

Hungarian Is No *Idioma Incomparabile*: The Hungarian Language Reform in European Comparison¹

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Abstract: The idea of the uniqueness of the Hungarian language is firmly rooted in Hungarian culture and discourse. Accordingly, the language reform ("nyelvújítás")—the movement which led to the standardization of Modern Hungarian orthography and grammar and a radical renewal of the lexicon, especially by way of numerous neologisms, in the nineteenth century—is often seen as part of specifically Hungarian cultural history rather than in the framework of European ideologies. This paper briefly presents the most relevant linguistic aspects of the language reform and analyzes its connections to contemporary linguistic culture, the ideologies of late Enlightenment and Romantic Nationalism, and the progress in linguistics.

Keywords: *Hungarian Language, Language Planning, Lexicon, Derivation, Nationalism, Emancipation*

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"Rather than being expressions of conscious or unconscious linguistic determinism, language policies are generally expressions of widespread convictions that the furtherance of crucial national policies more generally also require language status policies and language corpus policies that can contribute to national policies as a whole" (Fishman 2004: 8361).

A Unique Language, a Unique Language Reform?

Hungarians are used to thinking of their language as something unique and incomparable. Recently, the tradition of regarding Hungarian as an *idioma incomparabile* culminated in "our unique language" [*egyedülálló nyelvünk*] being explicitly mentioned in the preamble to the new Constitution, alongside other aspects of Hungarian cultural legacy. Quite obviously, this concept refers to something beyond the trivial fact that all languages of the world are unique in their own ways.

This way of thinking has its natural basis in the fact that Hungarian, unlike the Germanic, Romance, and Slavic languages of Europe (but similarly to Greek, Albanian, or Armenian, for instance) has no close relatives. All the other Finno-Ugric languages are geographically and genetically far away. As there are no "almost-Hungarian" languages that a Hungarian speaker can "almost" understand, there is no easy way for Hungarians to experience relatedness between languages. This impression is strengthened by the widespread (although erroneous) idea that all European languages are conspicuously related to some other European languages; in fact, as shown by the *Eurocom* project (www.eurocomresearch.net), the mutual relatedness of Germanic, Romance, or Slavic languages can be successfully utilized in language teaching and learning. While the speakers of German, for instance, can profit from the relatedness of all Germanic languages in learning English or Swedish, Hungarians have no support of this kind from their mother tongue. Moreover, a Hungarian speaker who has already learned one Western European language and starts learning another will more probably profit more from his second-language knowledge than from his mother-tongue skills. Against this background, Hungarian appears even more unique than it is.

In the course of Hungarian national history and in Hungarian cultural identity-building, the "uniqueness" of the Hungarian language has become a powerful symbol of national uniqueness, sometimes implicitly connected with the popular thought of Hungarians being "alone in Europe" [*egyedül vagyunk Európában*], an exceptionally unlucky nation surrounded by enemies. Intertwined with the half-mythical, half-historical accounts of the Eastern origin of the Hungarians, the idea of the uniqueness of the Hungarian language has become a national myth. "Myth" in this case should not be understood as just a synonym for "untruth" or "emotionally motivated, pseudo-scientific misconception" (Bauer and Trudgill 1998). Rather, myths are elements of national identity building, important by virtue of their emotional value, not because of their historical truth (see, for example, Romsics 2005). Typically, myths of national history have a certain "hard core" of truth, and the uniqueness myth could perhaps best be characterised as a "myth-as-omission," wherein the existing connections and contacts of the Hungarian language as well as the heterogeneous origins of the Hungarian population are intentionally forgotten (Abizadeh 2004: 309).

The ideological connection between national and linguistic uniqueness seems to draw from essentialist relativism, the idea of language being the very soul of a nation and its *Volksgeist*. In the same way as gender essentialism can be operationalized for political purposes by naturalizing a social category, language can be made into a tool of nationalist policies and even portrayed as a necessary condition for a nation's existence. *Gentem lingua facit*, or to quote the well-known sentence usually ascribed to István Széchenyi, *nyelvében él a nemzet* ('it is in its language that the nation lives'). Yet, as Anthony Smith (1971: 149-50; quoted in Schmid 2001: 9) has pointed out, the emphasis on language "follows the growth of nationalistic fervor; it does not create it." Nations perhaps do not "make" their languages, but nations—or, rather, people and organs who claim to represent the nation—are the ones who plan, cultivate and develop the national languages.

In the last few decades, sociolinguistic research into the everyday multilingualism of modern minorities or immigrants in Western cities has begun to contest the traditional autonomist idea of languages as separate systems, pointing out that this idea itself is connected to nationalist ideologies and essentialization of ethnic identities: in nation-state projects of the nineteenth century, monolingualism was seen as the normal or even ideal state. As a reaction to the monolingual bias of autonomous linguistics and nationalist language-planning projects, it has become fashionable to claim that multilingual speakers are actually not speaking "different languages" but "simply communicating in patterns that [are] familiar to them" (Garner 2004: 212), or even that forcing the idea of "languages" as entities upon the existing diversity is "epistemic violence" (Makoni and Pennycook 2007: 16). Here, however, languages with a weaker tradition of standardization and written literature as well as languages surrounded by related language varieties are not in the same position as languages like Hungarian. Speakers socialized in a prescriptivist standard-language culture, of which Hungarian is a good example (see, for example, Szabó 2012), are probably more prone to perceive their languages as distinct units. This was also obvious in the ELDIA study on Hungarian in Austria: first-generation Hungarian migrants, raised in Hungarian linguistic culture, typically disapprove of "language mixing" and are convinced that there is a "pure" and "correct" variety of Hungarian (Berényi-Kiss et al. 2013: 157, 166).

The belief of Hungarian speakers in the distinctness of their language does not arise naturally from pre-existing categories and implicit social conventions only. Whatever is done with the language is part and parcel of the prevailing linguistic culture: "the sum totality of ideas, values, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, myths, religious strictures, and all the other cultural 'baggage' that speakers bring to their dealings with language from their culture" (Schiffman 2006: 112). In order to understand the history of what was done with the Hungarian language, and especially in order to understand the language reform [*nyelvújítás*] which dramatically transformed and modernized the Hungarian language, its orthography, lexicon and perhaps even its grammar in the early nineteenth century, the linguistic culture in Hungary needs to be examined thoroughly.

The linguistic culture in Hungary in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century was characterized by multiethnicity and multilingualism, together with the exceptionally strong position of Latin as the language of higher culture, education, and even administration. The language reform arose from this background, but it was also influenced by all-European phenomena such as nationalist purism, that is, conscious avoidance of "foreign" words, elements and constructions, and more or less successful attempts to replace them with "authentic", inherited ones (see Thomas 1991; Raag 1998: 14–16; Langer and Davies 2005).

Due to the dominance of the German language in the education and cultural life of higher social strata in Habsburg-dominated Hungary, language ideologies from the German-language area—as the German Romantic Nationalism in general—played an important role for Hungarian activists (see Martins 1970: 75, 103). At the same time, Hungarian language policies can be compared with those of other Eastern Central European languages, such as Czech, Slovak, and Polish (Kamusella 2008). István Fried finds conspicuous similarities between the linguistic and literary reform movements of Hungary and both Western Slavic (Czech, Polish, Slovak) and South Slavic (Serbian, Slovene, Croatian) nations:

“This is an East Central European peculiarity: scholarly, aesthetic and—in a stricter sense—literary aspirations did not arise separately from each other but simultaneously, albeit not in an institutional framework (such institutional frameworks hardly existed, except in wishful thinking) but in the activities of people who were poets, authors and linguists at the same time” (Fried 1986: 181; my translation).

[*Kelet-közép-európai sajátosság: a tudományos, a nyelvészeti és a szűkebb értelemben vett irodalmi törekvések nem egymástól elválva, hanem egyszerre, bár nem intézményi keretben (ilyen intézményi keretek nemigen voltak, csak vágyakban léteztek), hanem költők-írók-nyelvészek munkásságában léteztek.*]

In Hungary as in many other European countries, the lack of institutional frameworks for a language reform, together with the underdeveloped profile of linguistics as a scientific discipline or as a profession (and, in particular, the almost completely lacking tradition of linguistic and philological research into “less well studied languages”), had the natural consequence that language reforms came to rest on the shoulders of a few prominent personalities. These were typically people with some kind of a higher education but, understandably, without formal training in linguistics, a discipline which hardly existed. As this phenomenon is not typical of Eastern Central Europe only, the Hungarian language reform deserves to be regarded in a wider, all-European context.

In this paper, I will try to point out a few points of comparison between the Hungarian language reform and similar processes in other parts of Europe. From a strictly Hungarian perspective, as part of the national history writing, the Hungarian *nyelvújítás* has been extensively researched and documented. My aim is not to add new research results to this rich tradition but to show that it could be worthwhile to pay attention both to the international connections and parallels and to the strictly linguistic background of the language reform. On the one hand, the Hungarian language reform was not just a product of the “unique” characteristics of the language and the history of the country but part of an international network of developments. On the other hand, some of its aspects can only be understood on the basis of the history of Hungarian linguistics and what was known about the Hungarian language, its history and structure.

The Hungarian Language Reform

Nyelvújítás is the established term for the process or movement which began at the turn of the nineteenth century, brought forth some radical changes already within a few decades and, in a certain sense, continued until the second part of the nineteenth century, by which time we can already speak of Modern Standard Hungarian. The political backgrounds of this process have been unambiguously identified in Hungarian national history-writing (see Pándi 1965: 189–191). The language reform is seen as a surrogate emancipation movement of the Hungarian nation in a situation in which direct political resistance against the Habsburg empire was impossible. Therefore, the fact that the Hungarian language reform concentrated around a few prominent personalities such as Ferenc Kazinczy was not just a natural consequence of the fact that no institutionalized Hungarian linguistics existed yet but was also an example of political nationalism in a purportedly harmless form.

While in some countries language reforms were organized centrally, by way of a national “academy” such as the *Académie Française* or the *Real Academia Española* (Raag 1998: 14), in Hungary, when the language reform arose, there were no such institutions yet. This initial lack of institutional frameworks is typical not only of politically subordinated languages of minority nations. In the English-speaking world as well, language planning has been directed by “individuals of great authority”, lexicographers or grammarians such as Samuel Johnson or Noah Webster. In Hungary, however, national institutions for language policy and research were already created during the nineteenth century as part of the national emancipation, and since then, the connection between national language planning and the (nation-)state has been strong and obvious. (This ideology has persisted until our days, as witnessed by the present government’s recent decision in Hungary to found a National Language Strategy Institute, separate from the existing linguistic research institutions and subject directly to the Prime Minister.) In this perspective, it seems that the leading role of certain individuals in the Hungarian language reform was a transitory necessity rather than a political choice.

In a wider perspective, the Hungarian language reform can also be seen as a reaction to the dynamics of national language policies in the Habsburg empire and in Europe. As already mentioned, in Hungary Latin had played an exceptionally prominent role. It was not just the traditional language of higher education, elite culture, and the Roman Catholic church as everywhere in Western Europe but also, practically until the nineteenth century, the language of administration and even, to some extent, of interethnic communication (of elites) in the old Kingdom of Hungary. Actually, the use and knowledge of Latin was one of the basic building blocks of the traditional *Hungarus* identity (Csáky 1982). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the position of Latin in administration and (elite) communication was dramatically challenged by German, which for some time was even made the official language in Hungary by the notorious language decree which Emperor-King Joseph II issued in 1784 but revoked on his deathbed in 1790. The strengthening of German was also connected to the spread of Romantic Nationalism and its ideal of a monolingual nationstate. The effects of these processes can be summarized in the following table (translated and slightly modified from Nádor 2002: 27):

Period	Dominant (Elite) Language (Assumed or Documented)	Non-dominant Language(s)	
the Conquest (<i>Honfoglalás</i>), late ninth century AD	[Hungarian as the language of the invading tribes or their leading strata]	other languages	
the Old Kingdom of Hungary	Latin	Hungarian	other languages
Hungary as part of the Habsburg Empire	Latin	German	Hungarian and other languages
1784–1844	German / Hungarian	(Hungarian and) other languages	
1844–	Hungarian	minority languages in Hungary (German, Slavic languages, Romanian, etc.)	

The Hungarian language reform began at the turn of the nineteenth century as an initiative of writers and poets and rapidly gained the enthusiastic support of many intellectuals (theologians, physicians, scientists, etc.). Only later, in the course of the nineteenth century, did the supporting institutional structures emerge, such as the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (founded in 1827). The activists of the language reform movement wanted to promote higher education and science in Hungarian (which required, for example, development and standardization of terminology in various fields). Furthermore, they consciously worked to make Hungarian a language of literature conforming to European standards. This meant not only the enhancement of vocabulary but included aesthetic aspects, which became evident especially in the works of poets such as Ferenc Kazinczy and Ferenc Kölcsey. According to Ferenc Toldy (quoted, for instance, in Pándi 1965: 581), “from Révai [Miklós Révai (1750–1807), author of a path-breaking Hungarian grammar], the nation learnt to speak correctly, from Kazinczy, to speak beautifully, from Pál Bugát [1793–1865; physician and activist of the reform movement] to speak skilfully and succinctly” [*Helyesen szólani Révai, szépen Kazinczy, műszabatosan Bugát Pál tanították a nemzetet*].

Among the results of the language reform, lexical development is perhaps the most conspicuous. New terms were created for science and engineering, culture and education, and law and administration, which implied a conscious encoding of lexical contrasts which were present in other European languages. For instance, Kazinczy wrote that the Hungarian equivalent for the German word *Geist* ‘spirit, ghost’ could not be *lélek*, because *lélek* [‘soul’] already corresponds to *Seele* in German, and so another word—*szellem* [‘spirit, ghost’]—was needed. Aesthetic goals were also explicitly highlighted by the language reform activists. “Ugly” (*rút-alakú*) words were to be substituted with more beautiful and more compact ones, so, for example, Kazinczy (1979: 444) considered *év* [‘year’] aesthetically better than *esztendő*. It is noteworthy that the latter seems to be making a comeback in Hungarian political language use, perhaps because of its associations to the Bible—*hét szűk esztendő* [‘seven lean years’]—or the text of the Hungarian national anthem. Beyond the aesthetic values attached to individual words, language reformers also believed that by enriching the vocabulary they would make the language as a whole more expressive and versatile. The limits of lexical enhancement were discussed in

heated debates between the so-called "neologists," advocates of neologisms, and the more conservative "orthologists," who were less ready to accept newly created words into the language. Both, however, generally agreed that the adoption of new foreign words should be avoided.

Even today, the results of puristic language planning challenge language learners and amaze tourists because words which in many other European languages are easily recognizable internationalisms have a completely different equivalent, such as *zene* ['music'], *zongora* ['piano'], or *rendőrség* ['police']. Moreover, nineteenth-century neologisms are omnipresent, and it is difficult to imagine how Modern Hungarian could function without words such as *anyag* ['matter, material'], *gyár* ['factory'], or *cím* ['address; title']. In handbooks of the history of Hungarian (see Zsilinszky 2003: 177ff.), these many neologisms are usually classified according to the ways in which they were formed:

1. words from dialects (for example: *doboz* ['box']) or Old Hungarian literature (for example: *terem* ['hall, room']), sometimes with a slightly changed meaning (*hős* ['hero'], which originally meant 'boy, young man');
2. phonetically adapted foreign words (for example: *bálna* ['whale' from Latin *balaena*]);
3. derivatives (for instance: *növény* ['plant'] ← *nő* ['to grow']), sometimes with suffixes which otherwise were not productive (*pincér* ['waiter'] ← *pince* ['cellar']; *adag* ['portion'] ← *ad* ['to give']; *állam* ['state'] ← *áll* ['to stand']);
4. retrograde derivatives and "clippings" (*ábra* ['figure, diagram'] ← *ábráz(ol)* ['to picture, to illustrate'], a loanword from Slavic *obraz* ['picture'] reanalysed as a derivative in -z-);
5. compound words: *rendőr* ['policeman' (order-guard)]; *állatkert* ['zoo' (animal-garden)]; etc.

Many of these neologisms can actually be analysed as calques from major European languages. Not only did the terminological need for expressions of a certain meaning (for instance, technical innovations such as 'railway') come from abroad, often the onomasiological motivation was also copied from another language—in many cases, German. For instance, the semantic connection between 'waiter' [*pincér*] and 'cellar' [*pince*] is obvious only for those who understand the connection between German *Kellner* and *Keller*, and the derivation of *anyag* ['material, matter'] from *anya* ['mother'] reflected the relationship between Latin *materia* and *mater*.

Standard handbook accounts of the Hungarian language reform usually focus on its most visible results, the new vocabulary, while less attention is paid to the standardization of orthography, and even less to the standardization of morphology and syntax. Yet, creating unified and viable standards for the spelling and grammar of the Hungarian literary language was just as important as creating new words for modern technology and culture. Without a standardized literary form, it is very difficult to teach and support the written use of a language, to compose grammars, textbooks or dictionaries. For example, at the end of the eighteenth century, the [ts] sound could still be written in two ways, either with *cz* or with *tz*. These spellings were originally connected to the written traditions of the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches, respectively, although by Kazinczy's times, the choice of spelling did not automatically depend on religious affiliation any more. How can you look up a word in a dictionary if you don't know whether it is spelled with the "Protestant" *tz* or the "Catholic" *cz*? The "Catholic" spellings *cz* (later: *c*) and *cs* finally prevailed over the "Protestant" *tz* and *ts*, and in this reform Kazinczy himself played an important role (Korompay 2003: 698).

The European Context: Language Policies and National Emancipation

The Hungarian language reform, although perhaps exceptionally radical, intensive, and well-documented, is not the only example of its kind. At roughly the same time, Serbian and Czech went through a literary revitalization and standardization process, while Slovak and the Latin-script Romanian literary language were standardized a few decades later, in the mid-nineteenth century. In Finland, which since 1809 was an autonomous grand duchy within the Russian empire, the new political situation lent support to a development which ended with the official acknowledgment of the Finnish language in education and administration in the late nineteenth century. In Norway, the separation from Denmark and, later on, Sweden formed the political background to the linguistic emancipation which resulted in the creation of *landsmål/nynorsk*, a standard language based on authentic Norwegian dialects, instead of the Danish-based *bokmål*. And finally, the perhaps exceptionally radical language reform (*keeleeuendus* or 'language renewal') in Estonia in the early twentieth century should be mentioned. Its leader, Johannes Aavik (1880–1973), was in many respects a "disciple" of Kazinczy's. Estonian scholars have repeatedly pointed out that Aavik's explicitly formulated aesthetic goal, the "beauty principle", corresponds to Kazinczy's views, although Aavik himself did not particularly emphasize this Hungarian connection (Alekōrs 1937; Raag 1998: 24).

The European language reform movements in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were closely connected to ethnopolitical emancipation processes. The ideology of romantic nationalism required a national language which could be used in nationwide institutions, in national literature, culture, science, and arts as well as in the administration of the nation-state. For romanticism, the national language would represent the *Volkgeist*, the mentality of a nation understood as an organic or biological whole, an organism or a family, meaning that an ideal nation was to be monolingual—an ideology which even in our days means that the anachronistic idea of ethnic purity is projected on heterogeneous and urban populations (Barbour 2000: 6). Sadly enough, this monolingual ideology has led in almost all, if not all, nation-states to the disadvantaging or even oppression and assimilation of linguistic minorities. In Hungary, these policies culminated in the notorious *Lex Apponyi* school act in 1907 (introducing compulsory teaching of Hungarian in all primary schools in the Kingdom of Hungary) which, in the words of Szarka (2007), was an attempt "to modernize the institutional system of Hungarian primary schools, linked to the goals of Magyarization" [*a magyarosítás céljaival egybekapcsolva próbálta a magyar népiskolák intézményrendszerét modernizálni*]. In the Kingdom of Hungary before WWI, the Magyarization policies were politically motivated by the large numbers of non-Hungarian ethnic minorities, which made Hungarian nationalists afraid of becoming a minority in their own country. However, even in the Nordic countries, where the old minorities were far too small in number to threaten the majority position of the national language, the Sámi as well as the Tornedal Finns in Sweden, the Kvens (Finnmark Finns) in Norway or the Karelians in Finland were subject to assimilatory policies well into the second half of the twentieth century.

In general, it can be stated that the rise of the nation-states brought a decisive change to the earlier ways of language management; more precisely, a transition from receptive multilingualism as in the Late Middle Ages to productive bi- or multilingualism as in the emerging nation-states (Braunmüller 2007: 30). In the older framework of pragmatic multilingual language management, the language of education, cultural institutions or administration did not need to be the mother tongue of the majority or even the mother tongue of the ruling class. (Neither Latin as used in large parts of Europe nor French as the aristocrats'

language of habitual use in nineteenth-century Russia were mother tongues or ethnic languages of the ruling class.) In such a system, multilingualism in various ad-hoc forms was self-evident and positively valued. The common people were often exposed to many languages and could communicate in them to some extent, the upper classes could learn both the common people's vernaculars (for instance, already in their childhood from servants) and the languages of literary culture and administration (by way of formal teaching, at school or from a private teacher). In a nation-state, by contrast, multilingualism is often unilateral, with minorities expected to learn the majority language, while the majority does not feel obliged to learn other languages. On the contrary, multilingualism may be considered harmful, suspect, even anti-patriotic and treacherous, while monolingualism in the national language becomes a purportedly uniting factor, a hallmark of true patriotism. In Hungary, the eighteenth century saw a clear transition from earlier multilingual language management (the "empire model") to monolingual nation-state ideology (Nádor 2002: 58–69).

The shift from pragmatic multilingualism to monolingual nation-state ideologies in Hungary only took place after the most intensive phase of the Hungarian language reform. In fact, the introduction of Hungarian as the official state language in 1844 would not have been possible without the preceding standardization of literary Hungarian. The language activists of the most intensive phase of the language reform, Kazinczy and his contemporaries, lived and worked within an "empire model" of pragmatically multilingual language management, a model that in their time was still viable. However, the problem with pragmatic multilingualism of the "empire" type is that it is hardly compatible with latter-day European ideals of democratic administration and education. Pragmatic multilingualism of the "medieval" type, with *lingue franche* for nation-wide uses, can only function in a society in which the official and literary language use only concerns a relatively small elite stratum (which can afford the necessary language education), while all other languages mainly live only in non-written domains and do not have to compete with each other for resources and judicious representation in administration, education and media. The "empire model" was, perhaps, conceivable only in the "time of innocence", before the rise of nationalism, and at a time in which language choices were practical questions and not yet burdened with symbolic, political functions.

Language Planning, Status Planning, Corpus Planning

In Kazinczy's times, language planning was obviously seen from a holistic point of view, as part and parcel of the national emancipation but without dividing language planning activities into different components. In contrast, since the 1960s and the work of linguists such as Einar Haugen (see Hornberger 2005), it has been customary to distinguish the dimensions of *status planning* and *corpus planning*, while sometimes *language acquisition planning* is mentioned as the third field of language policy. Status planning means creating the institutional frameworks and opportunities for language use, by way of laws, regulations and policies as well as institutions (for instance, schools) in which the language is to be used. The use of the language, of course, requires corpus planning, the creating of material (corpora), such as law texts or other documents in the language at issue, school textbooks, media products etc. Corpora, in turn, do not necessarily come into being if a language does not have an official status. For instance, school textbooks are not created in a language which is not used as a teaching medium. For many endangered languages, this mutual dependence leads to a vicious circle. On the other hand, if this circle is turned into reverse direction, positive developments may enforce each other, as in the "Catherine Wheel" model proposed by the Catalan linguist Miquel Strubell (2001). The more a

language is transmitted to children, taught and studied, the more demand there will be for products and services in the language, increasing demand will result in increasing supply of language products, and this supply in turn will create more confidence in the usability and "usefulness" of the language, which means that the language will be learnt and used by more and more people. In retrospect, we can claim that something similar to this happened with many Eastern and Central European languages, including Hungarian, in the course of national and linguistic emancipation in the nineteenth century.

The Catherine Wheel model is not necessarily applicable for all endangered languages; for instance, it hardly functions in situations in which the language at issue is no more used widely in informal domains or transmitted to next generations, such as in the case of the severely endangered Kven in Norway (Laakso et al. 2013: 16). Moreover, it presupposes a Western "market economy" type of society, consisting of free individual consumers, and a generally accepted commodification of language products. Obviously, at the time of the Hungarian language reform, this was not the prevailing view on society and its functions. Instead, the activists of the language reform movement operated with general and idealized concepts which had no explicit connection to market economy: science, knowledge, learning.

In the 1770s, György Bessenyei in his program for the development of public education put it this way: a country can only develop by way of knowledge and science, and people can only acquire knowledge in their own language, which means that the development of the language is of primary importance (Korompay 2003: 697). Bessenyei's program seems to reflect a very elitist view on language and gives the impression of an idealistic dream. In his times, a school system which would have covered the whole population and enabled the education of the whole people of Hungary was, in István Fried's words quoted above, something that only existed in wishful thinking. At the same time, however, Bessenyei and other early activists of national emancipation and language reform seem to represent a surprisingly modern view on language. It seems that they regarded language rather as a tool, something that can be objectively analysed, developed, taught and learnt, than as an organic part of the nation and its identity in its Romantic Nationalist, "racial" sense.

Linguistics and Linguistic Culture

The historical developments in language planning are, of course, connected with extralinguistic political and ideological developments such as nationalism and ethnic emancipation. However, language standardization—as shown by the example of dominant state languages such as German or French—is not just a matter of emancipation but part of the linguistic culture of its times. This also includes the knowledge and ideas about language as a phenomenon and its study.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, new ideas emerged which gradually revolutionized the study of language and led to the professionalization of linguistic science in its modern sense through the discovery of language relatedness and the methods of historical-comparative linguistics. As one can read in almost any handbook of linguistics, it was the British colonial overlords in India who, studying Sanskrit, first realized that there was a special relationship between this exotic language and the major European languages, and understood that this relationship, the Indo-European relatedness, could be investigated by understanding the mechanism of language change. As Sir William Jones, civil servant and philologist, put it in his often-quoted speech in 1786 (see Campbell & Poser 2008: 5), there is "... a stronger affinity, both in the roots of verbs and in the forms of grammar, than could possibly have been produced

by accident; so strong indeed, that no philologist could examine them all three [= Sanskrit, Greek, and Latin], without believing them to have sprung from some common source, which, perhaps, no longer exists..."

Actually, Sir William Jones was not the first scholar to formulate the idea that languages which are not conspicuously similar nor mutually intelligible may still be distant relatives, descending from a common proto-language. Already in 1770, the Hungarian astronomer János Sajnovics had in his path-breaking work demonstrated that Hungarian and Sámi are related (or, in the undeveloped terminology of those times, "the same", *idem*). The idea that the Hungarian language, so markedly different from all its neighbors, might have something to do with some other equally "strange" languages of Russia or the Far North of Europe had been formulated by many European scholars already since the 17th century, but it was Sajnovics who first attempted to systematically demonstrate the relatedness between Hungarian and Sámi on the basis of correspondences in vocabulary and grammar, pointing out that languages change with time and that relatedness does not necessarily mean superficial similarity or mutual intelligibility (see for example Stipa 1990: 209–212; Bartha 2005). Sajnovics's work was widely acknowledged in international scholarly circles, and since those times comparative-historical Finno-Ugric studies have developed in parallel, often in cooperation and interaction with comparative Indo-European studies.

This insight—the idea that languages, like animal or plant species, did not always exist in their present form but have gradually developed from something completely different—gave rise to modern comparative-historical linguistics, which developed in parallel with the general historicity and theories of evolution in nature sciences. Linguistic research began to detach itself from the tradition of philology and understand itself as a science: quasi-exact, "scientific" methods were developed, and linguistic studies were professionalized in their own right.

In the late 18th century, the disciplines of modern humanities, the classical *artes* in academia had mainly been understood as preparatory and accompanying studies for theologians and jurists, and their institutional position was unclear (see Schlieben-Lange and Weydt 2004: 120). This situation began to change in the course of the nineteenth century. However, especially the linguistic study of the minor, emancipating languages of Europe was institutionalized relatively slowly. Most of the pioneers of nineteenth-century language planning and linguistics in Central and Eastern Europe were no linguists but poets (like Kazinczy and Kölcsey), physicians (like Sámuel Gyarmathi, who continued Sajnovics's work on Finno-Ugric language comparisons, or Pál Bugát, the language activist and creator of many Hungarian medical terms), lawyers, priests, or scientists (Miklós Révai, the grammarian, was a Catholic priest, János Sajnovics, the pioneer of comparative Finno-Ugric studies, was a learned Jesuit, an astronomer, and a mathematician). In fact, it could not have been otherwise, as there were no institutes or university chairs for their languages (at least not in the sense of modern linguistic inquiry) in which they could have acquired an academic qualification.

In Kazinczy's times, in the most intensive phase of the Hungarian language reform, the time of professional linguistics had not yet begun in Hungary. Kazinczy himself was a typical amateur "language practitioner" of his time, with a classical gentleman's education in law (the traditional prerequisite for state office), theology and languages. The activists of the language reform had no competence to really evaluate the first, revolutionary results of comparative linguistics, which were made by people like János Sajnovics or Sámuel Gyarmathi. Some activists of the Hungarian language reform, such as Pál Bugát and András Dugonics, enthusiastically embraced the ideas of János Sajnovics and Sámuel Gyarmathi about the

relatedness between Hungarian and some exotic languages of the North. Others, also highly esteemed representatives of the cultural emancipation movement such as György Bessenyei, vehemently opposed them, although mainly for emotional and prestige reasons. The idea of being related with primitive peoples ("the relatives who smell of fish fat", *a halzsíros atyafiság*) was too much for many Hungarian nationalists of those times (Korhonen 1984: 30ff.; Tervonen 1984: 59ff.; Stipa 1990: 213–218, 245–256, 331–332). All in all, however, the emerging historical linguistics and the ideas about the prehistory and relatedness of Hungarian, whether valid or pseudoscientific from today's point of view, had very little effect on the Hungarian language reform. The activists of the language reform movement, irrespective of whether they accepted the findings of early comparative linguists or not, hardly took them into account in their practical work. Their view on language was almost completely ahistorical, or at least did not reach further in time than to the most intensive phase of Hungarian literary use at the times of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, especially to the questions of lexicon and stylistics in different genres.

At the time of the Hungarian language reform, languages were not yet placed on the time axis of evolution and not compared with earlier, reconstructed stages of development. Instead, European learned discourse focused on the perceived positive and negative qualities of existing (literary) languages, either modern or classical (that is, ancient Greek and Latin). Learned gentlemen compared and discussed the "beauty", "richness," or "perfection" of diverse European languages. In 1794, the Academy in Berlin announced a prize for an essay answering the question on the "comparison of the main languages of Europe, living and dead, as concerns their richness, regularity, vigor, harmony and other virtues: in what respect is one superior to another, which ones are closest to the perfection of human language?" (Schlieben-Lange and Weydt 2004: 119.) The prize was given to Daniel Jenisch, a German theologian and philologist who in his essay compared fourteen languages (classical Latin and Greek, some modern Romance, Germanic and Slavic languages) on the basis of their "richness", "vigor", "beauty" and "clarity" and ended up stating that it was Greek that had the most of these virtues. Jenisch's work was read and enthusiastically commented upon by numerous Hungarian intellectuals, including Kazinczy himself. Many Hungarian activists used Jenisch's criteria when formulating their thoughts on how the Hungarian language should be developed into perfection (see e.g. Balázs 1986: 25–27; Németh 2007: 112).

The Hungarian language reform took place mainly in a pre-Positivist context, before the time of modern comparative linguistics – or modern empirical linguistics, in which the spoken language (especially in terms of late Romantic Nationalism in the late nineteenth century: the "authentic", "unspoiled", "pure" dialects of the common people) came to be prioritized over the classics of written literature. Philological activities followed the ideals of elitist aesthetics, found their inspiration in the tradition of written literature, especially Greek and Latin classics, and operated with fuzzy and pre-theoretical concepts such as "beauty" or "perfection," which later, as *gesunkenes Kulturgut*, resurface in romantic poetry. Linguistic discourse had not yet separated itself from the aesthetics and philosophy of literature.

In Place of a Conclusion: Hungary Never Was Alone in Europe

The Hungarian language reform took place in a historical situation in which the role of the Hungarian language had to be redefined. The circumstances of this process were partly similar to those in many other countries. Latin, the traditional language of European culture and civilization, and after the French revolution French as well had lost part of their international

importance, so that in the German-language area we can speak of a language-political vacuum (Schlieben-Lange and Weydt 2004: 120). In this situation, a standard language based on the people's vernacular and symbolizing its ethnic identity could emerge as a unifying factor, in particular in Germany, where neither political nor religious unity existed at those times (see e.g. Barbour 2000: 15).

Although the nationalist motivation of the Hungarian language reform was very similar to that of other contemporary projects in Europe, the *nyelvújítás* also had some "unique" characteristics, arising from the structure and history of the Hungarian language. In her study on East Central European languages and nationalisms, Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (2000: 216–217) claims that the Hungarian language reform differed from other similar projects of the region in that other similar reforms emerged from the common people, not from the higher strata as in Hungary. In this context, Törnquist-Plewa refers to the later language policies in Hungary especially during the second half of the nineteenth century. Her argumentation is somewhat anachronistic (and in the context of linguistic emancipation, expressions such as *the obsession of the Magyars with their language* sound strange). Moreover, we can claim that even language reforms supposedly arising from the common people are actually promoted by some higher-status group which seeks political legitimation in the people's interests. For instance, according to Ylikangas (2007) the linguistic emancipation process in nineteenth-century Finland was propelled by the new urban middle class which, often bilingually raised, used the Finnish-speaking common people as its political allies against the Swedish-speaking aristocracy. However, Törnquist-Plewa is right in that the background of the Hungarian language reform was more "elitist" than, for instance, it was with the Slavic peoples of the Habsburg empire. As Hungary during the nineteenth century was transformed into a nation-state in which ethnic Hungarians played the leading role, Hungarian had a clearer connection to the ethnolinguistic identity of the ruling classes in Hungary than other languages of the old Kingdom of Hungary did.

The special characteristics of the Hungarian language reform were due in part to the typological properties of the language itself. The rich agglutinative morphology of Hungarian offered an exceptionally wide array of means for the formation of neologisms: not just compounding, as in the German neologisms *Augenblick* 'moment' ("eye-blinking") or *Grundlage* 'foundation' ("ground-setting"), but suffixes or chains of suffixes, as in *pillanat* ('moment') or *alap* ('foundation'). At the same time, however, derivatives containing complex chains of suffixes were less desirable from an aesthetic point of view, and so, language reform activists sometimes resorted to back-formations or "clipping". For instance, Kazinczy (1979: 444) recommended that instead of *kegyesség* ('graciousness, mercifulness,' which contain the adjective suffix *-es* and the abstract noun suffix *-ség*), the simple stem *kegy* ('grace, mercy') be used.

Moreover, as mentioned above, Hungarian is a quasi-isolate, without close linguistic relatives or related neighbors, and for this reason, drawing the boundaries to the neighboring languages and defining the position of the language in relation to its sister varieties was not an issue. In this respect, the Hungarian language reform clearly differs from many other European language reform movements, which were characterized by questions of defining the relationship between related varieties (for example, Czech vs. Slovak: which words or forms are too Czech to be authentic Slovak or vice versa?) or the use of material from related languages (for example, the Romanian language planners consciously borrowed from other Romance languages to replace Slavic elements, and the Estonian language planners freely adopted hundreds of Finnish

loanwords which were perceived as more authentic than the numerous German loanwords in Estonian).

Hungarian is also very homogeneous in comparison to many other European nation-state languages, in that the differences between Hungarian dialects are small, and determining the dialect basis for Standard Hungarian was no major issue. In some other European language reforms, the choice of the dialect basis for the national language has been a matter of major debates or even "battles of dialects." In Estonia, the rivalry between the Southern and Northern written traditions was only resolved in the nineteenth century with the Northern variety ousting the Southern one. At the same time in Finland, the deep differences between the Western-based old literary language and the Eastern dialects (which, showing less Swedish influences, were often perceived as more authentic) were reconciled by standardizing a literary language which contained many artificial compromise solutions. Of course, discussions on the dialect basis for the Hungarian national standard were almost completely absent also because the Hungarian language reform took place earlier than in Estonia or Finland, before the times of modern empirical dialectology. Kazinczy and other pioneers of the *nyelvújítás* worked in the spirit of traditional philology, their ideals were determined by classical European literature and not by the "authenticity" of the genuine language of the people in the Romantic sense.

Although some characteristics of the Hungarian language reform were due to the peculiarities of the Hungarian language itself and its language-geographic or language-sociological situation, we can still claim that the *nyelvújítás* was definitely not a solitary phenomenon which is part of the Hungarian cultural history and nothing else. Its activists, although not very well versed in linguistics in the modern sense of the word—they could not be, as modern linguistic inquiry into the Hungarian language, including its history, its relatives and its dialects had not yet been properly institutionalized or professionalized—often had a classical philological education. They spoke or read various languages, knew the literary traditions of Western Europe, including the classical Greek and Latin authors, and wanted to cultivate and develop Hungarian in the spirit of European culture. Despite its nationalist goals, the Hungarian language reform was an international phenomenon, connected to international language-political developments and scholarly models of its time, and as shown by the above-mentioned ideological connection between Ferenc Kazinczy and Johannes Aavik's work in Estonia, Hungarian language reform activists inspired linguistic emancipation and language planning even in far-away Estonia a hundred years later.

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