

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

**Choosing a foreign language and motivation for
foreign language learning in secondary grammar
and secondary technical schools of Hajdú-Bihar
and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county**

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The aim of the thesis, delineation of the theme

According to the international and Hungarian researchers foreign language knowledge is becoming a basic competence not only regarding studies but also considering labour (Hegyi-Halmos, 2018). Being a part of human and cultural resources language knowledge implies a knowledge plus in the labour market (Veroszta, 2010; Gerhard-Hans, 2013; Pusztai, 2015). The objective of the European Union is that people should be able to use two foreign languages for communication purposes apart from their mother tongue (Kommission der Europäischen Gemeinschaften 2005; Hesse et al., 2008). To reach this education systems need to promote foreign language learning. It entails a rise in the level of foreign language knowledge (Hufeisen, 2008). In most of the European countries mastering two foreign languages is expected. One of them is English because it became a lingua franca (Saraceni, 2008), while the other language is usually German or French (Eurydice, 2017). In Hungary the second foreign language taught after English is generally German. This tendency is due to historical reasons,

geographical factors and economic processes. All these led to a higher number of those learning German than those learning English in the 1990s. By the 2000s this proportion gradually changed into the reverse (Tichy and Ilse, 2014). In our research we are examining the background of this change and the process of English becoming a leading foreign language. Meanwhile, we are dealing with the factors of choosing a foreign language, with methodology and schoolbooks. That can add to the findings of literature until now.

The aim of our dissertation is to provide a cross-sectional view on the current circumstances of foreign language learning and teaching in the secondary schools. Concerning all these we examined what major factors influencing the choice of a foreign language and learning it after the change of regime can affect the aspirations for foreign language learning these days. Furthermore, what are the motivations, methods and future plans of language learning that are standing behind or hindering learning German as a foreign language and parallel to it what factors are promoting English gaining ground. To answer these questions, we were considering language pedagogy

and sociology of education and searched for reasons and explanations that may have an effect on choosing German as a foreign language, the enhancement of the efficiency of its learning/teaching in public education and the transfer of everyday language knowledge. Although, in Hungary there is a significant proportion of people of German nationality (Tóth and Vékás, 2014), our dissertation does not aim the detailed study of teaching German as a foreign language for those of German nationality (data describing it is only slightly present). Beyond this, we are examining the scope of teaching German as a foreign language. Learning a foreign language is affected by several factors for instance the environment where a language learner lives, foreign languages offered to learn in the educational institutions, laws regulating foreign language learning, a language learner's personal features, foreign language teachers as well as equipment for language learning (Csapó, 2001; Petneki, 2002; Pusztai, 2009; Klein, 2011; Sominé Hrebík, 2011; Hegedűs, 2016b). A thorough research of all these factors lies beyond the scope of our dissertation that is why we are studying merely the factors that are the most closely related to ours: learners' family

background, their motivation for choosing a foreign language, their aim of language learning, foreign language teachers' professional work and their plans for further training as well as students' and teachers' judgement about schoolbooks.

The novelty of our research lies in the aspect that it touches primarily the social factors and those considering language learning that have an effect on the efficiency of learning/teaching German as a foreign language. It uses a filtered sample for students and one for teachers in Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county. Comparing various types of education (secondary grammar and secondary technical schools) and examining merely a limited region imply novelty in research because this way more precise figures are generated than data based on the moderate conclusions of a representative study countrywide. Furthermore, previously there was no such a detailed study researching Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties, thus, regional features can also be got acquainted with more thoroughly. Our results can be used for enhancing the efficiency of language learning and teaching and to improve methods

and equipment of foreign language teaching. In the long run all these may contribute to people becoming bilingual.

To prepare our research we surveyed the regional presence of those of German nationality, figures describing the number of students learning German and of those learning English, as well as documents regulating language teaching. The reason for its necessity was to figure out whether there are any of these factors that are significant and may influence how to choose a foreign language. According to the census of population in Hungary in 2011 the majority of people of German nationality live in the capital city, Baranya, Tolna, Pest and Veszprém counties (Bindorffer et al., 2010; Takács, 2013; Tóth and Vékás, 2014). This is the reason why educational institutions for students of German nationality are operated mainly in these regions according to the data of the Educational Authority (The list of public educational institutions providing minority and bilingual education [Information system of public education], 2016). The regional feature of primary schools for students of not any minorities changed compared to the 2000s because according to figures by Imre (2000) and Csapó

(2001) from the turn of the millennium students in the eastern region of Hungary were learning rather English while in the western region of the country German was learnt by the students. According to the surveyed figures (The list of operating public educational institutions, [Information system of public education] 2016; Foreign languages taught in public educational institutions [Information system of public education], 2016) the number of primary schools where solely English is taught is significant mainly in Nógrád, Heves, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties, while the number of those providing teaching of English as well as German is high in Bács-Kiskun, Fejér and Pest counties. In the eastern region of the country often due to their structure there are several settlements with a primary and secondary school where English and German are also taught. As for the foreign languages offered at schools it indicates that students' possibilities of learning English and/or German are becoming slightly different.

In the primary schools between the school years of 1990/1991 and that of 2018/2019 as well as in the vocational/secondary technical schools until the early

2000s students learnt German on a larger scale according to figures describing the number of students learning foreign languages. Whereas, in the secondary technical schools from the middle of the 1990s and in the secondary grammar schools from the first examined school year students learning English outnumbered those learning German (Csécsiné Máriás et al., 2008; Hagymássy and Könyvesi, 2017; information by the Educational Authority, 2019).

Although, from the change of regime the documents regulating the education changed several times (National Curriculum, general curriculum), possibilities of teaching foreign languages have not changed almost at all. It starts compulsorily in the 4th grade and a foreign language is usually taught in 2-3-4 lessons a week. The documents are usually applied to the teaching of foreign languages in general. Therefore, there is not any difference specifically characteristic of any language that would have an effect on choosing, teaching and learning certain foreign languages.

Teaching a foreign language is influenced by a language teacher's pedagogic view, as well as the state of

his/her methodological preparedness. The pedagogic attitude towards teaching foreign languages keeps changing. Thus, compared to the traditional teacher-centered information transfer in the 1990s student-centered education was more and more evolving and language teaching methods associated with it were becoming more popular (Taczman, 2014). The application of methods does not strictly refer to one certain pedagogic view. Therefore, foreign language teachers can compile a collection of varied methodological collection for themselves (Einhorn, 2015a).

Factors that can have an effect on choosing a foreign language and influence the efficiency of learning a foreign language are for example the learner's mother tongue(s), the previously learnt foreign language(s), the individual's sociocultural background, his/her motivation, age and further features (Sominé Hrebik, 2011). Social background determines what physical and sociocultural environment the language learner is surrounded by. It also implies the parents' educational level, socio-economic status, as well as their cultural consumption (Pusztai, 2009; Nikolov and Csapó, 2018). All these affect the

standard of the language used at home and it has an influence on the vocabulary size, thus, on one's studies because if he/she cannot interpret the expressions in his/her mother tongue, he/she will have difficulties solving tasks in a foreign language (Bernstein, 1971; Réger, 1985; Gogolin, 2014; Sebestyén and Hegedűs, 2017). For students with higher socio-economic status the language used at home and that used at school differ less from each other that is why they are more likely to be successful in their studies (Réger, 1990; Gogolin, 2014). Students from families with higher socio-economic status usually attend secondary grammar schools. It is caused not only by the parents' educational level but also their experience with public and/or higher education (Boudon, 1998; Blossfeld et al., 2019; Hegedűs, 2020). Foreign language learning can also result from the parents' educational level. On the one hand children whose parents are better educated learn English (as well) (Csapó, 2001; Nikolov and Csapó, 2018). On the other hand foreign language learning can take place not only in public education but also for example in private lessons and somewhere where target language is guaranteed. It may depend on the financial

circumstances (Einhorn, 2012) or on the region where a student lives and learns (Kozma, 1973; Forray and Híves, 2003; Pusztai, 2004; Hegedűs, 2016a). According to literature several research questions were expressed: whether the foreign language learnt at primary school influences foreign language(s) learnt at secondary school. How can family background influence choosing the type of secondary education and that of foreign languages? What difference can be spotted in the school achievement and in the future plans considering family background and the foreign languages learnt?

Choosing and learning a foreign language can be boosted by an individual's cognitive, social emotional – including motivation, as well – and other factors connected to languages (Rampillon, 1995; Józsa and Fejes, 2012). Having a gift for languages, knowledge of formerly learnt languages and their level are language factors that can help acquire another foreign language (Heyd, 1991; Szépe, 2000; Kovács, 2014). In connection with the last one it is significant which language was the first one learnt by the individual because it influences the acquisition of other foreign languages. In Hungary and in

similarly monolingual countries individuals start to become bilingual when they begin to learn a foreign language in an educational institution (Petneki, 2015). An individual's school achievement is also influenced by the school community, how much a student is motivated by other students' achievement, what the relationship is between teachers and students like, how success and failure related to language learning are judged by the community (Dörnyei, 2001; Fejes and Józsa, 2007; Günther and Günther, 2007; Józsa and Fejes, 2012). Teachers' personality, their professional knowledge and teaching skills are significant for students because a teacher's personality can serve as a model considering for example the establishing of personal connections or forming opinion in the classes (Dörnyei, 2001). Professionally, it is vital whether a teacher is reflective of his/her own work, whether s/he considers self- and further trainings important, to what extent his/her teaching methods are varied and how effective s/he can use them (Falus, 2001; Einhorn, 2015b; Sebestyén and Dusa, 2015). Tools used for language learning also have an effect on students' efficiency and motivation. From all of them

schoolbooks have the most significant role (M. Nádasi, 2011). In connection with all these we formulated the following research questions: Does the length of teachers' career or the foreign languages taught by them affect a foreign language teacher's professional work and his/her interest in further trainings? How do students' future plans influence their evaluation of schoolbooks? What differences can be detected between the students' and the teachers' evaluation of schoolbooks?

Effectiveness of learning foreign languages is reflected by the students' number who participate in language competitions and that of those who pass a language exam (all of these figures connected to English are double than these of German) and by the results of the advanced and intermediate level of school leaving examinations. The annual school leaving examination results were examined in each county, in every type of educational institutions and at both levels. School leaving examination results showed that the intermediate level exam averages of the secondary technical schools are about one grade worth than in the secondary grammar schools considering both foreign languages. Whereas,

studying the advanced level exam results of the secondary technical schools they can rival these of the secondary grammar schools (Sebestyén, 2017). Language learning outside public education may have a significant role in the latter results. However, considering higher education or participation in the labour market it is a positive deviation from the intermediate level school leaving examination results. A background of German nationality may also affect school leaving examination results. Though, considering the averages it can be rather seen in the case of the intermediate level school leaving examination.

Applied methods

For our own research „Teaching and learning German in Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties” (2018-2019) we asked students of secondary grammar and students of secondary technical schools attending the 11th grade who learn German and/or English to participate along with their teachers. Narrowing down the geographical extension of the research was based on literature and (for example Garami, 2013; Híves, 2015; Hegedűs, 2020) the concerning statistic figures, as well as

a former examination (Sebestyén – Hegedűs, 2017). Subsequently, it was limited to two counties. For the research in our dissertation a geographical area was chosen where the background of German nationality is weak so that the distorting effect of the factors of a German nationality could be reduced. They might have been directed towards the German language when examining the choosing of a foreign language and the motivation to learn it.

For the research a questionnaire was composed for students and two more for teachers using the Evasys programme. In students' questionnaire the questions referred to demographic figures, the individual's former language knowledge, his/her motivation, methods and tools of language learning at the primary and secondary school. In teachers' questionnaire the questions referred to demographic figures, the individual's former language knowledge, professional progress, further educational plans for the future and characteristics of the teaching work as a language teacher. The pilot study of the paper-based questionnaires took place in two institutions of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county in December 2018 then

the collection of data in March-April 2019. The results of the pilot study fitted in the findings of data collection in spring. This way 890 questionnaires from students, 43 from teachers of German language and 57 from teachers of English language were collected in 18 institutions of the two counties.

Collection of data was carried out by stratified sampling. Our aim was to create a representative sample according to the number of students, type of education and maintainers. Considering figures about students' and teachers' number provided by the Educational Authority in 2019, a sample of 10% was aimed. We managed to collect a student sample of 8,6% and a teacher sample of 11,2%. All students' participation in the research was not fulfilled in Hajdú-Bihar county (395 persons) and in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county (453 persons) but as for the members of each language learning group their participation was fulfilled. In the research the number of secondary grammar students (420 persons) and secondary technical students (444 persons) from the two counties are almost the same that is why our samples can be considered representative as for the type of education. As for

maintainers we failed to create a representative sample because not all of the institutions operated by various maintainers were ready to enter our research. Using the figures a database was created for students (890 persons) and one more for teachers (100 persons). For analysing these SPSS software was used, while regional figures were depicted on a map applying MapInfo software.

Students were divided into a group of high socio-economic status (254 persons) and a group of low socio-economic status (486 persons) on the basis of their parents' school qualification and their family's financial circumstances. Based on the foreign languages learnt three groups were formed: those who learn only German (157 persons), only English (337 persons) and those who learn both German and English (396 persons). Considering how students had chosen their secondary schools, students were classed in four clusters: "Trade-centered commuters" (233 persons), "Escapees" (274 persons), "Higher education-centered locals" (127 persons) and "Survivors" (255 persons). Those who were surveyed evaluated the attributes of schoolbooks on a five-point Likert scale. Subsequently, summarizing these answers in a variable the

judgments were studied of those evaluating German (474 persons) and English (632 persons) schoolbooks.

In the database for teachers' figures teachers were divided into different groups according to the years spent in the teaching profession. Language teachers with a 0-9-year (12 persons), a 10-19-year (35 persons), a 20-29-year (40 persons) and those with an at least 30-year teaching experience belong to different groups. A new variable was created according to whether the surveyed person was working as a teacher of German (43 persons) or a teacher of English (57 persons) at the time of completing the questionnaire. Furthermore, similarly to the students' database a variable was created concerning the evaluation of schoolbooks.

Subsequently, Cronbach's alpha and distribution tests were performed, two- and three-dimensional cross tabulations were created, a variance analysis and correlation were calculated. To guarantee anonymity figures provided by students and teachers could not be connected with each other, therefore, our conclusions refer to institutions at the most.

Accomplishments

In the research views of students learning German and/or English and these of their teachers were analysed and compared considering foreign language learning and motivation for language learning. Our aim was to examine what reasons may influence declining population of German as a foreign language and parallel to it the increasing propagation of the English language. In connection with the topic 8 hypotheses were examined.

According to the first hypothesis *foreign language learning started in the primary school determines the foreign language learnt in the secondary school – it proved true*. There were only 75 persons (9%) within the 827 students who learnt another language in the secondary school than in the primary school. It is three times as high as the 3% found by Albert and his colleagues (2018) based on the representative sample of the country. Deviation may be due to the regional restriction of our research.

In our second hypothesis we expressed that *students' family background determines choosing the type of secondary education and that of foreign language – it proved true*. According to our results the foreign language

learnt in the primary school determines the one learnt in the secondary school. If it was the parents who had chosen the foreign language to learn in the primary school, 54% of them had chosen German as a foreign language for their children. It is especially true for the parents of students with high socio-economic status and with a residence in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county. However, if it was the surveyed student who had made the decision, rather the English was chosen irrespective of the socio-economic status. People with low and high socio-economic status choose a foreign language in a different way. While the former ones opt preferably for English, the latter ones learn German (as well). This finding differs from the previous literature (for example Csapó, 2001; Nikolov, 2003; Nikolov and Vígh, 2012; Nikolov and Csapó, 2018). Thus, this finding implies one of the novelties of our dissertation. One of the reasons of the result may be that the scope of our research includes two counties. Thus, the local, sociocultural characteristics can be easier detected and they do not hide in a bigger database of a country-wide sample. For example there is a major proportion of those with high socio-economic status in the students' database

who have been attending a secondary technical school of high standard to acquire an in-demand job on the labour market and for the sake of the technical training they have been learning German (as well). The other reason may be the parents' personal urge: work in a German speaking country in the future, travelling (Bassola, 1995; Einhorn, 2000; Szépe, 2000). However, this last one needs further research.

In our third hypothesis it was assumed that *the subject achievement of students with lower socio-economic status who learn German are lower than that of students with a similar socio-economic status who learn English – it proved true partially*. School achievement of students with lower socio-economic status are always lower than that of students with higher socio-economic status. However, school achievement of students who learn merely German is in more than half of the cases better than that of students learning merely English. Comparing the achievements of students learning German in the two counties, these of students living in Hajdú-Bihar county were better. It can result from their parents' higher educational level in general. As for the number of

participants in German language competitions students learning only German language, students of higher socio-economic status as well as those living in Hajdú-Bihar county had a higher proportion. Mainly children of fathers who are skilled workers have an intermediate or advanced level language certificate or passed an advanced level secondary school leaving examination considering students learning only German as a foreign language. On the contrary, mainly children of fathers with a degree have these in English. On the whole, school achievements of students learning German with lower socio-economic status are better. Among students entering foreign language competitions there are more who learn only German. However, children of fathers with a degree passed the secondary school leaving examination in English and had a language certificate in English.

In our fourth hypothesis we expressed that *students of lower socio-economic status learning German set lower targets than English learners of similar socio-economic status – it proved true*. Students with low socio-economic status have rather the intermediate secondary school leaving examination and working abroad in view. As

opposed to students of high socio-economic status who aim also at an intermediate language certificate. A higher proportion of students of low socio-economic status would like to pass a language exam in English than one in German. There is a higher proportion of students learning only German who intend to pass a language exam in English than that of students learning merely English and intending to pass the German language exam. Considering the plans of students learning only German in Hajdú-Bihar county they aim at an intermediate level language certificate and work abroad. Whereas, those in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county plan an intermediate level secondary school leaving examination. The three variables above are higher in the case of the students learning German as well as English in Hajdú-Bihar county. On the whole, in their future plans German is of less importance for low-socio-economic-status students who learn German compared with the English language or with the future plans of students learning English.

According to our fifth hypothesis *teachers with more professional experience lay emphasis more on the application of foreign language– it proved true*. Teachers

with a 0-9-year-long professional career strive for teaching experience and acquiring as much knowledge as possible and aim at improving in further trainings. Teachers with 10-19- and 20-29-year teaching experience focus on widening their methodological culture. However, the evaluation of teachers with 10-19-year experience is significantly the highest as for the application of frontal work for the sake of progress in their classes. Teachers with at least 30-year experience concentrate mainly on improving students' communication skills and focus on nurturing talent, though, they are less interested in methodological renewal and professional further trainings.

In our sixth hypothesis we expressed that *there is a significant difference between structuring classes by German and English teachers – it proved true*. The significant difference lies in that teachers of German think the improvement of grammatical knowledge – it may result from the characteristics of the structure of the language – and maintaining discipline in the classes more important. While for teachers of English students' number raises a more serious problem. Prospective further education desires were examined because of the range of

interests of those surveyed. Since knowledge acquired there can influence classroom management later. A significant difference is that teachers of German compared to teachers of English prefer trainings connected to the interactive whiteboard and audiovisual materials, furthermore, in Hungarian language the professional trainings connected to teaching and those of methodological topics.

In the seventh hypothesis it was assumed that *the various groups of students evaluate their schoolbooks differently in view of their later plans – it proved true*. The examination of the hypothesis was made on the basis of the clusters created according to the students' characteristics of choosing a secondary school. As for the "Trade-centered commuters" the averages of the evaluation of schoolbooks are in several cases higher by the learners of German than by the English learners. It might result from their higher socio-economic status that is a feature of the cluster as well as the desire to acquire a marketable job in secondary education. The remaining clusters can be characterized by the English learners' higher averages: the aim of the "Escapees" as well as of

the “Higher-education-centered locals” is primarily to study in tertiary education. Considering this command of English can be beneficial for example to be able to gather information in literature or in case of a scholarship abroad. “Survivors” evaluated English schoolbooks as the better ones, too, although, their grade point averages are often the lowest. It is a feature of the cluster that can also be caused by the higher extent of the lack of their general motivation considering their secondary studies.

In the eighth hypothesis we expressed that *based on their own and even their teachers’ view students evaluate the quality of their schoolbooks better regarding both languages than their teachers do – it did not prove true*. Comparing teachers’ and students’ own opinion with teachers’ view assuming their students’ opinion, teachers’ evaluation of books is higher than the students’ own averages or that assumed by teachers excepting two cases. Examining the hypothesis new academic results were also gained because there is a difference in the averages of teachers’ and students’ evaluation of schoolbooks depending on which language is learnt. Students learning English evaluated their schoolbooks higher with two

exceptions. It can result from the degree of popularity of the two subjects. Without exception in all cases English teachers evaluated schoolbooks used by them higher than teachers of German. It may result from the low number of elements. However, reasons must be further examined to be found out.

On the whole it can be stated that from all of the factors studied family background is of the biggest significance when choosing a foreign language and learning it. For example, if the foreign language learnt in the primary school was chosen by the parents, family background has an influencing role in whether the child learns English or German as a foreign language. Students with higher socio-economic status strive for a higher level of language knowledge in German, whereas, students with lower socio-economic status have future plans considering rather learning English. According to our findings it was found that considering foreign languages German stands second after English and it can be assumed not to change in the future. Foreign language teachers' professional work and their planned further trainings are influenced by the length of their teaching career. Furthermore,

significant differences can be detected between teachers of different foreign languages. Thus, further trainings related to methodology and new tools can be organised well-aimed for teachers. Students learning English find more pleasure in their English classes than students learning German in their German classes. It can positively influence their schoolbook evaluation, however, even these results are overmatched by their teachers' view considering schoolbooks. According to students' opinion teachers can change classroom organisation and it can have a positive effect on students' motivation and school achievement.

Considering theoretically the academic novelty of the dissertation lies in a view of language pedagogy and sociology of education in which a literature referring primarily to language pedagogical features and one considering social features comes to light parallel with each other. The empirical novelty of the dissertation is our own research. According to it students' and teachers' database were created titled "Learning and teaching German in Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg counties. Researches similar to it were made previously

(Einhorn, 2015a; Öveges and Csizér, 2018; etc.), however, their scope of research covered the whole of the country. Database analysed in the dissertation describe local characteristics of a region. In the students' database for example four clusters were created ("Trade-centered commuters", "Escapees", "Further education-centered locals", "Survivors"). Their family background and school characteristics were analysed by involving further variables. Empirical novelties are also that several database were analysed that had been specifically created for the sake of the research. These are the databases used in the preparatory process of the research: "Database of the authorized books for teaching German as a foreign language based on the official lists of schoolbooks in Hungary for the school years between 1998/1999 and 2018/2019", the database titled "Secondary school leaving examination in German as a foreign language 2007-2018" and the database "Secondary school leaving examination in English as a foreign language 2007-2018". A further academic novelty is that the answers of students learning German and English as well as those of teachers teaching

German and English were analysed parallel in the dissertation.

Our research was restricted among others because the proportion of secondary schools that could be involved deviates from the information provided by the Educational Authority in 2019 as for the maintainers of the schools. That is the reason why the proportion of answers from institutions with any other maintenance is the lowest, though, according to the Educational Authority this group of maintainers operates the most institutions in the examined counties. A further restriction is caused by the limitation of the type of education as well as that of the examined region because based on this limited sample findings referring to the whole of the country or to the secondary education overall cannot be pointed out. The third restriction is due to the figures referring to the number of teachers because the number of those working in secondary technical schools (33 persons) is half of those working in secondary grammar schools (66 persons), besides the number of teachers teaching German (43 persons) and that of teachers teaching English (57 persons) is not equal either.

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PhD Publication List

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List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian book chapters (2)

1. **Sebestyén, K.:** Általános iskolai idegennyelv-tanulás Hajdú-Bihar és Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg megyében.
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