

“We were that small, special group in that large school with »normal« classes”

Education in a Minority Language in the Context of Hungarians From Zagreb

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ABSTRACT

The latest research conducted in the Hungarian community of the City of Zagreb has shown that the Hungarian language is slowly losing its communication functions in informal domains (family, friends, the sphere of intimacy) and is withdrawing before Croatian, i.e., that language shift is in progress. As one of the key factors affecting language shift, school is mentioned as support in families in intergenerational language transmission and language preservation in the community. Croatia has ensured an institutional framework for education in minority languages to its minorities through a series of regulatory acts. However, exercising this right is often followed by numerous difficulties. In case of the Hungarian minority, this is due to geographical dispersity. Nevertheless, during the 1990s, a Hungarian group in kindergarten, a bilingual class and nurturing language for primary- and secondary-school pupils were launched in Zagreb. In order to obtain a clearer image of how various class models in a minority language actually function and which problems their participants are faced with, we conducted a preliminary research among younger members of the community who attended classes in Hungarian at least at one point during their education. We completed the results with information obtained through informal conversations with preschool and school teachers as well as through immediate observations of the community.

Key words: Hungarian minority, domains, language shift, education in minority language

1. The Hungarian minority in the City of Zagreb

1.1. Socio-demographic context

Even though the ethnic homogenisation of the Croatian state territory has been on a constant rise over the past thirty years (Babić 2015), Croatia is at the very top among the European Union member states according to the number of officially recognized and protected national minorities and their languages. “Officially” means that the Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia lists 22 national minorities. Article 15 of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia warrants freedom to minority members to express their national affiliation, to freely use their language and script as well as cultural autonomy. These rights are regulated by the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities dated 2002. Hungarians are among the stated minorities that enjoy these rights.

Hungarians belong to old or native national minorities. With regard to the old national minorities, on the grounds of comparing censuses from 1991, 2001 and 2011, Babić (2015, 55) concludes that these minorities exhibit a tendency to decrease in number and to assimilate into the Croatian population, and the results of the latest census from 2021 show that their number is still declining, whereby Hungarians are no exception. Hence, their number is still gradually decreasing and today (2021 Census) amounts to 10 315, which is merely 46% of the total number of the Hungarian population back in 1991 when there were 22 355 of them. The share of 0.27% in the total population of Croatia indicates that this is a small community whose members are geographically mostly gathered in Baranya and several villages in eastern Slavonia (where Hungarians live in blocks), where they also constitute indigenous population¹, while others are scattered across other parts of the country (diaspora). In these areas, they are not indigenous, but rather immigrants, mostly from Vojvodina (Čurković-Major 2002, Sebők 2006, Kontra 2016). This also stands for the Hungarians in the city of Zagreb.

The statistical data from the last census from 2021 show that, even though the share of national minorities in the total population of the city amounts to a meagre 4.12% (or 31 624 persons from the total population of the City of Zagreb which amounts to 767 131), here we find members of all 22 nations which are mentioned in the Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. Among them, the most numerous ones are Serbs (12 034 or 1.57%), Bosniaks (6 566 or 0.86%), and Albanians (3 475 or 0.45%), followed by Roma (2 167 or 0.28%) and Slovenians (1 312 or 0.17%), whereas other minorities are represented with a number of members which does not surpass 1000 citizens (Austrians, Bulgarians, Czechs, Germans, Poles, Russians, etc.). The

¹ The majority of Hungarians (6059 or 58.7% of all Hungarians in Croatia) live in Osijek-Baranya County where they make up for 2.35% of the total population (2021 Census).

latter group also comprises Hungarians whose number, according to the last four censuses, is constantly decreasing: in 1991, 1168 citizens declared themselves as having Hungarian nationality; in 2001, 841; in 2011, 825; and in 2021, 646 which accounts for 0.08% of the total population of Zagreb and for 6.26% of the total number of Hungarians in Croatia.

The Hungarian population is represented by groups which came to Zagreb between the two world wars and later from various regions, as we mentioned before, mostly from Vojvodina, but also from eastern Slavonia and Srijem, and from Hungary in the 1990s or later (Škiljan 2015)². This was also shown by a research conducted in 2018 (Baričević-Tamaskó – Katalinić 2020), when out of the total number of respondents (N=67) 46.3% stated Vojvodina as their place of birth, 30.3% Hungary, and 6% of the respondents were born in other regions of Croatia with native Hungarian population or abroad. The remaining 16.7% of the respondents were born in Zagreb, and they belong to the second or third generation.

1.2. Factors of assimilation and language shift

Relying on demographic, historical, regional and social statistical data about the Hungarian ethnic minority in Croatia from 1910 to 2001, Gyémánt and Drozdik (2004) conclude that this little community with a decreased number of members is affected by the process of assimilation. Thereby, they emphasise that this is inevitable in groups that are scattered (diaspora), which also applies to a significant number of Hungarians. In Croatia, most national minorities are in the process of assimilation, and among the main reasons which generate assimilation, sociologists state political systems with an insufficiently elaborated system of national minorities' rights as well as a series of other factors such as mixed marriages, social conformism, unfavourable socio-political atmosphere and the inactivity of the community members themselves (Babić 2015). It is important to bear in mind that assimilation must not be observed as a simple and linear process. Sándor Oláh (cited by Bartha 1999, 83) defines assimilation of an ethnic community as a cultural adjustment; this is a process comprising multiple stages in which cultural codes, structural properties of the society, and emotional characteristics are mashed and mutually adjusted. Furthermore, language shift, as one of the elements of the identity and the basic cultural code, precedes a complete adjustment and invisibility of a national minority in society.³

The most general definition of language shift comes from Uriel Weinreich. He defines language shift "as a change from habitual use of

2 For more information regarding the Hungarian population throughout the history of the City of Zagreb, from the Middle Ages to the present day, dynamics and historical circumstances of their immigration, see Škiljan 2015.

3 Language shift or assimilation does not necessarily always have to be followed by a loss of national identity (ethnic assimilation); American emigrants are such an example (Borbély 2001).

one language to that of another” (Weinreich 1968, 68). Borbély (2001) emphasises that language shift must be understood as a process. We know that the process begins when one or more community members do not speak the minority language anymore, whereas at the end of the process there is not a single community member who speaks the minority language. Between these two poles lie various stages of bilingualism, from that in which the domination of the minority language is present, through stable bilingualism, to the domination of the majority language. Stable bilingualism is characterised by diglossia⁴, i.e., an equal functional distribution of functions in the two languages, which is quite rare, and even if it happens, it usually does not last long. Minority communities are more often found in the state of unstable bilingualism when the use of two languages is not strictly separated, i.e., their functions overlap, which eventually results in one language (usually the majority language) completely taking over all functions.

There are many factors by which sociolinguists explain why language shift has occurred in some minority communities, whereas others have managed to maintain their language⁵. Some of them are the following: the current policy on language and education of minorities, development of the group’s institutions, attitude of the minority group towards their language, towards majority language, towards bilingualism, etc. (cf. Grosjean 1982, Bartha 1999, Romaine 2005, Borbély 2014). It is important to note that some of these factors are ambivalent in that they may favour either maintenance or shift, and that the direction of the change is never determined by a single factor as many factors affecting maintenance and shift interact in complex ways (Grosjean 1982).

Systematic research that would attempt to show which factors affect assimilation and how (in their mutual co-relationship), and which are or will be responsible for language shift amongst Hungarians from Zagreb has still not been conducted. Nevertheless, various works mention certain individual factors (mostly in the context of socio-demographic data) that are considered relevant in the process. This is primarily the already mentioned diaspora in which a large portion of Croatia’s Hungarians live. For instance, education in a minority language (which is also stated as an important factor in language maintenance) is difficult to organize in diaspora conditions, so children do not have an opportunity to get formal education in a minority language (Ćurković-Major 2002)⁶.

4 Diglossia here does not imply Ferguson’s use of several specific codes (languages or varieties) within a society where each code performs functions different from the ones considered appropriate for another code, but rather functional differentiated linguistic varieties of any kind, as seen by Gumperz and Fishman (Fishman 1972).

5 The notion contrary to language shift is language maintenance. According to Baker (2006, 75), language maintenance usually refers to relative language stability in the number and distribution of its speakers, its proficient usage by children and adults, and its retention in specific domains (home, school, religion).

6 In that sense, Ćurković-Major emphasises Zagreb itself as a positive example, which will be dealt with in more detail later.

Furthermore, the demographic factor which is often stated as key for assimilation process in these communities, are mixed marriages (Kontra 2016, Sebők 2006) in which minority partners retain their identity, but their children as a rule accept the identity of the majority nation. A large number of Hungarians from Zagreb also live in mixed marriages⁷ which will, in the future, define not only the identity of the children born in these marriages, but it will also affect the dynamics of language shift at community level. Language shift in diaspora usually takes place within three generations; the first generation is monolingual or with dominant minority language, the second one is bilingual, whereas in the third generation the majority language is either dominant or the only language spoken (Borbély 2014, Baker 2006). Ćurković-Major (2002) claims that this is the situation with Hungarians from Zagreb, and that the third generation (grandchildren) speaks no or just a little bit of Hungarian. Besides, the author also points out the fact that in the 1991 census 15% of the Hungarian minority members from Croatia stated that the Hungarian language *was not* their mother tongue, foreseeing that this percentage, if viewed as a consequence of language shift, would most likely increase further. Thirty years later, we can see from the 2021 census that it grew to as high as 30%. When Hungarians from Zagreb are taken into consideration, today 25.6% of them do not consider Hungarian as their mother tongue⁸.

1.3. The domains of language use

As another factor in the process of assimilating minority groups in general, Kontra (2016) emphasises the lack of functional domains in which languages are used, i.e., the precondition for longer maintenance of a bilingual state are clearly separated functions which are for an individual or a community filled in by one or the other language (Bartha 1999, 123).

The notion of functional domains is tied to sociolinguist J. A. Fishman and his study of bilingualism and language choice-patterns in minority communities. With these observations, Fishman wanted to provide “descriptive and analytic variables which may contribute to an understanding of *who* speaks and with *whom* and *when* in those settings that are characterised by widespread and relatively stable multilingualism” (Fishman 1965). He defined “domains – regardless of their number – in terms of institutional context or socio-ecological co-occurrences. They

7 According to the research conducted by Baričević-Tamaskó and Katalinić (2020) in 2018, 48 out of the total of 67 respondents either are or were married, out of whom 79% are in a mixed marriage with a partner of Croatian nationality.

8 A high percentage of Hungarians to whom Hungarian is not their mother tongue is not characteristic for the communities of cross-border Hungarians (Sebők 2006). In their research, Baričević-Tamaskó and Katalinić (2018) attain a bit more favourable result than showed by censuses. In the interviewed group, 89.4% of the respondents state that Hungarian is their mother tongue, i.e., just a bit over 10% of those to whom it is not. A high percentage probably stems from the respondents' age group (38.8% 50-54 years old; 44.8% 33-53 years old).

attempt to designate the major clusters of interaction situations that occur in particular multilingual settings. (...) Domain is a sociocultural construct abstracted from topics of communication, relationship between communicators, and locales of communication” (Fishman 1972). In his research, Fishman establishes five of them: family, friendship, religion, education, and work, but it is possible to define a potentially unlimited number of domains relevant to some multilingual context. Domains are often referred to as either formal or informal, whereby the dominant language is more often used in public domains characterised by formality, and the minority language is more represented in private domains characterised by intimacy and solidarity. Fishman starts from the point of macro-perspective and seeks domains applicable to the entire language community, which are therefore prototypical and static, but they do not provide insight into how bilingual or multilingual speakers actually use their languages. Rydenvald (2019) explains that language use of multilinguals has proved to be more dynamic than the domain theory suggests. Not only do multilingual individuals use different languages in domains, but they also use different languages in the same domain. The borders between the domains are thus blurred, and the domains overlap. For instance, the school domain does not only relate to education but also social life between peers, resulting in the domains of school and friendship domains to be, to a large extent, interwoven. For this reason, domain research in recent studies consists of both quantitative and qualitative analysis. For example, Rydenvald (2019) complements the data obtained from the questionnaire with the data obtained from self-recordings and interviews. Even earlier, in the analysis, Bartha (1996) includes data collected through immediate participation and observations of the studied community, as was also done by Baričević-Tamaskó and Katalinić (2020) in the analysis of the domains in the community of the Hungarians from Zagreb. Their research shows that the functional division of the domains assumes the use of Hungarian in church (Hungarian mass), in the Hungarian cultural society, the Hungarian institute and other formal bodies, followed by family and among friends, and finally, in an entirely private sphere (prayer, reading, radio, and television). Therefore, we can talk about a formal and informal division. The use of the two languages is clearly divided by function, and the choice of the language is tied to certain situations, participants in the interaction, topics discussed, but also to communication competency (cf. Bartha 1993, 46). Consequently, Hungarian is completely dominant in the religious life domain as well as in formal domains (cultural society⁹, institute), whereas both

9 Programs in the cultural society are exclusively held in the Hungarian language. However, communication among the society members after the official part of the program, during informal socialising, is carried out as follows: older members communicate among themselves only in Hungarian, younger members communicate with the older ones mostly in Hungarian, whereas the Croatian language is dominant among younger members.

languages are present in the informal domain. Moreover, the deeper we enter the private sphere, the more the use of Croatian increases and that of Hungarian declines. This also refers to linguistic practices in families where, regarding the choice of the language, the factor of generation and age is noticeable. Whereas Hungarian prevails in the communication with the older generation (grandmothers and grandfathers), the second-generation members most commonly communicate in Croatian among themselves and with their children. In addition, the younger the person, the greater the extent to which Croatian is chosen for communication both with family members as well as friends and acquaintances. From the aforementioned, we can see that in this community the Hungarian language is more present in formal than in informal domains, and that there is a threat that it might soon disappear from the most important one, i.e., the family which is considered a major direct cause in the decline, revival or maintenance of a minority language (Baker 2006).

The mentioned research in this community did not examine school as the domain in which the minority language is used. This is the kind of domain that provides conditions for “practicing” a language (both for the pupils and the teachers), moreover, learning a minority language, i.e., what is even more important, learning in a minority language has an important role in minority language maintenance (Lanstyák 1994). The use of minority languages in education has its political framework, i.e., it is defined with official state acts. Further in the paper, we shall demonstrate the manner which regulates rights concerning education in minority languages in Croatia and what the Hungarian community has done to exercise the warranted rights.

2. Institutional framework for education in minority languages

Exercising special rights and freedoms of national minorities in Croatia is regulated by the *Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities* dated 2002¹⁰ according to which, among other things, members of national minorities are guaranteed to “use their own language and script, privately as well as in public and official use, upbringing and education on the language and script they use as well as cultural autonomy by maintaining, developing and expressing their own culture, and conserving and protecting their cultural goods and traditions”.¹¹ Therefore, in the education domain, Article 11 of this Act is extremely important,

10 For the historical overview and current situation in the Croatian legislation regarding education in minority languages see Lewis et al. 2020.

11 This means that national minorities can establish institutions for performing cultural, publishing, museum and library activities, establish associations, etc., in which they are supported by the Ministry of Culture that provides continuous financing of their programs.

as well as the *Act on Education in Languages and Scripts of National Minorities* dated 2000 which prescribes the manner of conducting education of national minorities in preschool and school institutions. The mentioned documents show a certain aspect of positive discrimination in the protection of national minorities' rights as they give advantage to enrolling children belonging to a national minority, enable holding classes (class organization) even for a smaller number of pupils from the one prescribed for school institutions with classes in the Croatian language as well as ensure schooling of the teaching staff required for the needs of holding such classes. For members of the Hungarian national minority and for exercising rights to education in Hungarian language, apart from the mentioned acts, the bilateral *Agreement between the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of Hungary on the protection of Hungarian minority in the Republic of Croatia and Croatian minority in the Republic of Hungary* dated 1995 is also extremely important as seen in Article 2 which ensures support to existing kindergartens, primary and secondary schools and high school institutions which hold classes in the languages of minorities (which then ensures all educational levels in a minority language), in the sense of employing and schooling teachers who are minority members, sharing experience among experts in this field from both countries, but also encouraging learning of minority languages in schools of the majority nation which seems as a highly important segment showing the relationship the majority community has with the minority language communities. The mentioned acts support the following forms of formal education: a) teaching in the language and script of the national minority (Model A), b) bilingual courses (Model B), or c) optional learning of the language and culture of the minority – language and culture nurturing (Model C). Thus, minority members themselves propose and choose the model and program in accordance with the possibilities for its realisation.

Model A means mother tongue medium education with compulsory learning of Croatian in the number of hours identical to the number of hours of minority languages. This model in the Croatian educational system is used by the more numerous and better organized national minorities; Czech, Serbian, Italian and Hungarian (Lewis et al. 2020). These are homogeneous communities geographically gathered in one area, like the Hungarians in Osijek-Baranya County in eastern Croatia. For them all levels of education in the Hungarian language are ensured in Hungarian Education and Cultural Centre in Osijek where after preschool and primary school, secondary-school pupils can choose among five programs: preparatory school (*opća gimnazija*), hotel and tourist technician, economist, merchant, and cook. Besides, there are three kindergartens and three elementary schools in that county where classes for children of the Hungarian minority are organized according to this model. According to many authors, only educational structures with tuition in the native language, i.e., education *in* the minority language, ensure its maintenance; all other types of education help language shift

(for example, Lanstyák 1994, Benő 2015). Skutnabb-Kangas (2004) also emphasises the importance of mother tongue medium education from the perspective of students' school achievements: „those students who reached the highest levels of both bilingualism and school achievement were the ones where the children's mother tongue was the main medium of education for the most extended period of time“¹².

The regions in which Hungarian minorities are smaller in number and less homogenous use Model B or Model C. Model B is bilingual: the natural group of subjects is taught in Croatian, while the social group of subjects is taught in the language of the members of the national minority. This model is realized in special departments in schools with classes in Croatian. Teaching according to Model B for Hungarians in Croatia is organized in two elementary schools. In Model C (language and culture nurturing), with regular teaching in Croatian, the language and culture of the national minority in the minority language are taught in two to five school hours a week. This includes learning the language and literature of the national minority, as well as geography, history, music and arts. Teaching according to Model C for Hungarians is organized in one kindergarten, 23 elementary schools, one high school and one higher education institution.¹³ Lanstyák (1994) calls this type of teaching an alternative solution which is often used in the former Yugoslav countries. These models of education in the minority language were based on programs created at the end of the 60s of the previous century. In them, teaching according to Model C was foreseen only for high school pupils, while today it is also used in elementary schools. Ćurković-Major (2002) believes that the proposed structure, or a network of schools as she calls it, has not corresponded to the real needs of the Croatian Hungarians neither then, nor today. Not only that more than half of the population scattered throughout the country was unable to educate their children in the minority language, but in such conditions, it was also difficult to achieve any kind of teaching in the Hungarian language. An exception and a positive example is Zagreb, where for more than 25 years lessons have been held for the children of the Hungarian minority: in one kindergarten group according to Model A, in elementary school (from first to fourth grade) according to the bilingual or Model B, and nurturing the language or Model C for elementary school pupils (grades 5-8) and high school pupils. In order to gain insight into how certain teaching models in the Hungarian language in Zagreb function in practice in real life, we decided to conduct pilot-research which comprised the participants coming from the educational process itself. The remainder of this paper shall present the results of this pilot-research.

12 Skutnabb-Kangas (2004) further argues in the same paper: „Indigenous and minority children should have their education mainly through the medium of their own language, with good teaching of a dominant language as subject, taught by bilingual teachers. (...) This would lead to high levels of bilingualism and multilingualism.”

13 Data refer to the school year 2015/2016 (Kontra 2016, 145).

3. Method and respondents

How a certain minority community uses its legally regulated right to practice its language singularity within the educational process and which problems it is faced with can be best demonstrated by its very participants, teachers, pupils, and parents. Thereby, we were most interested in how learning Hungarian in schools was perceived by pupils. Therefore, in spring 2021, we conducted a preliminary research with the help of qualitative semi-structured in-depth interviews (open-ended questions). The respondents included eight former (aged 24 and 29) and two current pupils (aged 10 and 11). We found it very important that all respondents were members of the second and third generation of Hungarians from Zagreb and that at least in one part of their education (kindergarten, primary and secondary school) they had learnt or were currently learning Hungarian according to one of the three models described in the previous section. The interviews were planned in a way to obtain information on language transmission in family and learning language in school as well as their daily language practices within these domains (family, school, friends). Since we did not examine language knowledge, the interviews were conducted both in Hungarian and Croatian, depending on the option the respondents felt more comfortable with at a given moment. All interviews were conducted live, recorded and then later transcribed.

The first interview was conducted with siblings (a brother and a sister) (further in the text Respondent 1 and Respondent 2) belonging to the third generation of Hungarians from Zagreb. Their mother was born in Vojvodina, but she moved to Zagreb with her parents in adulthood. Her husband is Croatian; therefore, the children grew up in a bilingual marriage, in which a huge role in passing on the language was played by their grandmother and grandfather with whom they communicate exclusively in Hungarian (the exceptions are situations when their father is present, who understands Hungarian, but does not speak it). With their mother they communicate mostly in Hungarian, but in their mutual communication the Croatian language prevails. The other two participants of the focus group were sisters (R3 and R4) born in a mixed marriage where the father is a Hungarian who moved to Zagreb from Vojvodina to study. According to their own words, they learnt the language primarily from their grandmother and grandfather who lived in Vojvodina. The two of them communicate in Croatian, and the Croatian language also prevails in the communication with their father. They stopped speaking Hungarian as actively as they did before after the death of their grandparents. They all passed all levels of education in the minority language offered in Zagreb. The next two respondents were siblings (a brother and a sister) (R5 and R6) born in a purely Hungarian marriage. They came to Zagreb from Hungary when they were 1 and 2 years old. Hungarian is their first language, and they learnt Croatian in kindergarten and school. They communicate exclusively in Hungarian within the family, and between themselves they use both languages, depending on the topic, even

though Hungarian feels more natural to them. They attended a bilingual Hungarian class in primary school. The sister is to be employed in a Hungarian kindergarten where she had internship for three consecutive years, so she shared that experience with us as well. Although Hungarian is their mother tongue and first language, now they do not feel that they are better in another language. The next interview was conducted with a pupil (R7) born in a bilingual family. He learnt Hungarian from his mother and Croatian from his father. At the time we spoke to him, he was attending a bilingual Hungarian class. The last interview was conducted with two students (R8 and R9) of the graduate program of the Hungarian Studies in the University of Zagreb. They were both born in mixed marriages. One of them learnt Hungarian from his grandmother who lives near Zagreb, and with whom he communicates exclusively in Hungarian even today (with his Hungarian mother he speaks Croatian, or they sometimes mix both languages in certain situations). He had learnt Hungarian as an optional subject according to Model C since the 7th grade. The other respondent enrolled in the Hungarian Studies with, according to his own words, basic knowledge of the Hungarian language. He is the oldest of the four children in the family in which the mother is Croatian and the father is a Hungarian from Vojvodina where his grandmother and grandfather (both Hungarians) live. He remembers that he and his sister spoke Hungarian until primary school because they spent much more time at their grandparents', when they also communicated in Hungarian with their father. Later, the father stopped being consistent in speaking Hungarian, and the language "disappeared" from the family (the two younger children have no knowledge of the Hungarian language), also due to less and less frequent visits to Vojvodina. He is convinced that this would not have happened had the grandparents lived nearer. He attended a Hungarian group in kindergarten, but he did not attend other forms of classes in Hungarian.

Apart from the pupils, one interview was given by a preschool teacher (R10) with 28 years of work experience who had been working in the Hungarian kindergarten group since the very beginning.

As we did not interview other participants of the education process in this preliminary research, for the purposes of this paper, we completed the data obtained in the interviews with the data obtained by immediate participation in the community (school visits, conversations with parents at kids' performances and family gatherings), as well as through informal conversations with two teachers working in a bilingual class and a teacher teaching Hungarian according to Model C in higher grades of primary and in secondary school. In addition, a valuable source of information was a publication compiled by teachers for the 25th anniversary of the existence of the Croatian-Hungarian class department (Lorencz Urkom et al. 2021). The publication contains short school reviews by the former and the incumbent school director, the former and the present teachers, two former pupils and five parents whose children are currently taught according to Model B.

4. Education in the minority language from the perspective of its participants

Model A is conducted only at preschool level, through a full-day kindergarten program in the Hungarian language intended for children of the Hungarian national minority, but also for other children whose parents want their kids to learn Hungarian as a foreign language¹⁴. The group was initiated in 1994 in the Potočnica Kindergarten located in the area of a wider city centre following the initiative of the Democratic Union of Hungarians of Croatia. This is a kindergarten group attended by children aged between two and half and seven, and the program is carried out by two preschool teachers who have higher professional education, and Hungarian is their mother tongue. The objective of the program, as mentioned on the kindergartens' website, among others, is to support families in nurturing national identity and creating the atmosphere of tolerance towards national (and every other type of) diversity. The average number of children ranges between 10 and 15, and in the school year 2020/2021, 12 children enrolled in this group. Before, there were more children, which is also indicated by the data from Kontra (2016: 146) for the school year 2015/2016 when the Hungarian kindergarten program was attended by 19 children, as also stated by the preschool teacher with 28 years of work experience in this kindergarten. She sees the reason for this trend in the *convenience* of young parents.

R10: It is primarily out of convenience that fewer children come to the group because if there is a kindergarten nearby, and the parents work from home (which has often been the case since the beginning of the pandemic), then, it is easier to take the kid, that is, send it to that nearer kindergarten... not because they don't want that their child speaks Hungarian, because they do teach it at home, but because they are not aware that such teaching is not the same as the one in the kindergarten.

One former pupil, however, states that this was also the case earlier, some fifteen years ago:

R5: We did not go to the Hungarian kindergarten not because it was not good, but because it was far away from the place we lived then.

The respondent who attended practice in the kindergarten sees the small number of children in the Hungarian kindergarten as:

¹⁴ This very „openness“ to enrol children into the group raises a question of whether the requirements put before preschool teachers by Model A can be met.

R6: the advantage before Croatian kindergartens with groups of thirty children. Still, there are days when, for instance, because of an illness, only two of them (children) show up, and then it is more difficult to organize some activity.

With regard to language knowledge, most children in the group are bilingual coming from mixed or purely Hungarian marriages. The preschool teacher with 28 years of work experience sees positive tendencies in mixed marriages regarding the use of the Hungarian language in families as well as the prestige of Hungarian in society:

R10: It is evident that they also use Hungarian at home. Young families today speak Hungarian, they are not afraid that they will find themselves in an unfavourable situation because of Hungarian. That was not the case before. (...) This changed because of the political situation, the Hungarian language now has much more prestige.

Nevertheless, it often happens that parents enrol their child in the Hungarian program for the very purpose of learning the language which then puts a difficult task before the preschool teachers. They try to speak only in Hungarian as they teach according to Model A, but because of the children who do not speak Hungarian, at the beginning they say everything in both languages, and at the end of the year all communication is conducted only in Hungarian. The respondent who attended practice as a kindergarten teacher looks at the issue in the following way:

R6: Parents from mixed marriages enrol their children in the Hungarian kindergarten because they do not speak Hungarian at home, but these children have a lot of difficulties in learning the language, let's say that half of them masters it, and the rest just struggle.

The mixed composition of the group consequently also influences the choice of language in which the children communicate among themselves. Preschool teachers state that both Hungarian and Croatian are used, depending on the situation and the interlocutor (e.g., they address the teachers in Hungarian). Sometimes the kindergarten group is divided into two subgroups; one only speaks Hungarian, the other Croatian. Apart from this fact, the group dynamics is also conditioned by the children who do not speak Croatian, and then the ideal situation is created in which Hungarian is given advantage to:

R10: An interesting situation happens if there is a child in the group who does not know Croatian (most often this is a diplomats' child), and then it "draws" the entire group towards Hungarian.

After kindergarten, Hungarian children can continue their schooling in the minority language according to Model B in a bilingual, Hungarian-Croatian, combined class organized in a primary school in the city centre (Ivan Gundulić Primary School). The program was launched during the school year 1996/1997 following the initiative of the Hungarian community and parents who chose this very model as they considered that their children should pass bilingual schooling in order to be included in the program of Croatian schools after the fourth grade without any difficulties. School subjects taught in the minority language are the Hungarian language, natural and social sciences, and music, whereas the children attend the Croatian language, mathematics, arts, and physical education classes in the Croatian language. The program is carried out by two teachers whose mother tongue is Hungarian. The children attend the lessons of foreign languages and religion together with pupils from regular classes. The number of children has changed over the years, and since the beginning of the school year 2020/2021 (when this bilingual Hungarian department celebrated its 25th anniversary), exactly one hundred children passed through the department. The number of children enrolled in the first grade ranges between two and a maximum of eight (in the school year 2011/2012), whereas 2015/2016 was the only year when there were no enrolments in the first grade according to Urkom-Lorencz et al. 2021. The tendency towards a decreasing number of children has especially been evident over the last several years which is a consequence, as thought by one of the teachers, of various external factors, from the pandemic, through the earthquake which struck Zagreb in 2020, to changes in the very "family dynamics". Namely, similarly as in kindergarten, many parents find it more and more difficult to make the decision to drive their children to school every day from the suburbs to the city centre. Working from home showed that it is easier if children attend a school which is located near the place of their residence. One of our respondents subscribes to the fact that such an attitude of parents is not anything new:

R6: I attended the first three grades of primary school in a Hungarian class in Gundulić school, and then we moved to another part of the city, so my parents transferred me to another school because the Hungarian school was too far away.

Some parents are nevertheless more motivated than others as well as more aware that passing on language within the family is not enough and that children also require formal education in Hungarian.¹⁵

Despite the fact that it is not always the easiest thing to organize bringing kids to school, it is worth every sacrifice.

We find it is important that the children learn Hungarian, that they learn the Hungarian language and orthography, that they also get introduced to other topics in Hungarian, that they get around in a Hungarian environment outside the family home as much as possible. We know that it is difficult to develop a language without all that.

Words of a dad whose child did not speak Croatian at the time of moving to Zagreb also express the attitude towards the majority language and the quality of the school program:

I would like to point out that with this school, apart from knowing the Hungarian language and culture well, she can also learn the Croatian language well, which will facilitate her future schooling and adjustment to the society where she lives.

Much like in the kindergarten, here too the group is heterogeneous with regard to language knowledge. The teachers state that many children come without any knowledge of Hungarian, therefore, their parents expect that they will acquire it in school. Others understand a little bit and speak Hungarian, whereas in the third group Hungarian is the mother tongue and frequently the only language spoken in the family, i.e., they do not know Croatian. This composition of groups puts teachers before a difficult task and requires a lot of flexibility from them when it comes to class contents and teaching methods as well as individual work with certain pupils. In addition, this situation impacts the choice of language which will prevail among children in their mutual communication during the recess and after school:

R1: I was lucky because there was a girl from Pécs in my class, so we only talked in Hungarian, and then there was another boy who didn't know Hungarian at all, so I only spoke Croatian with him.

The youngest respondent at the time of interviewing was a pupil of the fourth grade who described similar situations:

¹⁵ Taken from Urkom-Lorencz et al. 2021.

R7: With my best friends I only speak Hungarian, and with others I speak Croatian because they still don't know Hungarian well.

Combined classes pose an additional challenge both for teachers and pupils. As one former pupil said:

R2: At the beginning, it was weird to learn in a combined class, the teacher first explained something to the little ones, and then to us who were older.

The same respondent also indicates a feeling of isolation that pupils in minority classes experience compared to other pupils from the school:

R2: Another weird thing was that the classes were A, B, C, and then, there were we – the class M. We were that small, special group in that large school with »normal« classes. Even our classroom was small, so we found it rather unusual to be in a big classroom with a lot of pupils during, for example, an English lesson. And it was even more unusual to come to the fifth grade.

Namely, in the fifth grade, the pupils are included in the regular classes with Croatian pupils, and they can continue to learn Hungarian according to Model C (nurturing Hungarian language and culture). This possibility is also offered to secondary-school pupils from Zagreb in Novi Zagreb where Hungarian is part of the optional subjects offer, and it is taught by a native speaker of the Hungarian language. The classes are attended together by pupils from Prva Gimnazija and pupils from other secondary schools, and due to organizational reasons, a part of the lessons is held on Saturdays. According to the teacher's own words, the number of pupils who continue to learn the Hungarian language based on this model is decreasing every year, thus, in the school year 2021/2022, she taught 13 primary-school and 6 secondary-school pupils. She sees the small number of pupils as a result of kids and parents' disinterest, whereas the former pupils explain this with other numerous obligations and activities as well as a lack of time, but also with a period of crisis in growing up:

R1: There was one period of crisis, the end of secondary school, beginning of faculty, at that time Hungarian wasn't all that important to us. Later we realized that it was important nevertheless, it was part of our identity, but also an advantage.

R2: Sometimes it was difficult to force myself (to come), sometimes I was late, on Saturdays everyone else went out to the city, and we went to Hungarian lessons, but we did go.

Nevertheless, some of them were more motivated, by grades for example, and they have a positive attitude towards the program itself and its advantages:

R4: It was relaxed, and we gladly went (to lessons), we were also motivated by the fact that it was a subject of equal status in secondary school for which we got grades that increased our average.

R1: The program was very well designed, and it was pleasant to attend lessons, we felt nice, we were in puberty, so we always had some fun, at the beginning we would learn grammar according to Hungarian textbooks with fresh heads, then we would read (e.g., János Vitéz), later we would talk, but grammar and reading were never left out.

R8: It really helped me because my family friends in Subotica used to say that it could be noticed that I spoke Hungarian better and better, and that my pronunciation was much nicer, and all in all, it wasn't that intensive, only two lessons on Saturdays.

At the end, even though this does not belong to the domain of formal education in minority languages, we shall briefly also mention teaching Hungarian at university level. Almost at the same time with the launching of the Hungarian class in primary school, at the beginning of the 1990s, initiatives arose for founding Hungarian Studies at university level¹⁶. Before that, Hungarian was taught at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb within the framework of exercise courses as an optional course. Even though the program was primarily intended for those who do not know the Hungarian language, and the program was designed based on the model of other foreign philologies (thus, it is not really a part of institutional education for a minority and does not belong to any of the described models), it is also enrolled by those who learnt Hungarian in their family and/or passed all previous educational levels in the Hungarian language offered by the City of Zagreb. Currently, there are three pupils of Hungarian Studies who are minority members, and two of them are our respondents. Their motive for enrolling the studies was primarily learning and mastering the language:

R8: Since I've been studying, I can feel even a greater progress, I think that now I speak (Hungarian) better than my grandmother.

For the respondent who spoke Hungarian in his early childhood, and then the language "disappeared" in the family (R9), enrolling in Hungarian

16 For more information about this study program see Čurković-Major 2022: 84-90 and Katalinić and Sekso 2016, 32-44.

Studies was the only logical choice, both for emotional connection with the language and for the viability of learning minor languages at the labour market. He is now trying and managing to speak with his father and his family in Vojvodina solely in Hungarian, and he also noticed that with this practice he raised interest for learning Hungarian in his younger brothers and sisters. Right now, he does not know how successful he will be in this revitalisation of the language within his family (which indeed benefited from formal language learning), but he definitely wants his children to learn Hungarian one day as well.

5. Conclusion

This paper presents the results of a preliminary research conducted among younger members of the Hungarian community in Zagreb in order to obtain a clearer view on how education in a minority language truly functions within the context of the given community, whereby we were interested in learning about the problems its participants encounter. The research did not comprise a large number of respondents, therefore, it is necessary to supplement it by interviewing pupils who are involved in the educational process at this moment. Nevertheless, it does pose several relevant conclusions.

Even though official data show that the number of children attending Hungarian classes in school is low, according to the respondents' statements, their number has never been significantly higher. They themselves learnt Hungarian in smaller groups and combined classes which sometimes proved to be an advantage. The parents' decision on whether a child will attend the Hungarian program (kindergarten, primary school) is crucial, but other factors, such as school commitments and extracurricular activities, also play a major role in that matter in higher grades of primary school as well as secondary school, and the distance of the place of residence has also proved to be a persistent issue.

In practical performance of the curriculum, the greatest challenge for pre-school and school teachers is the heterogenous composition of the group or the class with respect to language knowledge. Teaching children whose parents have enrolled them in the Hungarian program to learn the language is a very complex task requiring adjustment of the school program and an individual approach. The school itself can hardly replace language transmission in families, therefore, it would also be very important to educate parents on that matter through various workshops. As far as children are concerned, moving to the fifth grade when their bilingual schooling is *de facto* finished and when they become included into teaching with other students in "large classes" poses a certain stressful situation, whereas a special bilingual program in small groups, on the other hand, creates a feeling of isolation. Therefore, they would benefit from a greater visibility of such classes at school level and their inclusion in joint programs with other students.

Finally, the fact that was not particularly emphasized in the analysis of the results, but we want to mention is that all respondents expressed a clear desire to pass the language on to their children, even though they are not certain that the level at which they speak Hungarian will suffice. It is characteristic to this generation that it is no longer certain in its language knowledge that school can be both assistance and support in language transmission. Thus, a combination of formal and informal language learning in the family might create conditions for maintaining Hungarian in the next generation.

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