

The current state and main problems of Hungarian native language education

ISTVÁN JÁNK^{1,2*} 

¹ Department of Hungarian Linguistics, Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Hungary

² Research Centre for Language Planning, Institute of Hungarian Research, Hungary

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ABSTRACT

The paper aims to present the current state, problems, challenges and opportunities of Hungarian native language education. It does so as a tribute to the memory and oeuvre of László Kálmán, who passed away in 2021, and as a way of preserving his approach characterized by a critical approach, but also by a focus on possible solutions. On the one hand, the study outlines the goals and tasks of native language education, including language teaching, drawing heavily on the concept of communicative competence as defined and represented by László Kálmán (see e.g. Kálmán 2010; Kálmán & Molnár 2009). On the other hand, the current state of native language education is described in the light of this framework. In addition to the current regulation of the content of native language education, the study will also describe the current situation with regard to the available teaching aids and textbooks. In this context, and partly independently of it, the paper will examine the question of what major areas of native language education need to be changed and what opportunities are available in this respect.

KEYWORDS

L1 education, Hungarian native language education, Hungarian language and literature, Kálmán László, reading comprehension

1. INTRODUCTION

“One of my favourite hornets’ nests is language education in schools, with all its absurdities. Almost every detail of it is questionable,” wrote [László Kálmán \(2021\)](#) about a textbook exercise

* Corresponding author. E-mail: jankisti08@gmail.com

for second graders, adding a comment about the students, “Don’t they hate school enough to be insulted by this?”. It is a telling fact that grammar (officially Hungarian language) has been ranked as the most unpopular subject in both previous and more recent subject popularity surveys in Hungary (e.g. Csapó 2000; Pap & Józsa 2000; Csikós 2012). This may be due to a variety of factors, ranging from more global social and educational policy factors to local, classroom and teacher-level problems.

Similarly to subject popularity surveys, the results of student ability tests do not reveal much good about the effectiveness of Hungarian native language education and teaching (in other words L1 education or mother tongue education). This statement is confirmed by the latest data of the most important international and Hungarian reading comprehension assessments. Both the *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)* and the *Hungarian National Assessment of Basic Competences (OKM)* show that reading comprehension skills in the age groups under review are low, whether compared to international averages or interpreted in the domestic context. In practice, this means that at least one third of the Hungarian children, or about 50% of them if less conservative estimates are used, are definitely functional illiterates, i.e. they are unable to extract the essential information from a text, to use it to create a new text or to solve a problem, or to filter out misleading information (cf. Oktatási Hivatal 2022; OECD 2022).

László Kálmán, who passed away in 2021, was one of the most influential Hungarian linguists, who focused on educational linguistics and native language education. He was an active participant, facilitator and author of much work in native language education (see e.g. Kálmán 2006, 2010; Kálmán & Molnár 2009 or the volumes of the *Sulinova Text Comprehension and Text Formation Programme*, e.g. Kálmán & Molnár 2006). The present study aims to follow his work by describing the current state of Hungarian native language education, its problems, and the related proposals and options for solutions.

There are several arguments and causal links that can be used to explain why there are many problems with Hungarian native language education. In this paper I will attempt to enumerate them, trying to take all possible factors into account, but without attempting to analyse all of them in depth. Nevertheless, it is possible that the list will not be exhaustive, due to its initial nature, but it may prove to be a useful starting point for further discussion of the problems of language teaching.

The paper first outlines a modern, linguistically fresh approach to the aims and tasks of native language education, including language teaching. It then describes the current content and legal regulation of native language teaching, as well as the emerging problems. Then, continuing with the description of the state of native-language education, the current state of Hungarian-language teaching materials, teaching aids and textbooks is discussed. Some important problems are highlighted in connection with the foregoing, and the next section describes the areas in most need of remedy to be addressed in native language education. Finally, the study concludes with a summary of the problems and opportunities.

2. THE AIMS AND TASKS OF NATIVE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

In the 20th century, especially in its second half a wide range of language teaching objectives (cf. structuralist, generativist and cognitive-functionalist approaches) were identified by



language teaching professionals and non-professionals alike. A grammar-centred approach, which mostly meant memorising abstract grammatical rules, dominated both international (cf. Walker 1990; Keen 1997; Hudson & Walmsley 2005; Pieniżek & Štěpáník 2016) and Hungarian language teaching for centuries (cf. Szabó G. 2006; Fehér 2018, 21–42). This was accompanied by a strong “language cultivation” attitude (Kálmán 2010), which tried to safeguard the Hungarian language by referring to various linguistic ideologies, misconceptions and superstitions, and to perceive this as the essence of language teaching (see Domonkosi, Lanstyák & Posgay 2007).

Although the situation summarised briefly above is generally similar today (Bartha 2022), it should be mentioned that in the last few decades there has been a growing trend in native language education that focuses on a cognitive, functional and constructivist approach (cf. Fehér 2018, 21–26; Pléh 2019). In this approach, communicative abilities – real language use, the role of the speech situation and the speech partner, different registers, etc. – are given a prominent role (see e.g. Kálmán 2006; Kádár 2017; Kugler 2018; Parapatics 2018). In this context, László Kálmán (2010) – on the basis of Hymes’s concept of communicative competence, which has been repeatedly supplemented since the 1970s (cf. e.g. Canale & Swain 1980; Bachman & Palmer 1996, 67–79) – writes: “language education should be about language and language use, without a sharp separation of the two – and without requiring an absence of value. The focus of language education in schools should not be on grammar, on descriptive grammar [...] language education should focus on three main areas: the development of text comprehension and text production skills, the development of language awareness and the dissemination of linguistic knowledge.”

In addition, it is certainly relevant – although Kálmán does not mention it, but given his oeuvre he clearly considered it essential – to shape linguistic attitudes, i.e. to educate children to be linguistically tolerant and conscious. Such language users respect the identity of others and the expression and manifestation of identity in language, and know that the language they use does not necessarily reveal personality traits, literacy or anything else.

Although it is not included in the above-mentioned goals and tasks, many experts in educational linguistics (e.g. Keen 1997; Roshan & Elhami 2016; Szabó 2020) also consider it essential to convey a conceptual system and meta-language that is suitable for interpreting linguistic phenomena. This implies that, in addition to developing skills and shaping attitudes, it is necessary to develop a conceptual framework in which the student moves together with the teacher: a theoretical knowledge base of the language that facilitates comprehension. It is primarily a set of knowledge elements of the subject, but also knowledge elements that are intrinsically linked and form a meaningful system, not ignoring semantic factors and issues.

Based on the foregoing, the main aims and tasks of native language education therefore include (1) the development of communicative linguistic competence, which enables the (more) effective use of language. This includes the development of text comprehension and composition, linguistic awareness, stylistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills; (2) language teaching, which presents the interesting and useful aspects of linguistics; (3) the development of a common conceptual framework and meta-language for the interpretation of linguistic phenomena, in which the various elements of linguistic knowledge are interconnected (4) the shaping of linguistic attitudes, which helps society as a whole to become more linguistically tolerant (5) the promotion of other (literacy) fields, which occurs more automatically, often accidentally, than



the achievement of the objectives listed above (cf. Kálmán 2010; Domonkosi & Ludányi 2020, 41–42).

If only one of the objectives described above is achieved within the framework of a grammar class, it is a significant improvement compared to previous practice. If more than one is achieved, then native language education can be truly useful and meaningful. However, this requires certain conditions that are either partially or completely absent in Hungarian native language education. These conditions are outlined below.

3. CURRENT STATE AND PROBLEMS OF HUNGARIAN NATIVE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

3.1. Content and legal regulation

Act CXC of 2011 on National Public Education (better known as the Public Education Act) regulates the process of education and teaching in Hungary today, which was supplemented by an amendment in 2019 (*Act LXX of 2019*). The Act on Public Education lays down the legal and organisational rules of public education (from pre-school to secondary school leaving certificate), the rights and obligations of pupils, their parents and teachers, as well as of the managing authorities and the specialised educational services, and defines the timeframes for education. In addition, the Public Education Act provides for “the assessment of the development of pupils’ literacy and mathematical skills in the sixth, eighth and tenth grades of full-time school education”. These assessments are clearly intended to help schools to focus more on skills such as reading comprehension, as mentioned above. Unfortunately, however, this often only goes so far as to involve pupils in the type of exercises included in the assessments, without directly addressing reading comprehension at all. A solution would be to not only expect Hungarian lessons to develop comprehension skills, but also to include a subject specifically aimed at developing this skill in the timetable, or simply to avoid teaching literature during grammar lessons (more on this later).

The next stage of content regulation is curriculum regulation, which in Hungary is currently a bipolar process, involving both input and output. The input side includes the various curricula (e.g. the *National Core Curriculum* or the framework curricula), training guidelines and qualification requirements. Output regulation, on the other hand, is based on examination systems (e.g. the school-leaving examinations). The *National Core Curriculum*, which has existed since 1995 and has been replaced/revised several times (in 1997, 2003, 2007, 2012 and most recently in 2020), is the main input regulator.

In brief, the currently applicable *National Core Curriculum 2020* is quite modern at a theoretical level, in terms of the declared principles and objectives, and is in line with the objectives outlined in the previous sub-chapter (e.g. emphasis on language awareness, identity or linguistic diversity). However, the amount of knowledge to be acquired has increased rather than decreased, creating an ambiguous situation. Knowledge-based, constructivist language teaching cannot be achieved if teachers have to teach the excessive amount of learning material that is compulsory under the *National Core Curriculum* and the framework curricula. Knowledge, including knowledge of the native language, is still primarily a concept characterised by



content rather than quality, i.e. the content rules for input do not ensure a balance between content and usable knowledge.

The same can be said about the main output content regulator, the school-leaving examination, especially if we take the planned changes for 2024 and the subject of Hungarian language and literature as a focus. From 2024, the structure of the exam will be changed, with a greater emphasis on the testing of factual knowledge: argumentative writing will be removed from the first set of questions, and students will be given a test on literature instead. In the second part, the comparative analysis exercise will be removed and replaced by a topic essay (cf. the sample tasks published by the Education Office in 2021). In other words, the focus will be clearly on subject knowledge.

3.2. Current state of teaching aids, textbooks and teaching materials

The problems described above are further exacerbated by the so-called Textbook Act (*Act CCXXXII of 2013 on the Supply of Textbooks for National Public Education*), which entered into force in 2013 and which severely restricts the free market for textbooks. The state has acquired two publishers (Apáczai Publishing House and Nemzedékek Tudása Textbook Publishing House) and at the same time developed, with the help of the Educational Research and Development Institute, experimental and new generation textbooks and the related digital teaching materials. Their quality and professionalism are highly questionable, both in the case of Hungarian language and literature and other subjects (cf. Jánk 2020). It should be noted, however, that the first copies of the grammar textbooks developed more recently by the Education Office show progress in the case of several topics and subtopics, but no comprehensive analysis has yet been conducted.

In addition to textbooks, methodological aids, teacher's manuals and guides, there are tools that can significantly improve the effectiveness of native language education. In the last decade, several high quality teacher's aids and exercise books (e.g. Kádár 2017, 2018; Kugler 2018) have been published. Among these books we can also mention the series of *Teaching Guides for Hungarian Language Teachers* published by Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary (e.g. Kontra 2018; Hegedűs 2019; Dóla 2020) and some of the MID teaching guides (e.g. Fóris 2018; Nádor 2018). However, Hungarian linguistics and native language education have not yet produced a comprehensive methodological toolkit with a fresh approach, integrating the latest findings of linguistics and pedagogy. No such work has been published in Hungarian for at least 15 years (see Kernya 1996; Adamikné 2002; Szili 2006).

In addition to textbooks, exercise books and methodological guides for teachers of the Hungarian language, there is a further shortcoming in the area of digital teaching materials. Although there are a number of websites, learning support systems and digital tasks available for native language education (see relevant items of Zanza.tv or Okosdoboz), there is no complex, currently usable, student- and teacher-friendly interface. Although the National Public Education Portal has undergone many improvements, it is still unable to fulfil this function. The problem is exacerbated by the inadequate equipment of schools and the professional competences of teachers involved in native language education (cf. Fekete 2022). Similarly to the methodological manual, the creation of digital teaching materials and the pertinent material and personnel conditions for their use is necessary for the development of Hungarian native language education.



3.3. Reduction/absence of grammar lessons and the consequences

Hungarian teachers often replace grammar lessons with literature lessons, partly due to the curricular requirements mentioned above. Although the framework curricula clearly specify the ratio between grammar and literature (1:1 in grades 5–6; 1:2 in grades 7–8; 1:2.5 in grades 9–10; 1:3 in grades 11–12), the amount of learning material required by the *National Curriculum*, especially about writers and poets, is forcing teachers to increase the number of literature lessons.

Literature and linguistics have probably never been equally distributed in public education or in universities generally.¹ The great reform of the 1970s, when new textbooks were introduced, radically reduced the teaching of grammar in Hungary, and later there were several grammar schools where grammar lessons were (unofficially) discontinued. At the same time, the curriculum of the reformed textbooks led to a significant increase in the amount of learning material in literature, making it impossible to cover the whole of the curriculum. As a result, the practice of skipping grammar lessons (i.e. failing to hold them and replacing them with literature) became more and more common. It is likely that textbook and curriculum writers had the idea that primary school had taught grammar in its entirety, so that only a little repetition and stylistic supplementation would be needed later in secondary school. In many respects, the situation is different in the cross-border areas, but according to some reports and studies, it is essentially the same: the number of grammar lessons is quite and unjustifiably low, and often even non-existent in the upper grades (see e.g. [Sándor 2011](#), 515–517; [Kálmán 2021a](#)).

There are many reasons behind this phenomenon, ranging from personal motivations to simple amateurism and tradition. A significant number of Hungarian teachers dislike grammar lessons, consider it boring (motivation), or simply do not understand its purpose and the linguistic context (dilettantism). So notwithstanding this, they often use grammar lessons to make up for the material they were unable to teach during literature lessons. Sometimes, however, they also teach much more literature because this is what they experienced when they were students (tradition). In any case, the relegation of grammar to the background is basically a very harmful practice because children cannot excel in many other areas (e.g. text tasks in mathematics, or essay writing and independent learning in the case of other subjects) without the necessary language competences (cf. [Volmer 2007](#); [Beacco et al. 2010](#); and e.g. [É. Kiss & Zétényi 2018](#)). Indeed, the language skills and knowledge that are necessary for successful learning and later for thriving in life can best be developed within the framework of grammar. The grammar class can provide the knowledge – provided it is taught properly – that is most needed for problem-solving in different subjects and fields.

Of course, literature can also fulfil this role, and optimally it does so, but the goal is fundamentally different: linguistic-metapragmatic awareness, dealing with different text types (which is an indispensable part of developing text comprehension), and the regularities and possibilities of language use are less emphasized (cf. e.g. [Demeter & Hoss 2020](#); [Szabó 2020](#)).

Moreover, in the case of literature in particular, the phenomenon known in educational theory as the Matthew effect, whereby those who have more will have more, and those who have

¹However, it should be noted that before the 2021 higher education reform, some universities, for example the Department of Hungarian Studies of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pécs, had a 50/50 ratio of linguistics and literature in their curricula for decades.



less will have even less (cf. Merton 1968), is particularly true. Those who already have a good grounding in the language will benefit the most. However, those who do not have a sufficient depth of knowledge in this field will benefit less or nothing from the learning-teaching process, since understanding almost any literary work (especially from a more distant century) requires a huge linguistic effort on the part of the learner. Students need to be exposed to other types of texts besides fiction, and they also need to engage with texts from a different angle. Reading literary works is not enough: linguistics, knowledge of linguistics and its application in a meaningful way are indispensable. Contexts in the text, deeper layers of the text, text cohesion factors, different linguistic elements can only be confidently addressed and explored if the individual has the appropriate text comprehension and analysis tools, strategies, patterns and skills (cf. Józsa et al. 2014). However, only a small percentage of Hungarian students have these skills, according to relevant measurements (e.g. PISA).

3.4. Knowledge of the student and the teacher, the impractical nature of grammar lessons

One of the undoubted reasons of the unpopularity of grammar is that it is still mostly taught in the way it has been for centuries: by teaching abstract, intangible rules about something that is tangible and familiar to the students, since language is part of their everyday lives. In a typical grammar class, the existing knowledge of children and the new knowledge to be taught do not correlate, because the students' linguistic ability, their knowledge about language, is very far removed from the abstract conceptual system that we understand as grammar in school. Kálmán (2021b) approaches this phenomenon from the point of view of the cognitive gap between the highly abstract concept of sense and the rather concrete mental aspects of language use. The dimension that can be translated into practical teaching is construction grammar (on this, see Kálmán 2001), which approaches the concept of grammatical structure (while taking context into account) from the point of view of the combination of the conventionalised form (phonology, syntax) and function (semantics, pragmatics).

The unpopularity of grammar is not only due to reasons related to the subject itself, but it is also worth looking at this phenomenon in relation to other subjects. In a cross-disciplinary context, a comparison with the subject of English is of particular importance. On the one hand, English is also a subject that focuses on language and linguistic phenomena. On the other hand, many of the didactic solutions, tools, methods and learning techniques used in the teaching of English are exemplary. They have been present in the methodological culture of the teaching of English and other foreign languages for decades (see Canale & Swain 1980), but are only recently emerging in the teaching of Hungarian language and literature. On the one hand, there is a strong emphasis on communication, since the child is an active user of the language, although teachers often tend to forget this.

On the other hand, due to the communicative approach, situational exercises and simulations often used in foreign language teaching, where the student is an active participant and not a passive recipient of the language class (cf. Bárdos 2000, 34, 55–65 and 86–101). It is easy to understand that this practice makes the learner more motivated and the learning material easier to absorb, as the learning process seems less formal. This is further reinforced when the tools used are those taken from real life: real, authentic audio materials, postcards, song lyrics, rather than purely artificial examples and texts. The impact can be further enhanced if these methods



and tools are adapted to the children's world. However, this is often not the case in the teaching of Hungarian, so there is a significant methodological gap in the teaching of Hungarian as a native language.

The above problems are perfectly explained and reinforced by the type of methodological training at Hungarian universities. In the Anglo-Saxon higher education system and academic life, the methodology of teaching and practical teacher training (applied linguistics to begin with) is given priority or at least equal importance to theoretical training, i.e. there is no hierarchy of the kind that is typical in Hungary (Kontra 2019, 65–68). The methodological part of teacher training is likely to become much more professional and of a higher quality, and as a consequence, teachers themselves will adopt the same approach. In this context, there are basically two types of competence: theoretical (known or declarative knowledge, to know “what”) and more practical (operational or procedural knowledge, to know “how”) (for more details see Csapó 2003). Theoretical competence includes all the knowledge necessary for teaching the subject, i.e. primarily subject-specific and pedagogical knowledge. If these are missing from the teacher's conceptual framework, there is a good chance that the teacher's work will be ineffective. Similarly, a lack of practical knowledge will also lead to ineffectiveness. Robust knowledge is useless if you cannot transfer it, if you cannot bring it closer to your students, if you do not know the “how” of the teaching process. For example, Hungarian teachers usually tell their students that there are 10 Hungarian dialect regions, often adding that each region is divided into additional areas, blocks, and that people speak differently in each region, or even that dialects are values and treasures that we must preserve and protect. However, in this way, dialect becomes a very distant, archaic concept, especially when children are asked to name the regions or one or two dialects and at the same time they are corrected if they speak in dialect. This is not uncommon, as the school usually favours the standard (also known as colloquial) variety of the language and stigmatises and corrects the varieties that are different from it (Jánk 2016, 2021). This is a direct path to cognitive dissonance in the child's mind, i.e. internal tension will arise due to the contradiction between new information, experience, and existing knowledge (Festinger & Carlsmith 1959).

3.5. Linguistic misconceptions, superstitions, ideologies and the standard language variety

Linguistic ideologies, linguistic misconceptions, linguistic superstitions and myths have been the subject of numerous studies and research in recent decades (see Woolard 2020). Among these, a considerable number have focused on the pedagogical implications of the above concepts along different aspects (e.g. in the case of students, teacher evaluation, specific communities of speakers, linguistic landscapes, classroom discourse, etc.). Understanding and raising awareness of linguistic ideologies and misconceptions is particularly important for teachers and students, and more broadly for all language users. However, the present work – due to the rather high and diversified number and character of linguistic ideologies, misconceptions, superstitions and myths (see e.g. Lanstyák 2015) – cannot present these phenomena in sufficient detail and therefore only deals with one major area of concern.

A common factor in the above-mentioned studies and phenomena is that in most cases it is inevitable to discuss the relationship between standard and non-standard linguistic elements and variants. This is rather difficult because these concepts, although manageable at the level of



abstraction, blend together in everyday life, as their boundaries are not static but dynamically changing (Woolard & Schieffelin 1994). Despite or in parallel with this, teachers have strong ideas about the standard and its role, based on different linguistic ideologies or misconceptions. If we do not aim for subtlety and abandon the continuum nature of reality, we can roughly speak of three basic attitudes towards the standard from the teaching aspect of native language education:

1. an inverted approach, positioning the standard above other language varieties;
2. an additive approach, implicitly placing the standard above other language varieties;
3. descriptive and additive, explicitly and implicitly considering the standard language variant as equal to other language variants.

It should be emphasised that this is an oversimplified classification, but it is satisfactory in that the teacher judges linguistic forms according to a prescriptive approach: stigmatising certain linguistic forms, considering them to be avoided or, in the worst case, persecuted or eradicated, all this without taking into account the context or the actual communicative function (Kálmán 2010), and explicitly communicating this to the students in various ways (e.g. in the case of the Hungarian suffix “-suk/-sük” teachers tend to say “in Hungarian conjugation, forms with this suffix [see e.g. *meglásuk*] do not exist” – see more in Kontra 2006, 103). The described process is one of the most typical manifestations of language-based discrimination, which is one of the most prominent and damaging problems in both Hungarian and international educational practice (for more details see Skutnabb-Kangas 2015; Jánk 2021, 2023).

The second case is the descriptive view, which interprets grammatical correctness more as contextual correctness or linguistic propriety, and which takes a neutral or positive attitude towards linguistic varieties and the linguistic forms they contain, and at best speaks about social prejudices related to certain linguistic forms and varieties (e.g. “you may be at a disadvantage at your final exams, you may get fewer points if you use -suk/-sük”), rather than about inherent adequacy or inadequacy.

From the student’s point of view, this can easily lead to cognitive dissonance, since even in early childhood it is easy to see the contradiction between this double standard of teaching equivalence and teaching what is right and wrong in certain situations (cf. Wiesmann et al. 2022). The argument, in fact, is the so-called ghetto argument: schools should teach children the standard language variety because otherwise they would prevent children from achieving their potential, i.e. they would allow them to live locked in the ghetto of their own language variety. According to this view, it is therefore important to disseminate the standard language through education in order to democratise language use and to ensure social mobility for those who have acquired a language variety other than the standard one in their primary socialisation.

The problem with this concept is that it produces exactly the opposite effect to what it proclaims: linguistic disadvantages and inequalities are not eliminated in this way, but the opposite happens, they are constantly being reproduced. The reason for this is, on the one hand, that the acquisition of a new language variety is essentially necessary for the children to achieve their potential (and this is already a handicap), paradoxically through the mediation of the new language variety. On the other hand, the ghetto argument conflates the concepts of opportunity and obligation. It is not the same whether the school creates the opportunity to learn the standard, thus fostering inequality of opportunity, or whether it requires the standard



language variety, thus disadvantaging non-standard speakers. In the end, the ghetto argument actually only addresses the situation on the surface level, not in depth; it prepares the child for discrimination and thus legitimises its existence (cf. [Sándor 2001](#)).

The third case is pure descriptivism and linguistic egalitarianism (cf. [Lanstyák 2015](#), 47–48). Here, the teacher merely notes that there are other linguistic forms, but neither explicitly nor implicitly associates a value with either form, and establishes a neutral relation in a uniform and comprehensive way (no reference to school-leaving exams, for example). In other words, it uses the descriptive approach and the attributive method, but in an unbiased, value-neutral way, as opposed to the previous case where the value association is implicit ([Lőrincz et al. 2022](#)).

The question is which approach is better or more effective in a normative, standard-oriented society (as is the case in the Hungarian and most European societies). The first approach, the prescriptive and standard-based approach, is linguistically unsound; it is often based on linguistic superstitions and cannot function as a guiding principle for native language education. There are arguments for and against the other two approaches, but the fundamental question is probably whether a much more pluralistic and neutral approach, completely free of value judgements (explicit and implicit), can be effective in a society that is essentially normative and mono-normative. Can a fully egalitarian conception of language be implemented without negative consequences in a language and speech community that primarily operates along the ideology of linguistic standardism?

4. SUMMARY AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

The problems described above can only be solved – provided that we do not think only at a theoretical level – by developing an assessment system that is objective and valid in the measurement-assessment sense of the word (cf. [Fowler 2002](#); [Bryman & Bell 2003](#)). One of its main features should be the separation of the measurement and assessment of the content knowledge of the subject from the measurement and assessment of language use/communicative competence. The two are fundamentally different in terms of the type, function and cognitive characteristics of the knowledge. A related suggestion is to abandon the use of questioning as the most subjective possible assessment method (cf. [Ollé-Szivák 2008](#); [Víg 2005](#)), or to use it only in specific cases (e.g. to model exams, job interviews or other speech situations and to measure and evaluate the adequacy of students' adaptation to the situation) including all levels of education (obviously the exception to this is foreign language teaching).

Another pillar of improving native language education is the production of high-quality textbooks and teaching materials, as well as methodological aids. Hungarian native language education is still lacking a comprehensive methodological guide for teachers, which is up-to-date and integrates the latest findings of linguistic and educational science, and the same applies to digital teaching materials. It should be noted, however, that there are a few exercise books and teaching aids that enable the professional teaching of the different thematic areas in the different grades, and even fulfil several of the objectives of native language education described above. For example, several works of László Kálmán in the fields of reading comprehension, language awareness and language acquisition are exemplary, but unfortunately they are not widely known among Hungarian language teachers.



In this context, and in line with the above, it would be of fundamental importance to reduce the course material required to be taught under the *National Core Curriculum*. It would also be necessary to modify the timeframe and the amount of content prescribed in the framework curricula, as it is hardly possible to acquire in-depth knowledge given the timeframe and the ratios set out in the framework curricula. It should be accepted that the development of competences requires more time, which obviously limits the number of knowledge elements to be acquired. It should also be accepted that it is likely that some content elements that are not explicitly irrelevant or uninteresting, but are merely 'victims' of restrictions, will have to be excluded from the curriculum.

Addressing the problems outlined above can obviously only be relevant if there is a related framework and space dedicated to native language education. In theory, this is provided by the grammar class, if there is a grammar class at all. However, it is very common that grammar is taught only for a negligible number of hours or not at all. Grammar is not taught in adequate teaching hours, despite the fact that the *National Curriculum* clearly states the ratio between literature and grammar (which is far from the ratio currently followed in native language education) and explicitly declares objectives that literature classes can only achieve to a limited extent. The following would be necessary in this context: to improve the methodological culture and linguistic knowledge of teachers of Hungarian; to provide adequate teacher training to make linguistics more accessible to future teachers; to emphasise and promote the importance of grammar; and to monitor the compliance with the prescribed ratio of literature and grammar lessons. In this context, it would be essential to promote linguistic awareness and to eliminate linguistic misconceptions and superstitions, which are detrimental to the teaching and education of the native language; to increase institutional freedom; and finally it would be necessary to align the output requirements with the above mentioned factors and conceptual changes (but this would be less in accordance with the new school leaving examination coming into force in 2024, which is expected to be much more knowledge-centred than the previous one).

A targeted social awareness-raising and educational activity, encompassing issues of native language education, would greatly facilitate this shift in attitude. At present, the only programme on Hungarian public media that deals with language issues on a regular basis is the five-minute language educational programme *Édes Anyanyelvünk* (Our Sweet Mother Tongue), broadcast on Duna Television and Kossuth Radio, although in the past there was an exemplary language educational programme called *Szószátyár* (*Verbose*), edited by László Kálmán and Ádám Nádasy, which ran until Kálmán's death in 2021.

Some of these problems can be addressed locally, but others can only be solved in a broader, global context. Given the Hungarian education policy situation and recent developments in Hungary (e.g. the change in the system of school-leaving qualifications), we are heading in the wrong direction. For the time being, therefore, we can only trust in the local level and hope that everyone involved in education will do what they can individually to improve schools and native language education, just as the eminent linguist commemorated in this issue of the journal once did. László Kálmán's merits are unparalleled, as in the past decades he turned public opinion on linguistics and sociology in a positive, modern, but at the same time value-preserving and value-creating direction. He played an important role in ensuring that language teaching and more generally thinking about language is no longer just a myth of the right/



wrong dichotomy, but a constructive activity that looks at variety and change with interest, accepts linguistic diversity and at the same time reveals the useful and interesting side of linguistics.

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