Working Papers in European Language Diversity 2

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Hungarian in Slovenia: An Overview of a Language in Context



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During the initial stage of the research project ELDIA (European Language Diversity for All) in 2010, "structured context analyses" of each speaker community at issue were prepared. These context analyses will act as a starting point for further deepened research by linguists, sociologists and lawyers. Thus, they will form the basis of further case-specific reports and the comparative report which will be the main outcome of the whole project. However, as these will be available for interested readers only at the end of the project, we wanted to publish shorter versions summarising our work so far already at this stage, thus providing up-to-date information for both the academic community and stakeholder groups. This paper, based on the context analysis by Anna Kolláth, Judit Gasparics, Annamária Gróf and Livija Horvat, gives a brief and up-to-date overview of the status of and research about Hungarian in Slovenia.

As all papers appearing in the series Working Papers in European Language Diversity, these context analyses have been subject to an anonymous peer-reviewing process. Whenever the present document is referred to, due reference to the author and the ELDIA project should be made. For more information about the ELDIA project see http://www.eldia-project.org/.

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1 Introduction: Speakers of Hungarian in Slovenia

The Hungarian community in Prekmurje (Hung. Muravidék), Slovenia, became a minority as a result of the Treaty of Trianon. Before 1919 and between 1941 and 1945 their area was part of Hungary. Prekmurje is the name of the eastern part of the region which is officially called Pomurje (Pomurska regija). The areas officially defined as having a mixed population (in colloquial language use "bilingual" Hungarian-Slovenian) are those where – when the borders were drawn after the Treaty of Versailles – the majority of inhabitants were Hungarians. Today, this bilingual area consists of 30 small villages (8 in the north in an area of 65 km², 22 in the south) and the town of Lendava (Hung. Lendva).

The population is divided among five administrative units, the major settlements functioning as their centres. The town of Lendava counts as the main centre of the whole bilingual region, while the central villages of the remaining administrative units are Dobrovnik (Dobronak), Prosenjakovci (Pártosfalva), Hodoš (Hodos) and Šalovci (Salovci).

The vast majority of Hungarians in Slovenia live here; they are the actual Hungarian community and make up around 50% of the total population in the Prekmurje region. Of Hungarians living in Slovenia, 16.5% live outside the bilingual area; their number amounts to 1,031 (census 2002). This migrant Hungarian community is composed not only of commuters leaving the Prekmurje area for economic reasons, but also of ethnic Hungarians from the Vojvodina region in Serbia who have come to Slovenia in search of better job opportunities or fleeing the Yugoslav wars. They live in the capital city of Ljubljana, in bigger towns or in economically more developed regions. They have cultural associations in Ljubljana and Murska Sobota (Kovács 2004).

Hungarians constitute 0.32% of the total Slovene population (1,964,036 people), according to the census of 2002; 6,243 citizens all over Slovenia declared themselves to be of Hungarian ethnicity and 7,713 as having Hungarian as their mother tongue. Thus there were 5,212 people of Hungarian nationality and 6,237 citizens with Hungarian as their mother tongue counted in the habitat of the Hungarian national community, the Prekmurje region (Statistični letopis RS, 2003).

The ratio of Hungarians will also decrease in the future in the autochthonous area of Prekmurje. This is the conclusion of the data of the census from 2002, which shows that the ratio of Hungarians fell to under 50%.

Hungarians lived in a compact block at the time the area was cut off from Hungary but dispersion started as early as the 1920s when Slovenes from different regions of the country were settled in the area (colonies). The current trend is moving towards diffusion, triggered partly by inward migration, partly by a shift in the content of identity and the formation of second language dominance.

The Hungarian community living in Prekmurje is autochthonous, a territorial minority in the classic sense: the Hungarian language has official status; it is an official language only in the mixed nationality area. Its rights are protected on the basis of positive discrimination (besides collective rights, each citizen is entitled to the special minority rights granted in the constitution), independently of the size (in percentage) of the community. The minority policy in Slovenia also grants special rights to the migrant community living away from the bilingual area. They can, for instance, be included in the list of electors of the Hungarian community if they want to; Hungarian language education is organised and financed for them by the Ministry of Education if the need arises (the minimum number of students in a class or in a group is 5).

Although the names of all the institutions contain the 'Prekmurje' element (e.g. Prekmurje Hungarian Municipal National Community, Hungarian Radio of Prekmurje), the majority of people generally identify themselves as Slovenian Hungarians/szlovéniai magyar, and not as Hungarians of Prekmurje/muravidéki magyar. They call their vernacular the language at home/geolect - hazaias beszéd/nyelvjárás. A specific language usage phenomenon displaying their group identity is, for example, that they use the Hungarian toponym Muravidék without the definite article as opposed to Standard Hungarian, a Muravidék.

After Trianon, the next change in the position of the Hungarian national community came in the socalled 'Hungarian times', between 1941 and 1945, when the area was annexed to Hungary and the local Hungarians thus became majority-language speakers again. On the other hand, the minoritymajority relations concerning Slovenians have also changed: following the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991, Slovenians turned from a minority into the majority of the new independent state. This is mainly reflected in local minority-majority relationships, e.g. attitudes to each other and each other's languages.

Slovenia - along with Hungary - joined the EU in 2004. Neither this change, nor the introduction of the Euro in 2007 (replacing the Slovene currency, the Tolar) has fundamentally affected the minoritymajority relations.

Socio-political Context

2.1 Legal and Political Position

In Slovenia three languages have official status, either fully or with limitations. Slovene is the official language of the whole country, while the mother tongues of the two autochthonous minority communities have official status in the areas with a mixed population: Hungarian in Prekmurje and Italian in the coastal area (Slovene Istria) have regional official language status in the areas inhabited by the autochthonous minorities.

Article 64 of the Constitution defines the special rights of the autochthonous Italian and Hungarian communities (referred to as positive discrimination in international legislation). Based on this they have the right to use their national symbols freely. In order to preserve their national identity, they have the right to establish organisations and develop economic, cultural, scientific and research activities, as well as activities in the field of public media and publishing. In accordance with the legislation, these two national communities and their members have the right to education and schooling in their own languages, as well as the right to establish and develop such education and schooling. The geographic areas in which bilingual schools are compulsory shall be established by law. They have the right to foster relations with their nations of origin and their respective countries. The state provides material and moral support for the exercising of these rights. In order to exercise their rights, the members of these communities can establish their own self-governing communities in the geographic areas in which they live. Based on the proposal of these selfgoverning national communities, the state may authorise them to perform certain functions under national jurisdiction, and will provide funds for the performing of such functions. The two national communities are directly represented in representative bodies of local self-government and in the National Assembly. The position of the Italian and Hungarian national communities and the manner in which their rights are exercised in the geographic areas they live in, the obligations of the selfgoverning local communities for the exercise of these rights, and those rights which the members of these national communities exercise also outside these areas, are all regulated by law. Laws, regulations and other general acts that concern the exercising of the constitutionally provided rights and the position of the national communities exclusively, may not be adopted without the consent of representatives of these national communities. The rights of both national communities and their members are guaranteed irrespective of the number of members of these communities.

As for minority language rights in Slovenia, the balance is somewhat skewed owing to the often mentioned inner legal safety measures. It is not adopting the European documents that makes the case interesting - Slovenia has fully adopted them in its legislation, sometimes exceeding the expectations – but revealing the discrepancies between the flawless theory (the accepted principles) and the practice (practical realisation) (Kolláth 2005: 73). Bilingualism is unilateral (explicitly de jure) in practice and the number of fields where Hungarian is used is decreasing. The general minority bill (in preparation), whose intention is to throw light on why the perfect theory does not work in practice and find a solution for the problems, is meant to change the situation.

Slovene minority legislation can be claimed to exceed European norms. The key act is the Zakon o samoupravnih narodnih skupnostih/Act on self-governing national minorities (Uradni list RS, št. 65/94), with the Ministry of Home Affairs/Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve in charge. It has over 60 amendments, covering the whole of the social sphere.

Slovenia has a language law (2005) and the language strategy was compiled in 2007. In accordance with the constitution, both the language act (Zakon o javni rabi slovenščin/ ZJSR, 2004) and the language strategy (Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za jezikovno politiko 2007-2011/ReNPJP0711) guarantee similar protection for Slovene and the two minority languages.

Media legislation and regulations cover language use only to the extent defined by the constitution. In bilingual areas the mother tongue of the national minority can be used, without any special regulations or limitations. According to Radiotelevizija Slovenija Act/Zakon o Radioteleviziji Slovenija (Uradni list RS, št. 96/2005) national communities can produce and broadcast their own radio and TV programmes. Ethnic programmes must be available in at least 90% of the bilingual area.

2.2 Attitudes

In comparison with the rest of Slovenia, Pomurje is economically the least developed of the regions: unemployment is highest there, most people make a living from farming and the level of education is relatively low. Living standards, however, are still much higher than those in Hungary. This, together with the current social, economical and political problems in Hungary has contributed to the devaluation of the Hungarian language both among speakers of Hungarian and Slovene.

The attitude of the Hungarian community is also affected by the changes in regional nationality policy. It is language that plays the key role in holding a community together. Language and cultural preservation is promoted by a relatively high number of NGO's and various cultural associations.

Several studies have examined the Hungarian and the Slovene languages from the point of view of aesthetic features, complexity, learnability, the relationship between language awareness, competence, and language use, their role in language choice (Bokor 2009: 77-108; Bartha 2007: 100-103; Kolláth 2005: 43-51, 2008; Novak Lukanovič 2004). They show that Hungarian is considered more difficult, more complex, harder to acquire, irrespective of which variety is investigated. Regarding aesthetic and emotional attitudes, speakers of Hungarian in Prekmurje prefer Hungarian (Bartha 2007: 100).

As regards aesthetic features, Hungarian is thought of more highly than Slovene and respondents have a very different opinion about their instrumental role and usability, locally and internationally. They regard English, German and other world languages as more useful than Hungarian, but not more useful than Slovene.

Investigating inter-group prejudices as part of an attitude study has become more common with cultural anthropology gaining ground. We have no knowledge of academic studies focusing on the ethnic hetero-stereotypes of the Hungarian minority and the Slovene majority in Prekmurje. However, a number of articles describe the prejudices in the history of the two nations, the bias in Slovene history textbooks, while at the same time, the articles themselves are not totally unbiased either.

So far research into reasons for the loss of prestige of the Hungarian language and the one on attitudes linked to the Hungarian and the Slovenian languages and their linguistic variants is not satisfactory.

Cultural Context

Both the autochthonous community living in the bilingual territory and the migrant community (migrant Hungarians) living outside it have a linguistic homeland and maintain strong cultural and economic links.

In Prekmurje people are strongly attached to the traditions of Hungarian literature, culture and history. Lendava, for instance, boasts a St. Stephen monument by Ferenc Király and a Theatre and Concert Hall by the famous Hungarian architect, Imre Makovecz. A memorial room has been set up in the Gallery Museum, which can be found in the castle of Lendava, to commemorate the sculptor György Zala, a native of Alsólendva, a bust of whom stands in Lendava in the square named after him, in front of the Theatre and Concert Hall.

The life of the Bánffy family is closely entwined with the rise of the town of Lendava (Göncz 2009: 40-46), which is why one of the institutes of the Hungarian National Institute for Culture is named after them. The Pandur family, natives of Prekmurje, have given the world two outstanding artists. Valuable pieces of art have been created by the artists Endre Göntér, Susanne Király Moss, by the sculptor Ferenc Király, and by the graphic artist Gálič Štefan.

Cultural symbols still indicate identification with a minority, however wearing the national costume is not particularly common. People wear traditional clothing only for cultural events or performances. The Muravidék Folk Dance Ensemble was founded in January 1999. Currently it has 24 members, mainly students. The Lendava International Folk Dance Festival, started by the ensemble, has been organised every year since 2005.

The majority (80%) of the members of the Hungarian community in Prekmurje are Catholic, while 8% are Lutheran. Roman Catholic Hungarians can pursue their religion in their mother tongue as they have native Hungarian priests. This is not the case with the Lutherans, with the exception of a handful of them in Lendava. The Protestant congregation also has a native Hungarian pastor. All in all, the use of the mother tongue is rather ambiguous in religious life (Kolláth 2005: 21). People can choose from among the alternating services in Hungarian or Slovene. The minority is neither characterised nor distinguished by religious symbols because the majority of Slovenes are also Roman Catholic.

The primary function of minority literature is to preserve and cherish the mother tongue and its culture. Often its political content exceeds its aesthetical value, as it deals mainly with issues arising from a minority lifestyle. The authors, speakers of the Prekmurje Hungarian contact variety, use standard Hungarian in their books, adding dialect elements in italics. A volume of poetry by Lajos Vlaj, published in 1961, serves as the starting point of Hungarian-language literature in Slovenia. Hungarian-language poetry in Prekmurje began in 1975 with a volume by three poets, Pál Szomi, Sándor Szúnyogh and József Varga. The Group of Slovenian Hungarian Writers, formed by 13 authors in 1989 changed its name to the Society of Slovenian Hungarian Writers in 1997. The Association, meant to represent the interests of Slovenian Hungarian writers, belongs to the Hungarian National Institute of Culture, and at the same time is also a member of the Hungarian Authors' Association (Zágorec-Csuka 2003: 62-64). In the field of children's literature Gabriella Bence Utroša (Story of a small acorn and other tales), József Varga (Sun-inviting, Hang-bona) and Lajos Bence (Sunflowerparrot) must also be mentioned.

Mária Szabó revives folk traditions and old customs in her books (Hungarian linguistic antiques form Lendava region, How we played). Tájszójegyzék, a dictionary-type collection of dialect words from the Lendava region is based on her collective work.

Language

4.1 General description of the language

Hungarian is a Uralic language, in the Ugric language group of the Finno-Ugric branch. Its closest language relatives are the other Ugric languages Mansi (Vogul) and Khanty (Ostyak) in Western Siberia, but the Ugric language community had already split about 2,500 years ago. Hungarians call themselves and the language Magyar, while the external names vary from one language to another: ungarisch, Hungarian, venger, ungur.

From a linguistic point of view Hungarian is in a very special position. The period when Hungarian was synonymous with the Hungarian language used in Hungary ended with the Treaty of Versailles. The fragmentation into external dialects, the tendency of language divergence, does not endanger the Hungarian language, but much more emphasises the vitality and diversity.

The curious stereotypical image of 'being left to its own devices' in the heart of Europe is clear from the fact that Hungarian, unlike its Slavic neighbours, has no close relatives. It does not resemble any other language. Speakers of Hungarian cannot experience 'nearly' understanding a language which is just a little different from their own. The lack of the so-called almost-Hungarian languages often goes along with the (incorrect) conclusion that the Hungarian language should be uniform (the language ideology of standardism).

In the Prekmurje region, Standard Hungarian as in Hungary is used as the literary language. However, this language variety is known and used by only a few people. It is used by intellectuals from the fields of humanities in formal situations, usually in writing, or in official documents and textbooks translated from Slovene. So far, no local literary language has emerged from the Hungarian contact varieties in Slovenia.

The local Hungarian varieties are all spoken while in writing, most Prekmurje Hungarians only use Slovenian. Obviously, the spoken Hungarian varieties are primarily used in informal situations and in Hungarian-Hungarian discourse, while in Hungarian-Slovene communication the vehicular language is Slovene. Hungarian is mainly spoken at home and in the family. The formal, professional and official registers are totally absent. The cultural and political events organised by the Hungarians are bilingual, with Hungarian as the dominant language.

Participant observations show that Slovene has also appeared as the intermediate language in Hungarian-Hungarian communication. This indicates that the content of the local Hungarian identity has changed and has begun to include Slovene elements as well. Investigating this issue would be of utmost importance, because this is the most spectacular manifestation of language shift.

4.2 Language contact and multilingualism

There are very few monolingual speakers among the Hungarian national community, only some older members who did not attend Slovenian schools, and have seldom been outside their Hungarian (majority) villages. Among Hungarians societal bilingualism is coupled with individual bilingualism, which is not the case among Slovenes (unilateral bilingualism, to a large extent responsible for the shrinking role of Hungarian). According to the experiences the Hungarians in Prekmurje like the Croatian language and culture (the language of the people next door), and most can use the language receptively, some productively, while some can even speak Serbian.¹

Research into the lexicology in Prekmurje focused on dialectology in the last century. The special features of the linguistic situation in Slovenia are summarised by the research project called Hungarian in the Carpathian Basin at the end of the 20th century (A magyar nyelv a Kárpátmedencében a XX. század végén) (Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, project leader: Miklós Kontra)². Published in 2005, the English-language volume, edited by Anna Fenyvesi (Hungarian Language Contact Outside Hungary. Studies on Hungarian as a minority language), gives a sociolinguistic overview of the Hungarian speech communities in the Carpathian Basin. The section on the Hungarians in Slovenia was written by Ottó Vörös.

The studies of loan words from the Slovene national language in the Hungarian in Prekmurje gained momentum in 2003 when Hungarian language offices and individual study bases were launched, serving as a starting point for a joint research programme of the Termini Hungarian Language Research Network (http://ht.nytud.hu; the Imre Samu Institute of Linguistics is part of this, its centre is in Unterwart/Alsóőr, Austria³). The practical aim of the project is 'de-Trianonisation', or 'debordering of words': collecting information and raising consciousness of loan words which serve as tools to refer to objects, institutions etc. that did not exist before Trianon. The idea is that the diversification of the Hungarian language is a natural phenomenon, while rigid monocentric codification of Standard Hungarian might be harmful, even for the development of the language.

The project is meant to provide over-the-border language varieties with proper representation in dictionaries, grammar books and other reference books so that Hungarian language and linguistics can become universal, all-Hungarian. Since Trianon, but especially after 1945, all such publications dealt only with the Hungarian in Hungary. Whichever way we look at it, the process should have a positive effect on the situation of the Hungarian language, by expanding codification it will serve linguistic unity, increase the appreciation of minority Hungarians, and put an end to the shrinking of language use stages in minority bilingualism. If its results are spread widely they will reach education

¹ It is mainly the middle-aged and older who can speak Serbian, those who attended school in Vojvodina before the political changes, or Slovene monolingual schools, where Serbian was a mandatory subject in the 5th form. Men who had been in the army can also speak Serbian, because it was the language of the army in former Yugoslavia.

² The series of publications with a similar title so far includes the volumes presenting the situation of the Hungarian language in the Zakarpattia Oblast (Ukraine) and in Slovakia. The volume on the Prekmurje Hungarian (by Ottó Vörös) has not yet been completed.

³ The Imre Samu Institute of Linguistics (ISNYI, http://www.umiz.at/isnyi/index.html) co-ordinates the research (and researchers) of the three small region of Austria, Slovenia and Croatia.

and the channels spreading linguistic information, then it will reach its true potential (Lanstyák 2005). It is bound to strengthen the self-confidence of Hungarians living across the borders, and help them retain their mother tongue.

So far research has yielded an online (Hungarian-Hungarian) ht (határon túli 'over-the-border') database containing the specific vocabulary of the eight over-the-border areas (http://ht.nytud.hu). It is being constantly updated and differentiated on the basis of background research already underway in the regions.

4.3 Language use and maintenance

The bilingual educational model in the Prekmurje region greatly shapes the image of public/official bilingualism. Bilingual education replaced the monolingual ethnic classes in Prekmurje in 1959, by which time the latter had been practically abandoned. Bilingual primary and secondary schools in the Prekmurje region are obligatory for both the minority and the majority⁴. The education model features both the minority and majority language as a school subject and the language of teaching. The new form of education, a rather utopian two-way immersion model with the two languages used in parallel, was thought at that time to be of model value, but it remained a utopia even after half a century as it has failed to achieve the value-adding, positive outcome of bilingualism. Instead of adding, it rather took away from the values, leaving the national minority language without dominance and without as much as the illusion of being equal. The model of Prekmurje has become education in a secondary language, with the mother tongue losing ground and purpose (from class 7 on the use of Hungarian is reduced to 30% of class time, in theory). In most of the lessons Hungarian is limited to a few fields of terminology (all text on the board must be bilingual), while the rest of the class is conducted in Slovene.

All this has led to the absence of vocational/professional languages in the minority language, to constant code switching, loss of prestige for the minority mother tongue, marginalisation, and finally language switching. For Hungarians this is more a programme of redirection, leading not to the conservation of the mother tongue, but rather to switching over to the majority language.

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⁴ In the bilingual area there are only (Hungarian–Slovene) bilingual schools. If the parents wish to have another school for their children, they have to go outside the bilingual area.

It is mainly the representatives of the national minority within the profession who warn of the failure of bilingual education, the quasi-phenomena on the expectations side, reflecting the political intentions of the time when the programme was launched. The gap between the intentions and the outcome is blamed on the programme's lack of methodological background, insufficient teacher training in methodology and teachers being left to their own devices (Kolláth 2008).

The use of Hungarian in the bilingual area for all purposes is a right granted by the constitution. In practice, the vernacular is more or less consequently used in familiar situations in Hungarian-Hungarian communication. The vehicular language in communication with Slovenes is Slovene. Hungarian is losing ground in bilingual education: there is hardly any teaching in Hungarian language it only exists as a subject. Acquiring standard Hungarian – owing to inappropriate subject support and a change in the content of identity - does not happen. On the contrary, it occurs the other way round: those who stay in the bilingual area will soon 're-learn' the vernacular, since this is the language of communication in the family when they are speaking in Hungarian.

The language used by the local written media is standard Hungarian with very few direct contact features and the occasional calque. The electronic media is much more colourful: the language used by local announcers and reporters retains at least the strongest phonological-morphological features of the direct contact phenomena. The language of legislation is Slovene and the most important documents appear in translation. The issue of bilingualism and translation has come up over the past few years in connection with textbook translations. Hungarian professional terminology is nonexistent, Hungarians use Slovene in most areas of public life, which only strengthens the dominance of Slovene and does not encourage functional bilingualism (the functions of the mother tongue will become more limited).

Research has been focused mainly on borrowing (word-level code switching is separated from borrowing on the basis of the level of integration into the base language and the frequency of use). The code switching strategies, their types, and the reason for choosing them in minority discourse have not yet been examined, the information we have mostly comes from passive observation. That language accommodation triggers a base-switch type code switching is shown from the research by Csilla Bartha: when a Slovene enters the room, Hungarians will switch over to Slovenian, even if they are in the majority (Bartha 2007). This high-level accommodation is acceptable for most Hungarian speakers and they find it perfectly natural. Others, at the same time, would rather give in, in order to maintain successful communication. They do not acknowledge either borrowing or word-level code switching, do not identify with such loan words (in front of strangers), do not regard them as legitimate elements of the Hungarian language they use, considering them as inappropriate, bad Hungarian – although they use them all the time.

The trend of language shift is growing stronger. Hungarian in Prekmurje – according to some experts - is in an advanced state of language switching (Bartha 2006; Bence 2010, Bernjak 2004 and passim). Others would rather not use the adjective and emphasise that Hungarian is moving into the background, pointing out that it is still passed on to the younger generation. Homogeneous families socialise their children in Hungarian (in the absence of research there are no exact data), but by the time they leave school, as a result of the bilingual instruction model they lose Hungarian dominance and become Slovene dominant bilinguals. Most children born in mixed families are socialised in Slovenian. In bilingual kindergartens Hungarian children pick up Slovene very quickly, many develop a positive attitude to the state language already at that time. This in itself is not a problem. What is a problem then is that it happens in a substituting/subtractive and not an additive manner. Most Slovene children, on the other hand, do not have a good command of Hungarian. The shift in language dominance happens in the bilingual area without a migration situation.

Future research must be focused on the following topics. So far, no comprehensive monograph, describing all varieties of the Hungarian language in Slovenia, has been compiled, even though the existing literature is rich and varied. Describing the vernacular Hungarian language variant is necessary to make a valid and accurate draft of the tendencies in the language changes. The Hungarian migrant community is a completely blank spot, there is - except for the demographic data - no research about them. Investigating (internal and external) migration and its impact on the Hungarian language variant in the Prekmurje region is necessary and an exciting research topic (are there Hungarian commuters, can they play a role in the language balancing). We do not have enough knowledge about the attitude contents, the audio and hetero-stereotypes, their reasons and consequences for the coexistence. Research into language use in mixed marriages, language selection in the school, correlation between contact interference and sociolinguistic situation are also of key importance. There is a lack of research on the media use and the language use on the internet and community portals. We should get a thorough picture about the vehicular use of the Hungarian language (in what situations and how often is the Slovene language used in Hungarian-Hungarian communication, as this would be the most spectacular revelation of language shift).

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