



**Erika-Mária TÓDOR–Imre TÓDOR–
Enikő TANKÓ (2024)
Romániai magyar középiskolások
másodnyelvű szocializációja**

*[Second Language Socialization of Hungarian High School
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Book Review by

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The recognition that the Romanian state language requires a differentiated pedagogical approach in Hungarian minority schools in Romania has long been the subject of political, language policy, and professional debate. The implementation of a curriculum reform in 2011 – predicated on the acceptance of the term “Romanian as a non-native language” – marked the culmination of decades of sustained effort. These efforts, at times seemingly futile and at other times promising, ultimately led to the institutional acknowledgment that Romanian must be taught through tailored methods and tools to students who do not speak it as their first language. The reform embodies a competence-based, communicative approach to language education, which is applied not only to foreign languages (such as English or German) but also to the teaching of the mother tongue (in this case Hungarian) and the state language alike.

Accordingly, the 2025 high school graduates have been the first to take the Romanian language and literature component of the baccalaureate exam under this reformed curriculum, with exam items specifically designed for learners of Romanian as a non-native language instead of those intended for native Romanian-speaking students in majority-language schools.

A key question – one that remains open at present – is how this curricular reform will impact exam performance, language proficiency, and learners’ attitudes towards Romanian language acquisition. Given that proficiency in Romanian, which is the state language in our country, remains a critical factor in the social and professional integration of the Hungarian youth in Romania, the implications of this reform are far-reaching. Furthermore, it is of particular interest how the reform has influenced students’ motivation to learn languages, as well as their subjective assessments of language proficiency and motivation across different languages.

This is the generation referred to by the authors of the present volume as the “reform generation”, while in everyday discourse they are often labelled as the “experimental generation”. As the first generation affected by the curriculum reform, their educational experience was marked by the fact that textbooks reflecting the new pedagogical approach were not available in time. Consequently, instruction often took place without appropriate textbooks, relying heavily on the creativity and resourcefulness of teachers. In this sense, the term “experimental generation” carries a certain irony: will the anticipated outcome – language competence that ensures effective communication in Romanian – be achieved when students are taught according to a new curriculum but with outdated textbooks?¹

The book *Romániai magyar középiskolások másodnyelvű szocializációja* [Second Language Socialization of Hungarian High School Students in Romania] was published in Hungarian in 2024 by Cluj University Press. Its authors – Erika-Mária Tódor, Imre Tódor, and Enikő Tankó – are all faculty members at the Miercurea Ciuc Campus of Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, affiliated with the university’s Teacher Training Institute.

The aim of the research presented in the book is to map the Romanian and English language socialization of Hungarian high school students in Romania. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, the authors investigate and interpret the extent to which the first generation affected by the 2011 curriculum reform has experienced changes in language competences and attitudes towards Romanian and English. The study assesses whether the reform has fulfilled its intended goals and explores the following core questions: “What are the defining characteristics of the factors that shape high school students’ language socialization, and which types of background factors in the language learning process contribute to the effectiveness of multilingual communication?” (Tódor–Tódor–Tankó 2024: 10).

1 It should be noted that at the time of the book’s publication, this exam had not yet taken place, so it was not possible to see what impact the curriculum reform had on the results of the final examination. By now, the results of this exam are already known, and some statistics have also been compiled. An *Edupedu* article states that in the case of the Romanian language and literature exam, the success rate of students enrolled in Hungarian-language sections increased by 8 percentage points (<https://tinyurl.com/mt4wdsb9>).

Apart from the curriculum reform, a study based on this complex, multi-perspective research framework was needed anyway, so the authors adopt a holistic approach. They build on several prior studies related to the theoretical background of the holistic language learning framework on the one hand.² On the other hand, they rely on several earlier studies on the subject of sociolinguistics and language socialization within the context of the Hungarian minority in Romania.³

Thus, the 2025 baccalaureate exam marks the first instance in which students attending Hungarian-language schools have received examination items specifically designed in accordance with the principles of the new curriculum. This creates an exciting opportunity to examine how these students' language socialization has evolved – both through their own self-assessment and through the results of language proficiency test items included in the researchers' questionnaire. Erika-Mária Tódor, Imre Tódor, and Enikő Tankó present an analysis of the data obtained through an online questionnaire administered in 2023. The survey encompassed a sample of 1,520 students from grades 9 to 11, drawn from 14 theoretical, vocational, and technical secondary schools in Harghita County, Romania.

Following the preface, the book is structured into eight chapters, with the first and final chapters being collaborative efforts of all three authors. The first chapter outlines the research objectives, the research instrument (which consists of 22 survey questions and 20 language proficiency test items), the target group, and the sampling methodology, all of which are contextualized within the framework of relevant prior literature and findings (*Language Socialization Processes among Hungarian-Speaking High School Students in Harghita County*, Tódor, Tódor, and Tankó 2024: 9–22). In this chapter, the authors also clarify the meaning and scope of the term “reform generation”, which refers to those students who began their formal education following the implementation of the 2011 curriculum reform.

In the concluding chapter (Tódor, Tódor, and Tankó 2024: 177–180), the authors synthesise the partial findings to offer a comprehensive overview of high school students' language socialization. They identify a correlation between students' socio-demographic indicators and the type of school they attend and note that the functional distribution among Hungarian, the students' mother tongue, English, and Romanian occurs along different domains of language use. In terms of Romanian language competence, one of the strengths of the new curriculum appears to be its content alignment with real-life, extra-curricular communication contexts.

Another significant finding of the study is the observed decline in the previously strong fear of deviating from linguistic norms. At the attitudinal level,

2 Some of these cited works are: Dörnyei 2009, Dörnyei and Ryan 2015, Grosjean 1982, Navracscics 2007.

3 Some of these cited bibliographies are: Tódor and Tankó 2022, Rácz 2021, Horváth 2006.

a shift is evident: instead of strict adherence to norms, students tend to express concern over lacking the language skills required for effective communication. The results of the English language tests also confirm that students who use the language outside the classroom achieve better outcomes. The digital world offers a wide range of opportunities for such use, which contributes to the absence of language anxiety in relation to English and fosters a positive attitude among students towards English lessons.

The analysis of questions exploring the relationship between motivation and language learning confirms an unsurprising but important result: there is a strong correlation between motivation and language acquisition. Emotional factors play a key role in maintaining learners' motivation.

Within the division of labour among the three authors, Imre Tódor undertook the analysis of the questionnaire's sociological dimensions. He authored Chapter Two, which examines the socio-demographic background of high school students in Harghita County (Tódor, Tódor, and Tankó 2024: 23–37). Additionally, in Chapter Seven, he applies statistical methodologies to investigate the variables influencing students' foreign language proficiency and their performance on foreign language assessments. Erika-Mária Tódor concentrates on the questionnaire items pertaining to Romanian language proficiency in chapters three and four. Her analysis explores the characteristics of the second-language socialization environments of students in Harghita County who participated in the study and identifies the main factors influencing their acquisition of Romanian.

In chapters five and six, Enikő Tankó conducts an in-depth analysis of English language socialization, with a particular focus on the interplay between language learning and learner motivation. The penultimate chapter, preceding the concluding synthesis, examines the relationship between students' socio-demographic characteristics – both familial and school-related – and their foreign language proficiency. The findings align with international research, reaffirming that factors such as demographic attributes, the socio-economic status of the family, parental foreign language proficiency, and the type of school attended are all significantly associated with students' motivation to acquire foreign languages.

To summarize, this comprehensive study offers valuable insights into the language socialization of Hungarian-speaking high school students in Romania, particularly in the context of the 2011 curriculum reform. By examining both Romanian and English language acquisition through a nuanced, interdisciplinary lens, the authors successfully highlight the multifaceted factors – socio-demographic, institutional, motivational, and emotional – that shape students' linguistic development. The findings underscore the importance of context-sensitive pedagogical approaches, especially in minority education settings, and suggest that aligning curriculum content with real-world communicative practices can enhance language competence and learner engagement. Furthermore, the

study affirms that motivation, supported by emotional and environmental factors, remains a crucial driver of successful language learning. Now that the first group of the reform generation has already completed their secondary education, this volume serves not only as a diagnostic reflection on the outcomes of educational policy but also as a foundational reference for future curriculum development and research on multilingualism in minority contexts.

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