

Language Ideologies, Discriminatory Practices and the Deaf Community in Hungary

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1. Introduction

Although there are about 60 thousand Deaf people in Hungary constituting the third largest linguistic minority, their bilingual and bicultural linguistic minority status has been neglected both in professional and public discourse. Furthermore, many Hungarian linguists disagree with the fact that Hungarian Sign Language (henceforth HSL) is an autonomous linguistic system different from Hungarian. In academic, political, and educational discourse the term ‘deaf community’ refers to all people with serious hearing impairment, according to the medically-based model of ‘the disabled community’ in order to legitimate the oralist, acculturational ideology of deafness. The pathological view which considers deafness as an illness to be erased is compounded in Hungarian culture and society by discrimination and prejudice.

While deafness and sign languages have moved into the focus of interest of a great number of researchers in social sciences worldwide with a growing body of academic literature, the establishment of research centres, international scientific journals adapting more complex perspectives, until recently linguistic and sociolinguistic research on Deaf people and their sign languages has been a very poorly studied scientific area in Hungary. Although there are more and more publications devoted to the fields in question (Szabó 1998, 1999; Bartha 1999; Lanz and Barbeco 1999; Hattyár 2000; Bartha and Hattyár 2002), studying the deaf community and HSL are still of peripheral importance for linguistics in Hungary. Power practices, academic knowledge and discourse were based very much on the 150-year-old hegemony of the pathological paradigm with its even varying etic constructions of deafness (cf. Foucault 1969; Reagan 2002). Emic constructions, “which are grounded in the experiences and history of the DEAF-WORLD”, focussing on sociocultural and linguistic aspects of deafness (Reagan 2002: 48) have not been articulated in public up to the 1990s. The ways the dominant group implements social, media and educational policies aimed at constructing and reconstructing “normal” perceptions to the advantage of their own identity needs seem to be very similar to processes documented with reference to other Deaf communities of the world (Lane 1992; Baynton 1996; Branson and Miller 1998).

In this article I give a brief overview of sociolinguistic, socio-psychological, ideological questions as well as educational policy, legislation and public discourse concerning the Deaf in Hungary. I argue further that sign-rejecting, Hungarian-only educational practice correlates not only with the medically-based concepts of “normal” vs “disabled”, but rather, with the ideology of monolingualism as “the normal state of affairs” emerging from the ideology of nationalism. Sources of evidence come from a pilot study on contextualized as well as decontextualized folk evaluations of “bilingualism”, “deafness”, and “sign languages” on the one hand, and, on the other hand, preliminary results of a national survey on linguistic and social change in six linguistic minorities in Hungary entitled “Dimensions of linguistic otherness: Prospects of minority language maintenance in Hungary”¹.

2. Medical versus cultural constructions of d/Deafness

Disability has always been part of the human condition, however, the response of society may have varied country by country². Deafness has also been a thematized category for a long time in the human

history. Present-day relationships between the two concepts become more and more ambiguous (for a thorough analysis of the problem see Corker 2002).

At the two extremes of a continuum we find two competing paradigms that influenced prominently both scientific and public discourse: the medical-pathological versus anthropological-cultural interpretations. Nonetheless, as some researchers emphasize, the two-polar approach to the concept of D/deafness³ based on the Woodwardian tradition (1972) can raise many problems (Corker 2000; 2002; Reagan 2002; Senghas and Monaghan 2002). Distinct or sometimes interrelated constructions of deafness in modern societies including psychology, linguistics, education, sociology, anthropology, legislation etc. are evidences of diverse disciplinary perspectives.

Deafness as a topic is a social construction (Groce 1985; Lane 1997; Gregory and Hartley 1991). In recent sociolinguistic analyses the most important dimension is how Deaf people as members of the Deaf community and Deaf culture articulate their Deaf identity in opposition with either the lay or the professional hearing world. From the “technologies of power” perspective it is very important of the mode how deafness is present in hegemonic and counterhegemonic discourses.

3. Definitions of Deaf community and Deaf culture: a sociolinguistic perspective

There are several definitions of the concept as established for medical, educational, legal etc. purposes, respectively (cf. Gregory and Hartley 1991). The widely used interpretation of the term is the inability to hear, although, it is only an umbrella term for different levels of hearing capacity and ways hearing loss emerged.

However, it is inevitably important to make a clear distinction between *pre-lingual* and *post-lingual deafness*. Furthermore, there are also serious scientific considerations that make the distinction between the deaf, especially pre-lingual deaf, and the hard of hearing very important: these groups should be viewed differently as far as their problems, needs and interests are concerned. Henceforth I will focus on the pre-lingual D/deaf population of Hungary.

Taking Deafness as a social, cultural and linguistic phenomenon, a state of being it is what characterizes a group of people who share a perception of the world through an emphasis on visual and kinesthetic input. Deafness here creates a cultural, social and linguistic minority (Andersson 1994) often signified by the use of a capital 'D' (Woodward 1972).

To the Deaf, the main thing that distinguishes the hearing person from the Deaf is the language they prefer to use, hence, the physiological capability to hear is conceived as another, but less significant, difference between the two cultures (cf. Padden 1989). Deaf people and their culture have been the target of oppressive attempts, where “oralism”, the “pedagogical” practice of forcing deaf children to master speech and speech-reading while forbidding the use of sign language soon became the symbol of the “others” who are removed from the Deaf interests and goals eliminating Deaf culture through hegemonic practices excluding the disabled body from the “normal” society.

“Hearing Culture” and “Deaf Culture” are not mutually exclusive social-cultural constructions (e.g. Groce 1985; Branson *et al.* 1996; Lane 1997). The Deaf population can always be characterized by inherent heterogeneity. Different sections of deaf groups use communication modes differently, each having a set of cultural and linguistic rules, norms and expectations, negotiating different identities. As with ethnolinguistic groups, many Deaf people may not only be bilingual but bicultural (Grosjean 1992): negotiating multiple social identities, participating in both “worlds”, belonging to hearing as well as Deaf social networks. Others consciously reject values of the DEAF-WORLD.

“Deaf community” may be a good analytic tool for describing sociolinguistic-cultural dimensions of Deafness (Lucas 1989; 2001). The problems of the deaf are more complex in many countries than the simple “in” and “out” distinction. Corker’s (2002) definition is broad enough to cover all the significant settings in the case of the Hungarian deaf population. She refers to deaf people “as that group of people with hearing impairments who are excluded from the dominant areas of social and cultural reproduction by the perpetuation of a phonocentric world-view. They may also feel excluded from the disability movement because the movement is seen to reflect this world-view in the way in which it is socially organised around phonocentric language “norms”. This description does not include people with hearing impairments who, with the use of hearing aids or surgically implanted devices, are

able to participate fully in a phonocentric society. It does include *Deaf* people — those who use sign language and are excluded collectively on the basis of their status as a minority group.”

The failure of Deaf education and lack of access are the key terms that make the difficulties of prelingually deaf population with different identities and interests a set of shared problems (Johnson *et al.* 1989). The next section attempts to take a critical look at the situation in Hungary.

4. The situation in Hungary

4.1. Some data

We hardly find reliable statistical data concerning the deaf population in the country. There are estimated to be about 3-400,000 deaf and hard of hearing persons in Hungary, that is about 3-4% of the total population. About 40-60,000 of these are profoundly or severely deaf⁴. As people grow older, the chances of becoming deaf increase: 10% of the total population suffer from hearing loss in a certain degree.

According to other estimates, 66,000 children under the age of 16 are hearing impaired. Children with residual hearing and profound hearing loss can be found in deaf schools, in special schools for hard of hearing, and occasionally, in mainstream schools.

A large proportion of working-age deaf people are unemployed or have jobs with low prestige. 50% of them between age 18-39 and 80% in the group of age 40-59 receive disability pension, 80% of the minimum old-age pension (Abonyi 2001). Hence, deaf and seriously hearing impaired people who are not employed would rather be working if a suitable job could be found. Deaf women are particularly victimized by job discrimination.

In the last decade, new initiatives and programs were set up on hearing impairment with the involvement of the key government departments in collaboration with international, national and local NGOs and many professionals. Services are provided such as full audiometric assessment, early intervention programs (medical and educational) that include early identification, medical intervention, audiological services, auditory training, training for community workers, new developments in teacher training in special education toward the inclusive philosophy, offering vocation skills in various trades to hearing impaired people, etc. Nevertheless, in these programs and policy inactments deaf people are rather passive recipients of welfare services as part of a medically-based normalizing process. Even though many of these services are of great importance for the majority of people who are hard of hearing, unexceptionally hearing policy makers ignore the role and needs of D/deaf people.

4.2. Legislation: disability versus minority rights paradigm

There are two main legislative options approaching D/deafness: to treat deaf people as disabled under the provision of disability/equal opportunities acts or declaring them legally a distinct linguistic minority and empowering it with individual as well as collective rights (Jokinen 2000; Reagan 2001; Skutnabb-Kangas 1994; 2000).

Documents in the first case also emphasize that people with disabilities should have the right to mainstream education as well as parents of disabled children should have the right to participate in planning and provision of their children's education. We can recall the fundamental principles of human rights entrenched by the United Nations in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, *Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons*, the *World Programme of Action Concerning Disabled Persons*, the *UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities*, the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*, *Charter of Luxembourg of November 1996*, the conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organisations on Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment and other documents with similar emphasis.

Fundamental elements of the second legislative option are the language and mother tongue status of sign languages and the right to education through the medium of SL as a linguistic human right (Skutnabb-Kangas 1994; 2000; Muzsnai 1999). Although many efforts have been made, Deaf minorities are not under the provision of international legal instruments protecting national minorities. Although Deaf minorities are not included in these documents, one can use in principle the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic*

Minorities (1992), the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages*, the *Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (1994) etc. There are additional legal instruments that ensure a number of linguistic rights all persons in the state should enjoy (e.g. freedom of expression, the right in criminal procedures to be informed of the charge against them in a language they understand through interpreter provided free of charge); or rights related to minorities by virtue of their minority status. Yet, educational linguistic human rights have special relevance for minority protection, thus for the Deaf minority, too.

The state policy regarding Deaf people and the legislative framework applied in a given country correlate highly with the degree of acceptance of multicultural and multiethnic values. Nonetheless, whatever approach is adopted in whatever legislative framework in whatever context, a critical point must be the key role of sign language(s) in education. Deaf children should have full access to a language (Johnson et al. 1989; Grosjean 1992; Gregory 1992). The Salamanca Statement (para 21) gives a clear statement about the importance of sign languages, furthermore, Rule 5 of the UN Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities makes a clear statement about access to information and communication.

In Hungary, we have no law that would support the Deaf perspective concerning, at least, education. Debate on the recognition of HSL was never put seriously on the agenda of the Parliament of Hungary. As far as the linguistic and educational rights of the Deaf are concerned, the following documents make concessions on the question of sign language use or tolerate it to a certain extent:

- (1) *Act No. 1. of 1973 on criminal procedure*
- (2) *Act No. XXXIII. of 1992 on the legal status of civil servants*
- (3) *Government Decree on the implementation of Act No. XXXIII. of 1992 on the legal status of civil servants in public education (138/1992)*
- (4) *Act No. LXXIX of 1993 on public education*
- (5) *Departmental Order (Ministry of Education) on publishing the Guiding principles of pre-school education of disabled children and Guiding principles of educating disabled children (with two Appendices)*
- (6) *Act No. XXVI. of 1998 on provision of the rights of persons living with disability and their equality of opportunity*
- (7) *Parliament Decree on the National Disability Affairs Programme (100/1999) and Appendix*
- (8) *Government Decree (2062/2000) on the medium term action plan concerning the implementation of the National Disability Affairs Programme*

There are six legal documents where variations of the term 'sign language' occur. It is worth noting that one of the most influential documents for the future status and social integration of the disabled community in Hungary, the *Parliament Decree on the National Disability Affairs Programme (100/1999)* avoids the term "sign language" and prefers to use "signing". The choice of this term symbolizes the widely accepted non-language conception of HSL.

At the end of 1998, the Hungarian Parliament passed a law (No. XXVI. of 1998) on provision of the rights of persons living with disability and their equality of opportunity providing equal access to participation in public life, in education, politics etc. for disabled persons in Hungary. This law assigns rights to the very heterogeneous group of "disabled people" with respect for education/training, employment, social welfare, special services, rehabilitation etc.

As part of our sociolinguistic project on linguistic minorities in Hungary we made a critical analysis of the legal texts in question, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, we are gathering data on the problems of implementation as well as violation (for detailed analysis see Bartha and Hattyár 2002).

4.3. *The situation of the Deaf community*

Provision of services to hearing impaired people can be linked at least to two main sectors of contributors: the voluntary sector and the state provision based on legislation, parliamentary records etc.

In spite of the guaranteed “reasonable adjustment” in the application process to enable persons with disability to compete on equal terms with non-disabled candidates, a large proportion of working-age deaf people are unemployed or have jobs with low prestige. Employers’ negative attitudes, their misguided notions on deafness as well as inadequate knowledge of the “Equal Opportunities Act” are essential barriers faced by deaf people who are looking for a job. Employers usually associate severe hearing loss with mental impairment and consider these people untrustworthy; they are convinced that deaf people will often be absent from work; it is a widely held belief that creative use of technology, job accommodations would be too costly. Deaf employees usually do not enjoy equal access to promotions, vocational and in-service training.

Communication and information access are essential problems. In principle, deaf people have the right to sign language interpretation free of charge in different areas of social life; in fact, however, many of them have serious communication problems when visiting the doctor, dentist, receiving treatment in a hospital; having conversations with lawyers, potential employers, at a tax office or insurance company etc. Furthermore, many cultural events, church services, meetings in the labour market, other public gatherings, debates etc. are inaccessible to them.

There are no regular special TV programs for the Deaf. Subtitling is available on only a narrow range of programs. Besides the lack of closed caption teletext services, teletext video recorders and decoders, multimedia technologies, computer and Internet, as well as textphones and videophones in which Deaf people are able to communicate in sign language, or even simple fax machines, mobile phones and SMS systems, without at least partial reimbursement, are unattainable for many Deaf.

Although sign language interpretation had existed for many years in Hungary, until recently, the profession of “sign language interpreter” has not been officially recognized. In 1998, there were only 38 interpreters, most of them free-lancers (G. Juhász 1998). Authorization process is in progress. Interpreter training is carried on by Bárczi College of Special Education, Budapest, the fundamental institutional center of the oralist-pathological paradigm.

Education is the most serious problem that families with deaf children have to face. Deaf people have less educational opportunities than their hearing counterparts. Besides the oral method there is no alternative option for Deaf education, consequently parents, in fact, are not fully and objectively informed either about the educational possibilities or the nature of HSL. The only educational choice means mainstreaming or not⁵.

4.4. Education and Hungarian sign language

Deaf education in Hungary is based strongly upon oralist principles. It is taught that a deaf person could reach an acceptable proficiency in any oral language if she/he were adequately trained. In Hungarian oralist schools, deafness is seen as a clinical problem based on the lack of hearing, a deficiency in producing a sound etc. Consequently, deaf children receive a tiresome training in order to produce acceptable versions of Hungarian sounds involving lipreading exercises, whose aim is to give deaf children the spoken Hungarian input that deafness denies them. Teachers officially prohibit children the use of any gestural code, at least in the first, sensitive period of the education process, because it is considered detrimental to learning Hungarian. In spite of teachers’ efforts, only those children with mild-to moderate hearing losses, which thus permit them to receive auditory signals, can obtain a certain grasp of spoken Hungarian. The rest of the children are never able to accomplish this even with help from adequate technology. In addition, although many Deaf pupils aware school ignorance of their linguistic, cultural heritage, they prefer to use HSL among each other, when they are out, at home, at play etc. Children report that when a teacher uses — not officially — some HSL or signed Hungarian to explain Hungarian grammar or another subject, it makes easier for them to learn and write. Deaf parents also give an account of the fact that their children need help and additional explanations in HSL at home.

Csányi (1993: 43), a well-known expert of the oralist approach also points out that “children (even hearers) of deaf parents acquire sign language as a mother tongue. [...] Hence, those children or adults who develop a proper level [sic!] of spoken language skills as well should be considered bilingual. Clearest indication of their bilingualism is, for example, when a student with profound hearing loss uses spoken language easily and adequately communicating with his/her teacher and classmates in the

classroom, but when the break starts he/she immediately switches to the less tiring signing during interactions with friends.”

In fact, children's naturally occurring bilingualism has been completely left out of consideration in a school context, although they show variability in terms of competence, language skills and attitudes toward HSL and the Hungarian language, respectively. Deaf language users constitute a so-called bilingual proficiency continuum in the following way:

HSL monolinguals: Deaf people who can express themselves only in HSL, and understand only that language. This includes people who have limited access to basic education, who have multiple disabilities, who come from disadvantageous, minority families etc. According to the fairly underestimated figures of the 1990 Microcensus, more than 25,000 people in the adult population with profound hearing loss including the Deaf did not complete elementary school, 2,655 individuals did not attend school at all. We have no figures on the functional illiteracy rate among the Deaf. (For ASL-English bilingualism see Rutherford 1988)

HSL dominant bilinguals: Deaf people who can express themselves more comfortably in HSL than Hungarian, and can understand better HSL than either the written, spoken or signed version of Hungarian.

Balanced bilinguals: Deaf people who have equal (not necessary high level) competence in both languages. Children of Deaf parents have better chance to develop these skills in HSL as well as in Hungarian. High level balanced bilingualism is very rare among the Deaf.

Hungarian dominant bilinguals: Deaf people who show higher competence in one or more channels of the Hungarian language whereas feel less comfortable to express themselves in HSL.

Hungarian monolinguals: Deaf people who have no skills in HSL and can express themselves only in Hungarian. Long term effect of the oral method in Hungary and socialization in hearing families could be Hungarian monolingualism⁶, nevertheless, many of them attain some proficiency in HSL after enrolment in a residential school coming into regular contact with Deaf peers or older people from the Deaf community⁷.

Moreover, since the curricular content of basic education has been constantly overlooked in favor of an effort to teach oral Hungarian, this situation leads to a deficit of basic educational necessities. Furthermore, and more importantly, these children are denied full acquisition of their first language throughout their entire school years. In addition, as Muzsnai emphasized, “the training of intellect, the developing of mental capacities, and the developing of the students’ personalities are inevitably relegated into the background.” (Muzsnai 1999: 282-3) To develop good lipreading (speechreading) skills is one of the most important tasks of oralist education⁸.

Hungary has three basic types of government provision for students with special educational needs: special schools, special classes, and ordinary classes, with or without special help. The number of special schools in Hungary is 271 with an average size of 107.8 students per school. Proportion of private special schools are very low (1.10%).

There are 7 special schools for the deaf: in *Budapest, Eger, Kaposvár, Sopron, Szeged*; and we can find two institutions, one for deaf children with no or slight mental disability, and another one for multiply disabled deaf children in *Vác*⁹.

As far as secondary, tertiary and higher education are concerned, the picture drawn officially is much more positive than reality. Teaching methods and conditions of primary schools for the deaf predetermine students’ prospects in their further studies. Their chances for studying in institutions of higher education are regrettably limited. Although most of the deaf students are able to participate in vocational training, there are only 2-3 deaf and 5-6 hard of hearing students who are enrolled in comprehensive schools per year. In fact, many of the crafts offered for them in trade schools are vanishing or less prestigious. Being Deaf and getting a university diploma is rather exceptional in Hungary. Educational facilities and support services are not accessible for Deaf students, neither educational interpreters and notetakers who could ease acquiring academic information.

In 2002, 400 students with disabilities were reported in higher education (from the total of 298,500 individuals) by the Ministry of Education. Comparing the different disability categories, students in the undifferentiated “hearing impaired” category represented the lowest proportion (13 per cent) of them. While the chance of disabled people to participate in higher education is itself a mere one per mill as compared to that of non-disabled people, the chance of the Deaf is a great deal even lower.

In the 1993/94 school year, a total of 1,046,479 children went to school in the six-to fourteen-year-old age group. Of these, 1,234 attended schools for the Deaf or schools for the hard-of-hearing. It is assumed that some hearing-impaired children went to normal schools, but their numbers are unknown. As Muzsnai claimed, in the 1997/98 academic year the Budapest School for the Deaf had 133 pupils, 112 attending the school proper, and 21 the kindergarten. „There were 19 classes for the 112 schoolchildren and three for those in the kindergarten. Forty-three of the children lived in the school’s dormitory. The school had 38 qualified teachers teaching subjects like mathematics, history, etc. These teachers were, without exception, culturally hearing, female educators. There were 37 other teachers who were also qualified to teach the Deaf, but whose classes took place after the school lessons proper. In this group of teachers, four male teachers were included, two of whom were Deaf themselves.” (Muzsnai 1999: 282).

For special schools, there is an increase in numbers with age starting at 3-5 and finishing at 10-14. After the age of 15 there is a dramatic decline. Census and other data indicate that there is a massive attrition in school attendance in the final years of schooling. This fact seems to reflect the normative view of the current Hungarian (compulsory) education system along with standardized assessment techniques as well as the limited opportunities for Deaf children to progress from primary to secondary education based on a restricted basic curriculum (in practice) for students with special educational needs.

Although most hearing teachers can be characterized by complete lack of knowledge of HSL, Deaf adults and the Deaf community are hardly involved in education. The very few Deaf staff members are often ex-pupils of the school and it is rare for them to have any formal qualifications beyond whatever was obtained during schooling.

Even those teachers, educators who do have contact with the Deaf and may have professional and personal stakes in the sign language represent a very strong sign-rejecting attitude.¹⁰ “Professional” attitude of teachers on Deaf children’s self-evaluation and identity construction may have detrimental effects: “Very soon, the children who had previously been proud of their useful heritage lost pride in their not-highly-valued language proficiency and adopted their teachers’. [...] This mental shift was not difficult to achieve, since the children were unconsciously aware that their parents were not formally well-educated nor very successful in academic terms.” (Muzsnai 1999: 286)

In fact, students enrolled in Hungarian deaf schools constitute a rather heterogeneous group in terms of their actual rate of hearing loss, their mental state and cognitive capacity, potential results of auditory-verbal training as well as achievable speech-language skills etc. However, for at least 25-30% of children with profound hearing loss oral communication methods yield definitely no results (cf. Csányi 1994: 118). The only effective education option for these children would be a sign language based bilingual program that is entirely lacking from deaf schools in Hungary. Equalization of opportunities in education for hearing impaired students will only have been achieved when the group of children with profound hearing loss (D/deaf) is fully included.

Hungarian Deaf Association’s Education Department as well as many Deaf parents and hearing professionals hold that local and national education policy hardly takes into account the needs of Deaf people. Absoluteness of oralist and/or auditory-verbal approach does not enable them to achieve their full potential, rather sets limits to their learning. Local education authorities influence parents to use the “oral method” to teach their deaf children even though this is failing them. At present, due to one-sided, even inaccurate information, advice, support and training, Deaf people are not able to make well-informed choices and to exert positive influence over future policy development, locally and nationally.

4.5. Mainstream attitudes toward and ideologies of deafness and sign languages in Hungary

It is also obvious from the previous sections that hearing people are still unaware of the existence and question the linguistic status of HSL: (1) because of entire lack of (regular) contact with Deaf people; (2) due to the missing or sometimes inadequate, medically-based information on deafness. There is little understanding of its classification, linguistic implications or appropriate educational intervention. Hearing people’s conceptions may vary along the level of involvement in Deafness and with Deaf people.

As part of our larger project, between November 2000 and April 2001, I made a pilot study among 265 university students of attitudes, stereotypes and misconceptions regarding *deafness*, *sign languages*, and *bilingualism*. Respondents were students of the Eötvös Loránd University at the Faculty of Arts who were attending my lectures. Students had to complete a questionnaire in the first occasion without having previous scientific information on the subject in question. Questionnaire had two main parts. The first section focused on the respondents' implicit knowledge and ideas of sign languages and deafness, respectively. (Table 1, Table 2)

Answers correlate highly with my presumptions: (1) Deafness was generally viewed and represented medically, as restriction, lack of ability, a defect to be ameliorated by special techniques and technologies; (2) HSL (and other sign languages) was (were) not regarded as “real”, full-fledged natural language(s); (3) bilingualism was accounted ambiguously; (4) with respect to the concepts of inclusion and difference, university students delineated them more liberally than the average population.

Table 1

On sign language	
(1)	Sign languages can develop and change. (88,1%)
(1)	Deaf people from different countries can mutually understand each other through signing. (84,9%)
(2)	The great majority of deaf children are born of deaf parents. (73%)
(3)	Integration into the hearing society is conceivable only through adequate knowledge of the Hungarian language. (61,5%)
(4)	Teaching or communicating with deaf people through the medium of spoken language is the most effective way of information exchange. (53%)
(5)	Sign languages are artificially developed by educators of the deaf in order to ease acquisition of the spoken language. (52,4%)
(6)	Sign languages are pantomime-like, gestural systems. (47,5%)
(7)	Communication with a deaf person is more effective with the help of a sign language interpreter. (47,2%)
(8)	Bilingualism in sign language and the national spoken language can cause confusion and problems in the person's cognitive and emotional development. (35%)
(9)	Sign language helps deaf people to develop mentally and intellectually. (34,4%)
(10)	Deaf children can learn on equal terms with hearing children when they have access to sign language. (29%)
(11)	Sign languages are natural human languages with their own grammar, independent of any spoken language. (27%)
(12)	Deaf people can be considered a linguistic and cultural minority. (23%)

In the second part I tried to scope out the dynamics of current myths and misconceptions present in everyday as well as in professional discourses. I also analyzed academic discourse regarding deafness and the status of sign languages. I also reviewed spoken and written professional materials focusing on interpretations, current myths and misconceptions of language as a whole, sign language and bilingualism, respectively.

It is commonly assumed that sign languages are *undeveloped* having lexicons with *insufficient number of signs* (eg. Csányi 1993: 37-8), although modern linguistic theory holds that all languages are basically equal in terms of complexity and utility.

Another argument against sign languages emphasizes their *non-standard nature*. Perceived difference between languages comes from their altering functional range they can fulfill and the overt prestige and value assigned to that language by its users and the others. However, development and existence of standard languages has little to do with linguistic parameters, it is rather part of socio-historical, political processes in a given ideological setting and often goes with hegemonic practices oppressing other language groups and linguistic variants.

Table 2

On deafness	
(1)	Speech is not the single mode of communication. (96%)
(2)	The Equal Opportunities Act assigns equal employment for people with disabilities. (84%)
(3)	Deafness implies delayed speech and learning disability. (78,4%)
(4)	Deaf and hard-of-hearing people are a small portion of the population in Hungary. (73%)
(5)	Hearing aid is the single solution for the deaf of their integration into the hearing society. (72%)
(6)	Deafness affects mostly older people. (63,7%)
(7)	Deaf children can become independent adults. (56,4%)
(8)	Deaf people cannot be employed in ordinary jobs. (55%)
(9)	People with hearing impairment are much more integrated into the Hungarian society than they were before. (54,7%)
(10)	Deafness goes hand in hand with mental retardation or stubbornness. (54,5%)
(11)	Deafness is simply a medical problem, to be treated by audiologists and surdopedagogists in the hope of a cure. (53%)
(12)	Deafness is an unusual, pathological condition. (51,2%)
(13)	Deafness is basically a health issue. (49,6%)
(14)	Deaf people (and people with other disabilities) can get financial assistance from the government, and so they don't want to work. (43,1%)
(15)	Deafness is the general term to talk about a wide range of hearing impairments. (43%)
(16)	Mainstreaming of deaf children leads to classroom disruption and lower educational standards. (32,1%)
(17)	Deafness begin at birth or in early childhood. (30,2%)
(18)	Deaf children can never communicate. (8%)

Although numerous recent studies indicate that "prelingually deaf persons are comparable to the hearing population" in terms of the range and distribution of intelligence, and ability to conceptualize and reason, a great amount of hearing professionals still think in Hungary that a deaf person has a "*cognitive deficit*", since it has been thought that prelingually deaf persons can be characterized by the lack of "language" which is essential for thought etc. (Charrow and Wilbur 1989: 105)

In contrast to "oralism", the concept of "*audism*" reflects more radically to the oppressive philosophy and practice in deaf education. According to Nover's definition, "audism is attached to institutionalized prejudices and biases that perpetuate discrimination based on the idea of the superiority of auditory and speech competency over ASL. This attitude of superiority perceives hearing and speech as the developmental norm for humans; conversely, signing is considered to be a deficiency. [...] Audism, like racism or sexism, reflects beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, or institutional arrangements that favor one (majority) group over another (minority) group." (Nover 1995: 120)

Analysis of academic discourse revealed that sign-rejecting, Hungarian-only educational practice correlate not only with the medically-based concepts of "normal" vs "disabled", but rather, with the ideology of monolingualism as "the normal state of being" emerging from the ideology of nationalism. Evaluations in academic discourse are linked very much with mainstream society's conceptions and expectations concerning "a real language" versus bilingualism. Results also proved my hypothesis that segments of a given society can be placed along a continuum regarding their ideologies, interpretations of and responses to the concepts of "deafness" and "disability" in general influenced by their socio-economic (age, education, sex, settlement etc.), medical (disabled or not) status, experience and personal interest.

Monolingual, fractional view of bilingualism has a great impact on devaluation and prohibition of HSL, as well as language policy implemented in schools for the Deaf. This view is rooted in the European linguistic tradition echoing the ideology of monolingual nation states with standard

languages, where the normal or unmarked case is the monolingual speaker in a homogenous speech community. Recontextualized version of this one state - one language statement presumes that in one (hearing) society there are normally hearing people who use optimally one oral language. Hence Deaf communities with their own distinct languages inconceivably violate these ethnocentric beliefs (cf. Woodward 1989: 169).

Academic literature on hearing impairment (monographs, articles, textbooks for students of special needs education teacher training, lexicon entries etc.) use the discriminating term for the concept of `deaf' (*süket*) more frequently than the culturally-socially acceptable version (*siket*). No chapter has been devoted to sign languages in general, HSL, Deaf culture or sign language-spoken language bilingualism. The contexts of occurrence are rather negative.

5. Prospect for change?

In fact, the debate on the question "Minority or disability law for the Deaf?" has only started recently in Hungary. There is a narrow circle of professionals alongside with a few Deaf activists lobbying for raising awareness of Deaf minority and Hungarian Sign Language. Among the preparatory steps for beginning of any implementation in this field, the most important activities should be the standardization of the national sign language, transformation of both regular and special needs education teacher training, educating a sufficient numbers of interpreters, even providing learning facilities of hearing parents of Deaf children, continuous research on all aspects of the life of the Deaf community. In this recognition process, forming mainstream attitudes and ideas seems to be fundamental.

There is an urgent need to develop an increasing amount of research to be conducted by professionals free from all bias on the educational attainment of Deaf people of all ages in Hungary. This would provide much needed evidence and feedback for the current special education policy and programs about how they are succeeding or (more often) failing to meet the needs of Deaf people.

Besides basic research, the overall aim of our academic work is to elaborate different strategic tools in order to help transforming the conceptual formulation of and social response to D/deafness.

Notes

¹ This research was funded by the Ministry of Education (Grant No. NKFP 5/126/2001), and by the Open Society Institute (IPF No. B 9158). The author is very grateful to Péter Siptár for his help and useful comments on a previous version of this paper.

² As Groce (1999: 756) suggests, "All societies have explanations for why some individuals and not others are disabled, how individuals with disabilities are to be treated, what roles are appropriate and inappropriate for such individuals, and what rights and responsibilities individuals with disability are either entitled to or denied. [...] For example, in societies in which physical strength and stamina are valued, individuals with physical impairments are at a disadvantage. In places where intellectual endeavours such as literacy and the ability to use technology are important, the fact that one is a wheelchair user may be less limiting. Similarly, as in some Pacific island societies, in which a man's status (but not a woman's) is determined in part by his ability to speak well in public, deafness or a speech impediment will be judged particularly disabling."

³ In this paper I follow the common practice of distinguishing between audiological *deafness* and cultural *Deafness*.

⁴ Estimated number of prelingually deaf people, based on the 1:1000 ratio (Schein 1992) is 10,000 in Hungary. According to different calculations (1:2000, Kyle and Allsop 1997: 71-72), the number of sign language users might be about 5,000 in Hungary.

⁵ According to the Act on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and on their Equal Opportunities, parents have the right to choose a school for their children. The final decision, however, is in the hands of the Professional

Rehabilitation Committees. If parents disagree with the decision, “they can appeal to their local education authority and there is then a second assessment by another committee.” (Csányi 2001: 301)

⁶ In hearing families parents' lack of access to information with regard to the importance of sign language for the cognitive and social development of their deaf child often leads to incomplete acquisition of either HSL or Hungarian language (cf. semilingualism). Despite the hardly existing empirical data in this respect, it can be stated that the number of those deaf individuals who do not have available language input in the critical period for language acquisition, is not insignificant. The great majority of these people belong to socially-economically disadvantaged minority groups, to the Gypsy ethnic minority, in the first place. “The educational indicators of national minorities are weaker than those of the entire population of the country. While almost 80 percent of the population over the age 15 has completed 8 years of primary schooling, this ratio is between 60-70 percent among minorities, though it must be mentioned that in the case of the Gypsy minority, this figure is only 36-43 percent.” (Mészáros and Fóti 1998: 102) The ratio of unemployment is outstanding among Gypsies (more than double the national average).

⁷ As other pidgin sign languages, Pidgin Sign Hungarian also exists. This is a contact language variant, which ranges from being more Hungarian to being more like HSL. PSH is what happens when adults try to learn HSL, basically. It is HSL and some of its grammar (how much varies from person to person) in Hungarian word order and with other “Hungarianism”. However, children exposed to PSH will often produce grammatically perfect HSL.

⁸ According to experiments conducted by speech pathologists among children with profound hearing loss (between age 7;6 and 12;7) on their lipreading abilities with and without help of hearing aid (Kudomrák 1999), children have shown definitely better scores in lipreading when they used technical help. Relatively high percentage of speech comprehension as opposed to international data comes from methodological differences (small segments of speech were tested instead of spontaneous interaction). However, the low level of their cognitive development predetermines these children’s low future academic success.

⁹ The first school for the Deaf had been established in 1802 in Vác, founded by Andras Chazar. In the first period (until 1840s) the main teaching method was manualism based on sign language and signed versions of Hungarian and full respect of hearing impaired people. By middle of the 19th century, a dramatic paradigm shift had taken place. It is interesting to note that the start of “special education” in Hungary is reckoned from the establishment of the Vác institute.

¹⁰ During the first half of the twentieth century it was not exceptional that hearing educators of the Deaf had high competence in HSL, who were very permissive considering sign language use in the classroom a were useful device in their teaching practice. Lajos Weinacht, a bright fellow Deaf, wrote in the April 1944 issue of *Magyar Siketnéma* [Hungarian Deafmute Review] that he was baffled by the question “Shall we sign...? Shall we not...?” [the title of an earlier article to which Weinacht’s contribution was a reply]. This is what he wrote:

“Indeed, the use of sign language by a Deaf is just as natural as, for instance, the fact that Germans talk German when they are in one another’s company [...] A teacher reckoning with the personality and needs of the Deaf, in our view, reasons like this: it is a good thing, very noble and useful, as well as my duty, to teach my pupils speak normally. But if I do not want my pupils to become asocial persons who feel out of place both in the company of their fellow Deaf and in that of the hearing, I must not prohibit them from using sign language. Also, signing is a very useful device in teaching as it facilitates the teacher’s work and helps develop the pupils’ intellect. Thus, I get a number of bonuses by signing without bringing any disadvantage to my pupils and their interest remains captivated, too. The boredom of school work is dispelled at one stroke, and that is something we cannot afford to ignore [...] Being able to use sign language is very practical for the Deaf. One can sign nicely, gently, artistically. Signing can be expressive, dignified, and delightful even for those who do not comprehend it. Social life for the Deaf is unimaginable without signing, as in that case it would be impossible to address several people or a crowd. Lip reading is tiresome, straining the eye, and endlessly slow; also, it can never be completely successful.

Truth, as these considerations suggest, is in the middle. A decent Deaf person has to be able to sign *and* speak, and teachers who are really aware of what their task is will not paralyse his efforts to learn both – since it is life that dictates in this matter, and nothing is more powerful than life.”

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ISB4: Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism

edited by James Cohen, Kara T. McAlister,
Kellie Rolstad, and Jeff MacSwan

Cascadilla Press Somerville, MA 2005

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ISBN 978-1-57473-210-8 CD-ROM
ISBN 978-1-57473-107-1 library binding (5-volume set)

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