



# Motivations Influencing the Choice of School in the Hungarian-Language Public Educational Institutions in Zoboralja<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract.** The paper examines the Hungarian parents' motivations behind their choice of school in areas of internal diaspora of Hungarians in Slovakia. These motivations are highlighted through both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis with the target group being Hungarian parents in Zoboralja. The paper argues that the background of these parents' respective choices includes mixed marriages, identity, local residence and prestige of language.

**Keywords:** choosing motivation, language planning, prestige of language, internal diasporas

## Introduction

The choice of school is a priority issue, a key element of the survival of the Hungarian communities in all the countries having minority Hungarian population in the Carpathian Basin. Important researches have been carried out in the last decades in this topic; therefore, nowadays a lot more is known about the special situation, problems, education etc. of the Hungarian communities living in the Carpathian Basin.

A part of the linguistic researches approaches the topic from the educational language, the survival of the school network of the mother tongue within the choice of school, usually related to the frequency of use of the linguistic variable. However, psychological and psycholinguistic approaches can also be identified (Csernicskó-Göncz 2009, Göncz 1999, Kelemen-Szoták-Göncz 2009, Kolláth-Varga-Göncz 2009). Based on my earlier researches on the topic, carried out in Transcarpathia, it can be concluded that parents' motivation in the choice of

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<sup>1</sup> This research and this study were supported by the Visegrad Found. Hereby, I would like to thank the professional support of the Hungarian Institute of the University of Bratislava, with special regards to Prof. István Lanstyák. I would also like to thank Mr. Lajos Ladányi and Ms. Szilvia Hőrih for establishing the right conditions for my researches.

school for their children is based on pragmatic and practical reasons; however, certain motives related to ideologies and stereotypes can also be mentioned (Séra 2010, 2012). I also examined the question in the diaspora territory, important for the Hungarians living in Transcarpathia, where some motivations can be more frequently detected in the parents' and the teachers' opinion. Based on the results of my research carried out in Beregrákos (Rakoshyno), the most important motive is the (Ukrainian and Hungarian) language use. The analysis of the interviews carried out in the town shows that choosing a school of the majority of the population has become preferential even there, where the circumstances of choosing a Hungarian educational institution have had more favourable conditions so far. The scenes for using the Hungarian language for children coming from ethnically mixed marriages have become narrower as in many cases the language of the majority has become dominant in the communication within the family and with friends (Séra 2013b: 136).

My presumption is that similar tendencies can be detected among the Hungarians living in Slovakia in the diasporas. This study presents the results of my researches carried out in Zoboralja.<sup>2</sup> The aim of the research was to examine the strategies for the choice of school of the Hungarian children and parents living in the Hungarian diasporas in Slovakia. What kind of similarities can be detected – if any – regarding the choice of school and which factors influence the choice?

Based on demographic data, it is common that a greatest population of Hungarians living in diasporas in Slovakia can be found in the Hungarian settlements of Nitra District, besides bigger cities. The number of children has significantly decreased in the past year, which consequently affects the Hungarian-language school network operating in the region (Morvai –Szarka 2012: 556).

My research topic is the following: Besides the decreasing demographic effect, what other factors influence the Hungarian-language education in Nitra District and what influences the parents/children in their choice of school?

## The Situation of Hungarian Education in Zoboralja

The most numerous Hungarian populations living in internal diasporas<sup>3</sup> (Bodó 2010) in Slovakia can be found in Nitra District. According to the results of the census of 2011, 10,956 persons claiming themselves Hungarian lived in Nitra Zoboralja, which represents 6.7% of the local population.

2 Zoboralja or Zoborvidék is a historical area in Slovakia situated at the southern ends of Tribecs Mountains (northeast from Nitra). Today it is considered to be the northeast, still coherent isle of Hungarian language within the Carpathian Basin.

3 The author prefers to apply the definition based on the paper of Barna Bodó, who points out the difference between diaspora and internal diaspora, describing the latter as a situation where the given ethnic/minority group has remained on their historical residence instead of emigrating.

The demographic decrease experienced Europe-wide has an effect on the Hungarian minority as well. The demographic decrease of the above-mentioned settlements thus also influenced the proportion of the Hungarian population.

The number of elementary school students has decreased by 27% in the last ten years in Slovakia. The number of Hungarian students living in Slovakia has become 3% lower (of 24%) compared to the national average.

The number of the Hungarian students of Nitra District shows almost the double of the national decrease (49%), whereas the proportion of students attending the Hungarian-language schools of the county is also as low (47%) as it was ten years ago<sup>4</sup> (cf.: Morvai 2013. 63). Hungarian-language elementary schools can be found in the following settlements in Nitra District: Dolné Obdokovce (Alsóbodok), Čechynce (Csehi), Jelenec (Gímes), Kolíňany (Kolon), Žirany (Zsére), Veľký Cetín (Nagycétény), Veľký Kýr (Nagykér) and Pohranice (Pográny). All of these institutions are consolidated elementary schools, except for the one in Veľký Kýr (Nagykér). Secondary school can only be found in Alsóbodok. However, there are villages of significant Hungarian population, according to the results of the census of 2001, in Zoboralja, where Hungarian-language classes/institutions no longer work. These are the following: Branč (Berencs), Klasov (Kalász), Veľké Chyndice (Nagyhind), Nitra (Nitra), Nitrianske Hrnčiarovce (Nitragerencsér) and Hostová (Nitrageszte).

**Table 1.** *The number of students of the age of 6 years in Zoboralja (Zilzi 2013: 313)*

School	Academic year								
	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08	2008/ 09	2009/ 10	2010/ 11	2011/ 12	2012/ 13
Elementary school of Dolné Obdokovce (Alsóbodok)	5	8	7	3	2	4	0	0	5
Elementary school of Čechynce (Csehi)	1	6	0	3	1	4	2	3	4
Elementary school of Jelenec (Gímes)	0	0	1	3	2	0	0	1	3
Elementary school of Kolíňany (Kolon)	4	6	3	4	6	4	2	2	4

4 Data referred to students studying in public schools. Source: [www.uips.sk](http://www.uips.sk).

School	Academic year								
	2004/ 05	2005/ 06	2006/ 07	2007/ 08	2008/ 09	2009/ 10	2010/ 11	2011/ 12	2012/ 13
Elementary school of Veľký Cetín (Nagycétény)	11	7	9	5	4	7	2	5	3
Elementary school of Veľký Kýr (Nagykér)	9	9	5	4	4	9	5	0	5
Elementary school of Pohranice (Pográny)	2	6	6	5	2	3	4	2	2
Elementary school of Žirany (Zsére)	3	3	1	1	4	0	2	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>29</b>

## The Importance of Choosing the Educational Language for People Living in Minority Communities

One acquires knowledge of the world around himself by the cognitive function of the language. The following statement can be accepted as a socio-linguistic or anthropological principle: the most optimal for the child's growth is to get acquainted with the world in the family's language and to start and carry out his studies in this language (See: *The Use of Vernacular Languages in Education*, edited by UNESCO, 1953).

Cummins distinguishes between two linguistic competences: *communication* and *cognitive* competences. Learning, acquiring and using certain knowledge is only possible if one possesses the *CALP* (cognitive academic learning proficiency) of the given language. According to this principle, the most ideal for the minority students (for example students of the Hungarian minority communities in the Carpathian Basin, among others) is learning in their mother tongue (Cummins 2008: 71–83).

Analysis on linguistic politics and minority education can be found in both the international and the Hungarian literature. The professionals of a community draw up the linguistic and educational targets based on these researches.

Some questions of bilingualism and multilingualism, educational questions and linguistic planning related to the minority community are also treated in

Upper Hungary ('Horné Uhorsko'), in co-ordination with the Hungarian linguistic research network of the Carpathian Basin, among others. (Including but not limited to: Skutnab Kangas, Toves 1997, Philpson 2009, Crystal 2003, Cummins 2008 in the international literature and: István Lanstyák, János Péntek, István Csernicskó in Hungarian literature.)

Analysis of the choice of school can be found in different fields of sciences. In her book, sociologist Zsuzsanna Lampl is looking for an answer to the following questions: *What kind of relationship can be detected between national identity and the use of mother tongue? And how are these two factors related to the choice of school?* Lampl comes to the conclusion that among the factors influencing the identity of the Hungarians living in Slovakia the most important one is the language of education. Furthermore, the choice of school is more than the result of an isolated decision: i.e. parents who attended Hungarian elementary school are more likely to enrol their students in a Hungarian elementary school, contrary to parents who attended Slovakian elementary school despite of their Hungarian origin and Hungarian communication background in the family (Lampl 1999: 106).

Anna Sándor, linguist and dialectologist, carried out researches in Kolíňany (Kolon). She also described in her research the youth coming from mixed marriages attending Slovakian schools. She found that those who attended Slovakian-language schools use Hungarian language in less fields of the communication than Slovakian. The prestige of Hungarian language and the positive relation to the mother tongue is stronger among those people who attended Hungarian-language schools (Sándor 1997, 2000).

Patrik Tátrai examined the relationship between the geographical environment and the ethnic structure at one part of the Hungarian-Slovakian language border, in the Hungarian settlements of Nitra District. As regards the choice of school, he makes the following statement, among others: 'The choice of school also depends on external factors such as the existence of Hungarian school in the neighbourhood and the costs that the family has to bear if their child attends it. These factors also contribute to the fact that the number of Hungarian children attending Slovakian school is extraordinarily high. Children coming from mixed marriages attend Slovakian institutions with almost no exception and many Hungarian families also prefer the Slovakian schools.' (Tátrai 2003)

Annamária Bálint and László Vincze examined secondary school students in two towns, in Kráľovský Chlmec (Királyhalmec) and Veľké Kapušany (Nagykapos) in 2008. In their research, they used the quantitative method. The researchers came to the conclusion that Hungarian students and those coming from mixed marriages are more likely to choose Slovakian-language schools in South-Eastern Slovakia when living in cities, when the language spoken in the family is Slovakian, when parents have different mother tongue and where the parents did not attend Hungarian-language elementary schools (Bálint–Vincze 2009: 126–130).

One more research carried out in 2013 on the choice of school has to be mentioned. The research was carried out by Tünde Morvai and László Szarka in Gömör and Zóboralja. They tried to explore the motivations of the choice of school by qualitative methods. According to Tünde Morvai's study, the majority's choice of school was accompanied by a constant uncertainty based on the interviewees' opinions, although cases of mixed marriages also affected it (Morvai 2013: 73).

## The Situation of the Hungarian Diasporas in Upper Hungary

The term diaspora is a special Hungarian expression of internal use and strongly differs from the international expression of Diaspora. The choice of the location of the research was based on the below definition of diasporas.

'Internal diaspora ("szórvány" as Hungarians call it) is (was) formed as a consequence of historical process (new circumstances caused by cataclysm, borders that have been moved). In the case of the members of internal diasporas, events that caused their minority status just happen(ed), while being member of a diaspora is a matter of a personal choice even in cases when there was a political pressure that caused it. Internal diaspora is the phenomenon of living in the same place despite of a changed political and ethnical medium. Internal diaspora means undertaking continuity.' (Bodó 2010)<sup>5</sup>

Diaspora regions and regions that are on the way to become diasporas can be found in all the bigger Hungarian regions outside of Hungary. As this question cannot be separated from the national policy, it is important to mention that the Forum of Hungarian Representatives of the Carpathian Basin adopted a diaspora strategy in 2010, based on which communities in the following situation can be considered as diasporas:

- **absolute diasporas:** where the linkage with the Hungarians is based on the sense of origin and the protection of the language – if there is still something to protect – is important for maintaining this sense of origin mostly because of the actual daily needs.

- **Hungarian minority living in cities:** although, based on their proportion, they already form an absolute minority in the bigger cities, the Hungarian community still possesses its own, remarkable internal social life, in which the role of the Hungarian language is based on the linkage with the community.

- **enclave Hungarians:** settlement or subregion in which the Hungarians still form the majority at the local level, or at least have leader positions in the settlement or in the subregion, and this ensures the daily functions of Hungarian language besides identity.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.acta.sapientia.ro/acta-euro/C1-1/euro11-4.pdf>

– **situation close to diaspora:** those settlements or regions of the Hungarians living in a block that have undergone ethnic changes due to migration processes either in a consciously planned way and facilitated by governmental or other (e.g. ecclesial) means, or by ‘natural,’ i.e. economy-based way; and where the situation of Hungarians being the local majority is expected to be lost in the future.<sup>6</sup> The Hungarian population of several isolated settlements and towns lying in Slovakia around the Hungarian-Slovakian border can already be considered as diasporas, such as Senec (Szenc), Levice (Léva), Lučenec, (Losonc), Bratislava (Pozsony), Kosice (Kassa) and Nitra (Nitra).

According to the Diaspora Strategy<sup>7</sup> elaborated by the Hungarian Coalition Party, the language border territory of Zoboralja and Bars County is the most endangered of becoming diaspora, and eventually assimilated in the future.

## Research Methodology, Locations

According to what has been settled in the research plan, researches were carried out in the Zoboralja region, in those settlements of Nitra District where Hungarian schools/classes are still in operation. These settlements of Nitra District are the following: Dolné Obdokovce (Alsóbodok), Čechynce (Csehi), Jelenec (Gímes), Kolíňany (Kolon), Žirany (Zsére), Veľký Cetín (Nagycétény), Veľký Kýr (Nagykér) and Pohranice (Pográny).

In line with the research plan, I managed to have questionnaires filled out by the parents of children attending Hungarian schools/classes in all the above-mentioned settlements, except for Kolíňany (Kolon), and make interviews with the school directors. I completed the predetermined locations with Veľký Kýr (Nagykér) in Nový Zámky (Érsekújvár) District, where I made a focus group interview with the 4<sup>th</sup> grade students of the elementary school and I made a semi-structured interview with the school director and also with one local leader.<sup>8</sup>

During the time spent in Bratislava, I examined the network of Hungarian-language schools in these settlements and the motives behind the choice of school with the co-ordination of local linguists.

6 Diaspora strategy of the Forum of Hungarian Representatives of the Carpathian Basin. Date of download: 01/02/2014. However, it should be noted that there are different opinions on this matter. See more: <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/bod%C3%B3/148f4f91870f56f0?projector=1> Date of download: 14/10/2014.

7 [http://www.duray.sk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=383:toembb1-szorvanyba-az-mkp-strategiai-tanacs-szorvany-program-mhelyenek-javaslat-ladanyi-lajos-es-duray-miklos&catid=1:dm-cikk&Itemid=60](http://www.duray.sk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=383:toembb1-szorvanyba-az-mkp-strategiai-tanacs-szorvany-program-mhelyenek-javaslat-ladanyi-lajos-es-duray-miklos&catid=1:dm-cikk&Itemid=60)

8 As the first four grades were all consolidated classes in the six settlements, I did not make a focus group interview in these cases. Only in Veľký Kýr (Nagykér), in Nový Zámky (Érsekújvár) District did I find a school where the education was assured in separate classes in the four grades. Therefore, I made the focus group interview here.

- Methods applied in my researches:
- Review of literature, analysis of statistical data
  - Filling questionnaires with students of the first four grades of elementary schools and the analysis of these questionnaires
  - Making interviews with school directors and teachers and the analysis of the interviews
  - Focus group interview in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Table 2.** *Interviews made at Zoboralja<sup>9</sup> (own source)*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Code</b>
Elementary School of Dolné Obdokovce (Alsóbodok)	director	A_I_1
	teacher	A_T_2
Elementary School of Čechynce (Csehi)	director	CS_I_3
	day care teacher	CS_N_4
Elementary School of Jelenec (Gímes)	director	G_I_5
Elementary School of Veľký Cetín (Nagycétény)	director	N_I_6
	teacher of the first four grades	N_A_7
Elementary School of Veľký Kýr (Nagykér)	director	N_I_8
	mayor	N_P_9
	focus group interviews	N_F_10
Elementary School of Pohranice (Pográny)	director	P_I_11
Elementary School of Žirany (Zsére)	director	ZS_I_12
	parent	ZS_I_13
Zoboralja Non-Profit Association	president	Z_E_14
CSEMADOK – Slovakian Hungarian Social and Cultural Association	member	CS_E_15

**Table 3.** *Interviews made in Nitra District (own source)*

<b>Name of School</b>	<b>Total number</b>	<b>Number of interviews</b>
Elementary School of Dolné Obdokovce (Alsóbodok)	5	3
Elementary School of Čechynce (Csehi)	12	8
Elementary School of Jelenec (Gímes)	6	6
Elementary School of Veľký Cetín (Nagycétény)	17	11
Elementary School of Pohranice (Pográny)	9	7
Elementary School of Žirany (Zsére)	6	5

9 Interviews are coded and where the study quotes the interviews it is also marked with the above used codes.



Qualitative and quantitative methods were both used in the research in a complimentary way. Thus, I managed to make 15 interviews, one focus group interview and 40 questionnaires (It is to be noted that there are 55 students in the first 4 grades.) during the fellowship.

According to the qualitative methodology, I typed each word of the interviews, and then I analysed them using the *ATLAS. TI 5.0* text analysing software. In the first phase of the analysis (reading), I created codes that later on I organized into bigger, so-called code families, taking into consideration the frequency of the codes. Although the quoted interview parts would later refer to the specificities of the language, I completed them in some points with words in brackets in order to make the text more understandable and to reveal the hidden content of the text.

Based on it, I distinguished between the following code families: *Hungarian school (the prestige of the language)*; *mixed marriage*; *motivations for the choice of school*; *history (intimidation)*; *vision*.

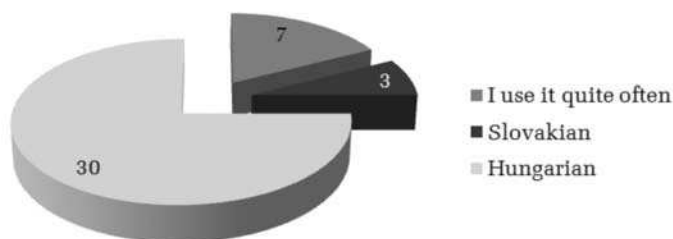
In the second part of the study, three code families will be presented in details.

## Analysis of the Questionnaires

The questionnaire contains the following topics: personal data, identity and language use, choice of the language of education and educational aid.

All but one respondent claimed themselves Hungarian. Similar data can be detected as regards the mother tongue: everyone but one person claimed using the Hungarian as mother tongue.

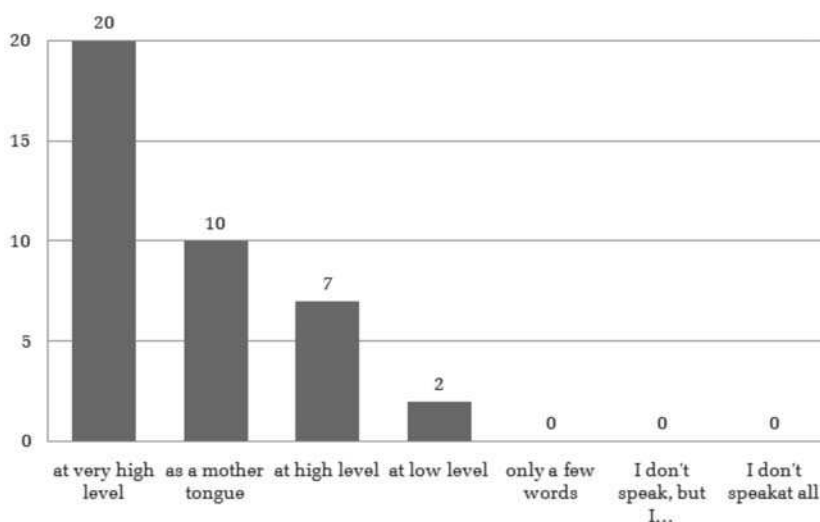
Most of the respondents in question use the Hungarian language the most frequently, followed by those who use both (Slovakian and Hungarian) languages, whereas three of the respondents use the Slovakian language most frequently.



**Figure 1.** Which language is used more frequently? (N: 40) (own source)

The questionnaire also asked about the level of language knowledge (Hungarian, Slovakian and Roma), and the respondents could choose from the following levels: as a mother tongue; at a very high level; at high level; at low level; only a

few words; I do not speak, but I understand, and I do not speak at all. 33 persons speak Hungarian as a mother tongue and 7 speak it at a very high level. The next figure shows the knowledge of the Slovakian language based on self estimation. 10 out of all the respondents speak the state language as a mother tongue and 20 of them speak it at a very high level (see Figure 4). These results confirm the earlier researches, according to which, from the point of view of the Hungarians living in diasporas, speaking the State language is not a problem as the Slovakian language is present in their daily communication both in formal and informal scenes (Sándor 2001, Séra 2010, Tátrai 2002).

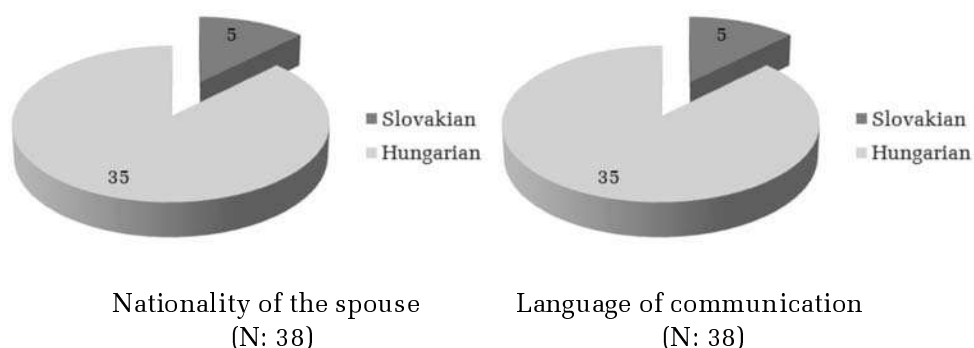


**Figure 2.** *At which level do you use the language? (N: 39) (own source)*

While the language of education in the parents' elementary school was mainly the Hungarian (34 of them attended Hungarian-language elementary school and 4 of them Slovakian), the educational language of the secondary school shows a more miscellaneous picture: 24 persons studied in Slovakian and 15 in Hungarian. All but one respondent having finished college completed their tertiary studies in Slovakian language. These results are also representative of the local Hungarian educational system. The Hungarian-language educational network has been significantly reduced in Zoboralja in the past years. The drop in the number of children resulted in the closure of schools in several settlements; therefore, those who attended Hungarian-language schools did not have the opportunity to continue their studies in Hungarian in the same settlement (cf.: statistical data. Source: [www.uips.sk](http://www.uips.sk)).

The questionnaire also aimed at revealing whether there was any relationship between the language use of people coming from mixed marriages and those

coming from homogenous families. Out of the 40 respondents, only 5 lived in mixed marriages and in these cases the spouse's nationality and mother tongue was Slovakian; therefore, the language of the communication with the children was also Slovakian.



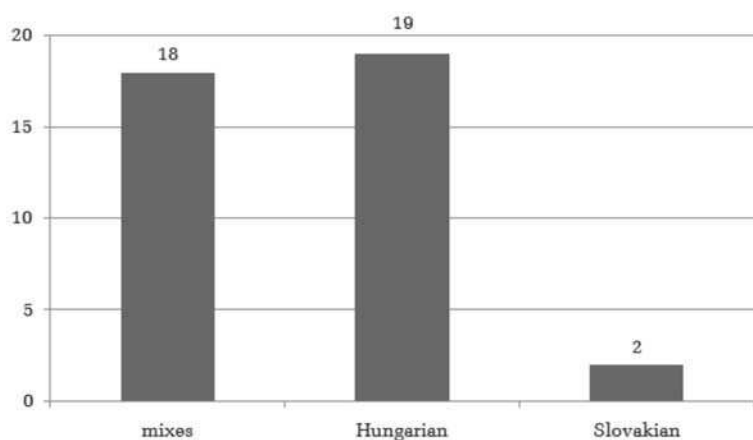
**Figure 3.** *The spouse's nationality and language of communication (own source)*

Mixed marriages are considered an important milestone in the process of assimilation of the Hungarian minority community. Both the Slovakian and the Romanian researches show that the number of children coming from mixed marriages is considerably higher in the diasporas and that there is a relationship between the family's ethnic structure and choice of school. My researches carried out in Transcarpathia draw attention to similar conclusions (see: Ferenc-Séra 2012 op. cit., Papp 2012). Other linguistic researches also confirm that the language use of children living in mixed marriages is most influenced by the family and the environment, depending on which family member or friend (speaking Ukrainian, Hungarian or Russian) the person spends the most time with using Hungarian. (Bartha 1999, Csernicskó 2009, Karmacsi 2011: 343–349).

The second part of the questionnaire aims at identifying in detail the motives behind the choice of educational language.

All of the respondents claim that one has to learn Slovakian in Slovakia, 'because this is the State language' (according to 30 persons) and 'in order to get along better' (according to 5 persons).

Regarding the children's studies in kindergarten and elementary school, the questionnaire asked which educational language had been chosen for the child in these institutions. Results show that 18 persons chose mixed-, 19 persons chose Hungarian- and 2 persons chose Slovakian-language kindergarten for their children. These results are not surprising as in many settlements Hungarian-language kindergarten groups do not exist officially; thus, there is not even a chance to choose.

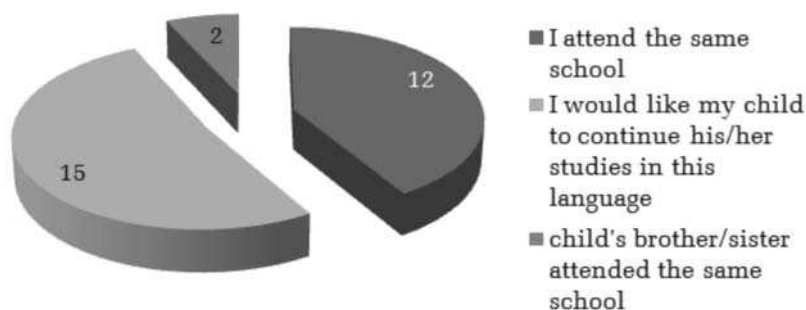


**Figure 4.** *Language of education at kindergarten (own source)*

For the question on the choice of the educational language, three respondents replied as having chosen Slovakian-language elementary school for their first child and four respondents replied as having chosen Slovakian-language class for their second child.

All of the respondents (40) replied positively on the question as to whether they were satisfied with their decision or not.

Based on the replies, two main motives influenced the choice of the given school: (one of) the parent(s) attended the same school (12) and this is the language in which the parent(s) would like their child to continue his/her studies (16).



**Figure 5.** *Why did you choose the school of that educational language? (N:33) (own source)*

Although there is a certain dominance of the choice of language in the choice of school, the motive based on the family model also has an important role. These results can be found in both the qualitative research carried out in Transcarpathia and the interviews made in Upper Hungary.

The last part of the questionnaire examined the factors influencing the choice of school, with special regards to the aid policy. I wanted to know whether and at which level the educational aid granted by the Hungarian Government can influence the choice of school in Zoboralja.

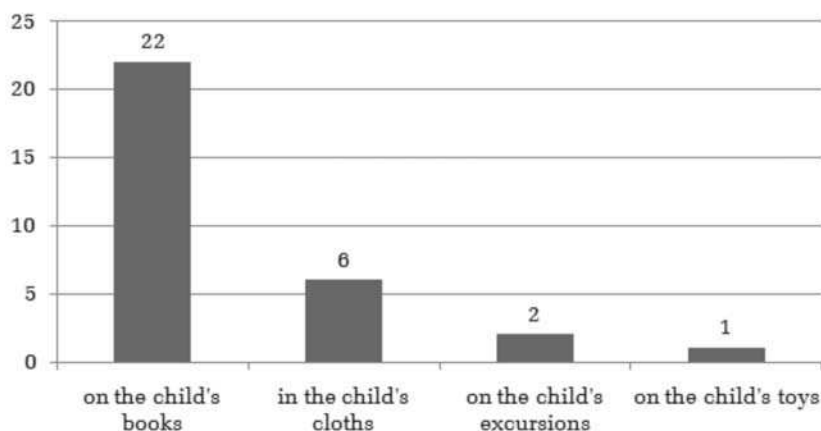
All of the interviewees have already heard of the aid.

**Table 4.** *What do you think this aid is used for? (own source)*

'I do not know what this aid is for and I do not think this is a good idea. When someone claims himself Hungarian, it is not for money, neither now, nor at any other time.'	Negative judgement
'Hungary helps to decrease the costs and is interested in supporting Hungarians living abroad to study in their mother tongue.'	Promotion of studying in the mother tongue
'To give a hand for Hungarians living on the other side of the border.'	Existence of support
'To cover the costs of beginning the school, and this is very helpful.'	Financial support
'To help parents at the beginning of or during the school year (bag, shoes, exercise books).'	Financial support
'To help the students living in Upper Hungary.'	Existence of support
'To increase the number of Hungarian students.'	Promotion of studying in the mother tongue
'To ensure that Hungarian children can attend Hungarian school.'	Promotion of studying in the mother tongue
'To inspire students attending Hungarian school.'	Promotion of studying in the mother tongue
'To enable more children to study in their mother tongue.'	Promotion of studying in the mother tongue
'To contribute to the purchase of materials.'	Promotion of studying in the mother tongue

The open question of this question block is: 'What do you think this aid is used for? Please write it down in a couple of sentences.' The replies show that the majority of the respondents (total respondents: 11) are aware of the principles based on which the Hungarian Government grants this aid. The left column of the table contains the answers and the right column shows my statements based on them.

Those parents, who answered the question as to what they spend the educational aid on, replied as follows: on the child's books (22); on the child's clothes (6); on the child's excursions (2); on the child's toys (1).



**Figure 6.** *What do you spend the aid on? (own source)*

## Analysis of the Interviews and Focus Group Interviews

Taking into consideration the space limitations of the study, the following analysis concentrates on the most frequent code families of the interview, i.e. opinions on the language and the choice of school.

### Hungarian School (the prestige of the language)

In order that a language can survive, it is indispensable that this language has speakers and that a forum exist where this language can be spoken. The survival of Hungarian language in Slovakia is strongly related to the prestige of the mother tongue and the appearance of language in the widest possible scenes.

Some of the interviewees believe that less and less people use Hungarian language in Zoboralja and there are more and more communication situations in which they cannot – or in many cases do not want to – express themselves in Hungarian.

When a stranger arrived, he had to assimilate and learn the (Hungarian) language. Now he does not have the chance for that because everyone speaks to him in Slovakian. (A\_I\_1)

This part of the interview contains several important statements: on the one hand, the prestige of Hungarian language was higher in the given community. A 'stranger' is presumably someone who was born outside the settlement and in order that this person can become part of the community he has to learn the language of

the majority, in this case, the Hungarian language. On the other hand, the second half of the quoted sentence shows that the prestige of the Hungarian language has become lower and that the scenes of the language use have become narrower.

And this is our biggest problem, and the effects of it. When someone from here works in any of the offices or in one of the many hypermarkets or who knows, in the hospitals as a nurse, this person spends the whole day in a Slovakian environment and speaks all day long Slovakian, of Slovakian topics and problems. Thus, there are no places, workplaces where 3-4-5 Hungarians would be together and could discuss Hungarian issues together. While this is the case in the block territory, even in a shop or in a factory, Hungarians are together and can deal with the questions of Hungarians. But not here. (Z\_E\_14)

The story shows the linguistic characteristics of the bilingual diaspora environment, which have been proved by several other researches as well. (Including but not limited to: Csernicskó 2009, 2005; Lanstyák 2002; Lampl 2009; Péntek 2002).

Whether a community is in a given stage of two or more languages, whether there is a balanced bilingualism, or bilingualism dominated by the mother tongue or even bilingualism dominated by the language of the majority, this can be determined by the appearance of the mother tongue in the different scenes of language use and in communication.

At home, (we) only (speak) Hungarian. We live in diaspora, and it was very frequent that when we went to see the doctor or went to the shop or anywhere else outside the family, we met Slovaks more often. (N\_I\_9)

According to István Lanstyák, linguist in Upper Hungary, 'The main question is what kind of opportunities Hungarians living in Slovakia have for using their mother tongue in the different scenes of the private and the public life. The less these speakers depend on the other language, the more their bilingualism remains dominated by the mother tongue, and thus their mother tongue stays less affected by the other language.' (Lanstyák 2005: 66.).

A: Today's children are not taught the Hungarian language. They do not speak (Hungarian) any more.

Q: Even if the grandmother still speaks Hungarian?

A: The grandmother spoke Hungarian but the grandchild does not speak it any more. *Maybe the grandchild calls the grandmother "Nagymama," but he speaks to her in Slovakian.* The problem here is that children are not even taught in Hungarian. This is mainly true for Jelenec (Gimes). In the neighbouring

villages, in Koliňany (Kolon) and in Žirany (Zsére), not that much, but in Jelenec (Gímes) this is very true. (G\_I\_5)

As it has already been mentioned, one can draw conclusions on the social processes happening in a multilingual community, based on the use of languages. The above-mentioned quote describes well the process happening in the community, i.e. the third generation does not speak Hungarian even with the grandparents; so, the family has undergone the shift of languages (from Slovakian to Hungarian) in two generations. The quote does not specify the reason behind: was it due to a mixed marriage or due to a conscious decision? The story only shows the result.

A: Because so far, at least, children studying in the Slovakian class went out on the corridor and spoke Hungarian.

Q: Not anymore?

A: No, not anymore. Parents speak Hungarian to each other but speak Slovakian with the children. (ZS\_I\_12)

The results of the focus group interviews made in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade show similarities in the language use.

Q: And which language do you speak with them?

A: Slovakian with those who speak Slovakian. And Hungarian-Slovakian with those who (speak) Hungarian.

Q: Hungarian-Slovakian, what does it mean?

A: They speak Hungarian and Slovakian too, or both. (N\_F\_10)

As regards the language use, it is important to mention the communication in the electronic space, the language of the TV and the language of listening to music as this information can also tell a lot about the linguistic stage of a community.

Q: In which language do you watch TV?

A1: In Hungarian and in Slovakian.

Q: Do you enjoy that as well? Do you understand it?

A1: Sports are all in Slovakian.

Q: Who do you pull for? Are you a football fan? Or what (kind of fan)?

A1: Football and hockey.

Q: And in which language do you watch TV?

A2: In Hungarian, in Slovakian and in English. (N\_F\_10)

As the support for the State language is high in the diasporas, knowing the Slovakian language does not mean a problem – compared to, for example, the



block Hungarian regions –, and therefore the language of both watching TV and listening to music cannot be limited to one but rather to two or even more languages.

## Mixed Marriage

The next code family is also related to language use.

Some statistical data at the beginning of the study have already pointed out the change in the proportion of those Hungarian students who benefit of education in the majority language instead of education in the mother tongue in Zoboralja.

But, unfortunately, due to the politics and maybe to marriages as well – there are more mixed marriages nowadays –, children coming from mixed marriages are enrolled to Slovakian classes.

They are here, they are Hungarians, they speak Hungarian and they enrol their children to Slovakian-language schools and classes. (A\_I\_1)

Among the close and far relatives of the respondents, there are some with whom the respondents do not speak Hungarian anymore, and this is mainly due to the consequences of the mixed marriages.

Nowadays, it happens that even if both parents are Hungarian they enrol their children to Slovakian-language elementary school, but those who go there usually come from mixed marriages. When I look at the list of students in the class, I rarely find someone called Száraz, Veres or Kovács. I find names reflecting that either they got married here or they bought a house here. This characterizes the kindergarten as well. (N\_I\_9)

According to the results of a survey that was made by the B Fókusz Institute in 2011 in the four bigger regions of the Carpathian Basin, the majority studying in the State language come from mixed marriages (Lanstyák 2005: 66).

I also had classmates, how should I say, coming from a half Slovakian, half Hungarian environment who graduated in Hungarian secondary schools, and *of course they claimed themselves Slovakian* and they still claim themselves so. This is an extremely complicated thing. Who arrives at this point, why and by what? If I knew the answer, believe me, I would tell you. (A\_T\_2)

This part of the interview underlines those results of the researches that prove that the identity, the use of the mother tongue and the educational language are strongly interrelated.

Researches prove clearly that a considerable part of those Hungarians who graduated in non-Hungarian schools claim themselves of having non- (or not exclusively) Hungarian identity (Csernicskó 2009, 2011; Gereben 1999; Lanstyák–Szabó Mihály 1997; Göncz 2005; Dobos 2011 op. cit., etc.).

## Motivations for the Choice of School

From kindergarten to university, the choice of school determines one's career and social mobility in large. Conscious and less conscious decisions are all based on real or imagined ideas and motives. Although the choice of the educational language at kindergarten and elementary school is the parents' decision, getting into the tertiary education and other future plans are based on the person's decisions. These decisions, however, are considerably determined by the continuity of the educational language, i.e. in which school children started their studies.

Based on the interviews carried out in the seven settlements, the decision on the choice of school is influenced by three main factors: *sample tracking*, *aid policy* and *success*.

What kind of school parents choose for their children also depends on the number of students in the class, whether the child will have a mate to share the table with and who the child will have daily contact with. Based on the stories, the choice of both the Hungarian and the Slovakian school is affected by the so-called a) *sample tracking*.

I simply cannot explain it. A father said that *it was trendy* to send his child to Slovakian (school). And I am very keen on (accepting) that it really is. Like the sheep effect, when one goes and the others follow him. (A\_I\_1)

Yes, and now the situation is that, as there are only one or two children, he does not enrol his child (there), because he would not have friends. (A\_T\_2)

Following the family sample can also be detected in the interviews, i.e. parents enrol their children to Slovakian- or Hungarian-language schools because they or their relatives or maybe even the brothers and sisters also studied in the same school.

A1: I think my mum studied here.

A2: My dad (studied) here.

A3: I think my mum studied here. (N\_F\_10)

The choice of school can be influenced by the political processes, the aid policy of the mother country and the economic factors. These factors can influence

positively and negatively the decision in the moment of choice. In Transcarpathia, for example, the Hungarian educational network has been negatively affected since 2008 by those governmental measures that lowered the prestige of the school network of the mother tongue, suggesting that studying in the mother tongue is less valuable as one cannot graduate and apply for further studies in his/her mother tongue (Csernicskó 2009 op. cit., Séra 2013b).

Another important factor is b) *the question of the aid policy* that could strengthen the education in the mother tongue in Upper Hungary as well. Educational aid was discussed both in the questionnaires filled in with parents and in the structured interviews.

Not really, because so far I have seen that the Rákóczi Association made real efforts to help parents. I have not really noticed it. Receiving it helps parents, but I do not think that it is given to Hungarian parents to encourage them to enrol their children to a Hungarian school. (A\_I\_1)

A: Some time ago, when it all started, helping parents financially, the aid was called 'in the homeland in Hungarian'. Schools could dispose of at least 1/3 of the money. I think having the money in our hands was more effective as we could buy school materials on it and could take the children to excursions. We could do things that parents might not spend on today. Because if I tell the parents to pay 40 Euros and we are going to visit Budapest, it is not sure that the parents will pay this money. But if the money is here, in the school, then I can take the necessary money for that and take the children to Budapest. (G\_I\_5)

It has to be noted that in this environment the aid policy, i.e. the educational aid, does not play any role in the choice of the Hungarian class. In my survey made in Munkács (Mukacheve), Transcarpathia (in big city diasporas), similar results were recorded, i.e. the choice of school did not depend on the above-mentioned aid.

One of the most frequent motives behind parental decisions is the misbelief that if the children study in the school of the majority, they will get along and succeed better. The motive of c) *success* can also be detected in the interviews.

They also reason that if they study there *they will be able to succeed better*. But I can show you 100 persons who studied there believing that they will succeed better and they do not get along better than those who studied in the Hungarian school. These latter succeeded even better, as the proportion of people who studied at college in this village is higher than those who studied there (in the Slovakian school). (CS\_E\_15)

So, there are people who do not go anymore to the Hungarian community because they want to *succeed better*. I even know somebody who *feels ashamed for* having chosen Slovakian school for his children, but he did it anyway. What should I say? So, this is it. This is someone very close to me, almost a relative, and we try to avoid the topic because we would only fight about that. I cannot understand his reasons. (P\_I\_11)

Other motives can also be found in the interviews that are presented in the figure below.

The choice of Hungarian-language school is presented on the right-hand side of the figure, while the left side presents the motives and results related to the choice of the Slovakian-language school.

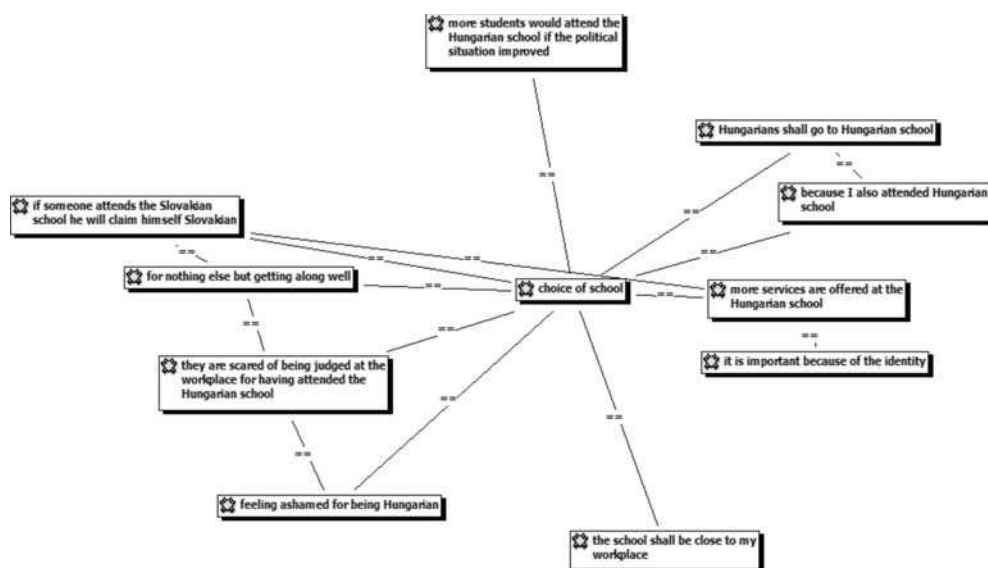


Figure 7. Motivations of the choice of school (own source)

## Conclusion

In this study made in Zoboralja, based on the questionnaires and interviews made with the directors of Hungarian schools, students and their parents, I tried to discover the motives that have an effect on the choice of elementary school.

As only fifty students study in the seven mentioned institutions, I decided not to make a deeper analysis and compare the dependent and independent variables. However, certain characteristics can be determined even from these forty questionnaires. The questionnaires show that all respondents are bilingual

at a certain level and use both languages in their daily communication and in the offices. Half of the respondents speak Slovakian as a mother tongue – based on self-claim – and one third of them at a very high level. Nonetheless, it has to be noted that parents living in mixed marriages use Slovakian language in their daily communication both with their spouse and with their children. As regards the choice of the language of education, it can be pointed out that the respondents (18) chose presumably the mixed educational language kindergarten for their children because there were no other possibilities in the settlement; so, there was not even a chance to choose from the kindergarten groups. As regards the motivations for the choice of school, it is important to note that almost half of the respondents (16) chose the Hungarian-language language school because it was important for them that their children continue their studies in this language, although following the family sample was also dominant, i.e. my child studies here because I also studied here. The last part of the questionnaire focused on the educational aid. All of the respondents heard from the aid and most of them (22) spent it on the child's books.

The analysis of the interviews revealed many hidden motives and narratives that colour the image of the situation of the Hungarian education and the factors affecting the choice of school in Zoboralja. Most of them confirm the already existing researches; however, they differ significantly from my researches carried out in Transcarpathia. While, based on my researches carried out in Beregrákos (Rakoshyno) and Munkács (Mukacheve), the linguistic factor is a 'white flight phenomenon' and the inadequate knowledge of Hungarian language characterizes the choice of school in the diasporas, the most important factor in Slovakia is the drop in prestige of the Hungarian language.

The space limitations of this study do not permit the detailed presentation of those main code families that can be found in the interviews, yet it can be said that the most common topics of the stories and interviews were the prestige of the Hungarian language, the mixed marriages and the motives behind the choice of school.

Although it is not analysed in details in this study, I have to mention in the conclusion that meditating on the vision and the survival of the school plays an important role in the interviews made with the school directors. Under the new Slovakian law on education, the entire Hungarian education will be ceased from 2015, as classes having less than eleven students cannot continue the operation. As, based on the present data, there will be no first grade students in any of the schools except for Veľký Cetín (Nagycétény), there are concerns that Hungarian-language education will be degraded and terminated in this region in the next two years.

After all, one can ask whether there will be Hungarian education in Zoboralja in ten years. Will there be Hungarian parents who may change this tendency?; is the enrolment programme and the diaspora strategy for slowing down or

eventually stopping the language shift in this region and, at the same time, the individuals' language change?

Answering the above questions and making action plans cannot happen without scientific researches, and this is what this study also tried to contribute to.

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