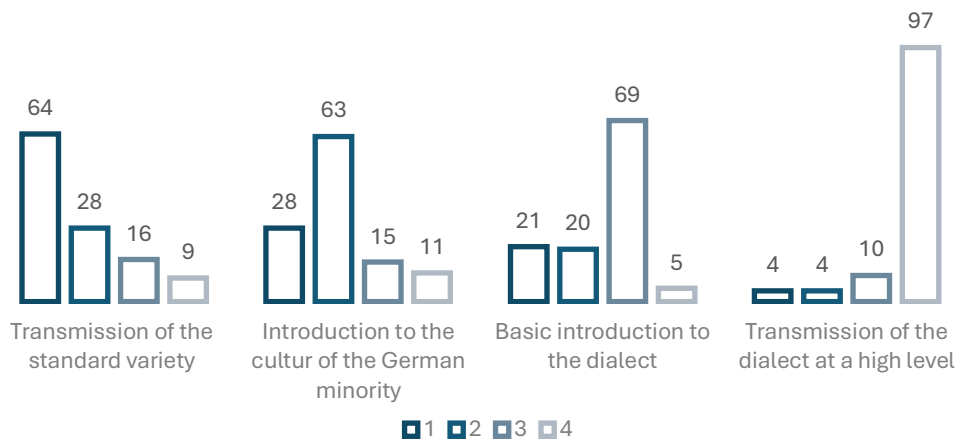


Figure 7. Parents' opinions on language and cultural education in kindergarten (%)

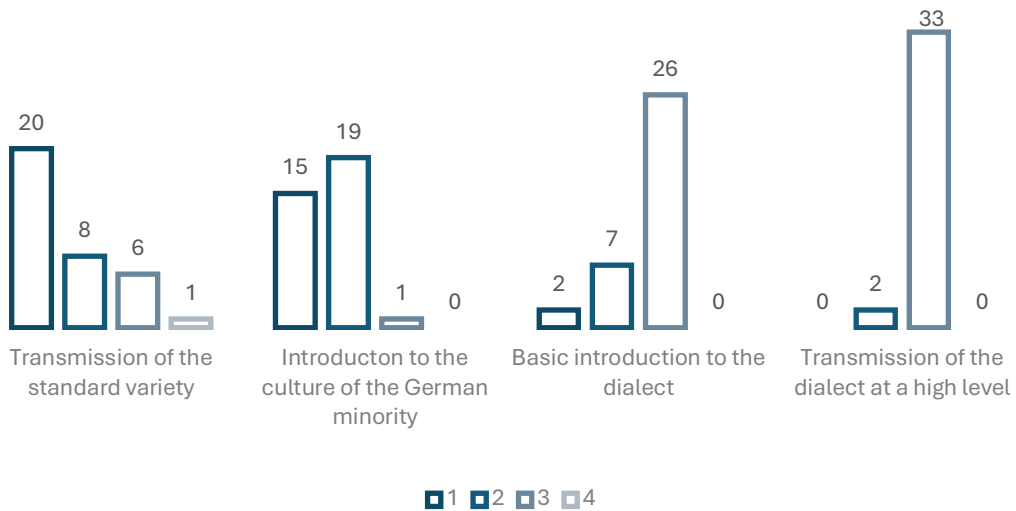


Figure 8 Kindergarten teachers' opinions on language and cultural education in kindergarten (%)

The figures clearly show that both parents and educators consider teaching the standard German language and, secondly, the introduction of German national culture, to be the most important, while teaching the regional language takes a less significant place (Figure 7-8.). Two hypotheses were confirmed by the evaluation of the results. In fact, the standard variety of German is more important for everyone involved and the kindergarten teachers clearly prefer activities in the kindergarten that have little to do with dialects, a phenomenon that is connected to the low levels of competencies possessed by kindergarten teachers and the rare opportunities they have for practicing their speaking abilities.

7. Discussion and conclusion

The education system is the focus of possible solutions for preserving Hungarian German dialects because the historical and social changes discussed in previous sections have made it nearly impossible for families to transmit these language variants within the home environment. When attempting to bring dialects closer to children, these variants must not be viewed as dusty exhibits in an archaic museum, but rather as an almost “tangible” form of heritage that can be felt and experienced. To accomplish this revitalisation of Hungary’s rich heritage in German dialects, teachers must expose children to them in a way that is creative, playful, and child-friendly. Subsequently, we find it indispensable to develop modern, attractive teaching tools and materials that also take into account the strongly auditory aspect of dialects and utilise the latest tools in the areas of media and information technology.

It is essential that the dialect be brought closer to the target audience. It is not enough to emphasise the advantages in children’s dialect knowledge, including the factors of how an interest in languages is awakened through comparisons, the development of language awareness, the way in which lessons can be held utilising holistic methods that combine music, movement, art, literature, and the natural sciences. Language acquisition can furthermore be accomplished by conducting playful activities, such as drawing a picture of a fairy tale, singing, etc. It must also be remembered that language is developed in small steps as users gain increasing independence. Young learners can also learn how to confront a variety of text types and strategies for coping with the text. When children quote nursery rhymes and sing nursery rhymes together, this act has a positive emotional effect that also plays a role in identity formation. This joint activity leads to results that are socially integrative and personality-forming in nature.

Without offering kindergartens aid in utilising Hungarian German songs, texts, rhymes or vocabulary, any improvement in integrating the dialect into the learning process cannot be expected. Although very good and complete collections of children’s

songs, fairy tales, and rhymes exist in the dialect and dialect dictionaries containing the most important expressions and vocabulary of individual settlements are also available, these sources are only written. They are furthermore difficult to read and cannot be used properly by people who do not know the dialect. Most teachers are simply afraid of using the dialect, either because they have never done so, have possibly never or rarely heard the dialect in use, or because the dialect has “gained” the status of being a dusty, archaic museum exhibit. In other words, the dialect is “on display”, appreciated for its inherent worth, but “visitors” are urged not to touch it, for fear that something might change. These attitudes must be altered by offering different audio texts and a variety of didactic-practical recommendations that can also be used to gain specific knowledge about and ties to their region, minority. Without this sense of connectedness, a corresponding identity will hardly emerge.

When children hear different linguistic means and an alternate vocabulary, they are actively being exposed to the phenomenon of Hungarian German bilingualism and biculturality, both essential aspects of the Hungarian German identity that can only be learned through the vocabulary, idioms, etc., preserved in our local dialects. These dialects form a teaching material that is to be observed and discovered. By doing so, children will learn that the German language is a polycentric language that is not uniform but has several varieties, one of which is the given Hungarian German dialect. One thing remains clear: the need for an educational policy foundation that maintains the preservation of the dialects as an important objective and provides professional and financial support for this purpose is urgent. Barring this groundwork, the current and continuous disappearance of Hungarian German dialects cannot be halted.

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