Attitudes of the Hungarian-American Diaspora to the Officialization of English in the United States

ABSTRACT

The paper examines the attitudes and opinions of the representatives of Hungarian-American communities in the United States regarding the officialization of English at the federal level. The corpora of the analysis have been built with the help of a) the websites of Hungarian-American organizations in the United States; b) the legislative database of the US Federal Congress; and the digitized versions of the printed newspapers and magazines published in Hungarian in the United States. The method of classifying the attitude patterns relies on Terrence G. Wiley's language policy classification spectrum (1999) and on Richard Ruíz's classic “orientations in language planning” framework (1984), expanded by Hult and Hornberger (2016). The results indicate that while Hungarian-Americans have mostly been trying to maintain their first language (in the private domain), they have also embraced English and willingly assimilated into American society, resenting the alleged ethnolinguistic separatism of Hispanic Americans and their demands for special minority-language accommodations.

Keywords: Hungarian diaspora, United States, language ideologies, Official English

Odnos madžarsko-ameriške diaspore do angleščine kot uradnega jezika v Združenih državah Amerike

IZVLEČEK


Ključne besede: madžarska diaspora, Združene države Amerike, jezikovne ideologije, uradna angleščina
1 Introduction

The size of the Hungarian-speaking diaspora in the United States has been dwindling fast for decades, as indicated by the relevant decennial censuses and the more recent American Community Survey statistics. Rapid assimilation into the mainstream is also evidenced by the concomitant Hungarian ancestry figures in census reports. These tendencies give rise to the hypothesis that embracing the English language has largely been taking (tacit) precedence over conscious and coordinated heritage language maintenance efforts in these communities, which may even have resulted in a general distrust of (additive) bilingual education programmes and the notion of language rights as well. Consequently, out of the three core characteristic features of a “diaspora” (as identified by Brubaker 2005, 5): dispersion in space; orientation to a ‘homeland’; and boundary-maintenance, at least the latter appears to be eroding quickly in view of the rapid language shift.

Relying on Bernard Spolsky’s tripartite language policy definition, comprising the language practices of a community, the (shifting) beliefs or ideological expectations (i.e., opinions about “what should be done”), and the language management efforts that frequently try to approximate practices to language-related beliefs (2004, 14; 2009, 4; 2021, 9), this analysis attempts to map the (English) language-related attitudes and potential attitudinal shifts in the Hungarian-American diaspora. This goal is to be reached by analysing the explicitly expressed opinions of the representatives or members of these communities concerning the officialization of English in the US, which is often regarded to be the most basic (and potentially most divisive) aspect of language management (Pułaczewska 2015, 3). I accept Graedler’s argument (based on Blommaert and Verschueren 1998) that newspapers “contribute to making issues of language and language use visible in the public sphere and are presumed to play a substantial role in the expression and mediation of a society’s language attitudes” (2014, 296). In order to compensate for potential biases, this exploration also focuses on the homepages of numerous Hungarian-American associations and on the legislative database of the US Federal Congress to find further Official English-related remarks by Hungarian-American contributors. “Attitudes” are understood here very broadly as “people’s positive or negative opinions or feelings about something” (Graedler 2014, 295), and are supposed to be rooted in deeper “orientations” or dispositions toward languages and linguistic diversity (discussed in detail in Section 4 below).

2 Hungarian-American Communities in the United States: Immigration Waves and Linguistic Assimilation

One of the most comprehensive sociolinguistics overviews of the Hungarian language in the United States is provided by Fenyvesi (2005, 265–318), who also reviews the successive waves of Hungarian immigration, which began in earnest in the 1880s (mostly due to economic hardship) and continued largely uninterrupted until World War I. During these decades, Hungarian-speaking immigrants – who typically found employment in mines and heavy industry – settled in the northeastern United States, primarily in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and Indiana (Fenyvesi 2005, 267). Later, the immigration “Quota Acts” of the 1920s drastically restricted the influx of newcomers from Central, Eastern
and Southern Europe to the US, putting an end to the predominantly “peasant exodus” (Gazsó 2020, 52). The post-World War I boundary adjustments – resulting in severe territorial losses for Hungary – pushed many of the often forcibly relocated ethnic Hungarians from the successor states overseas, mostly to Australia, Canada and Latin-America (Gazsó 2020, 59).

After World War II, tens of thousands of “displaced persons”, refugees from the Communist regime, and “56-ers” after the failed revolution of 1956, found their new home in the US. (Before the 1920s, many Hungarians were of the “sojourner” type, who worked in the US for a few years, saved enough money to start a new life in Hungary, and eventually returned to their country of origin.) Borbándi’s periodization of the post-World War II Hungarian emigration waves identifies several milestones up to the mid-1980s that represented the peak years of the (partially US-bound) exodus (2006, 6). The Soviet occupation in 1945, the consolidation of Communist power in 1947 and the crushed revolution of 1956 forced hundreds of thousands of people to leave the country; however, the gradual softening of the dictatorial system after 1963 and the peak years of détente around 1975 – which also witnessed the return of the Holy Crown from the United States in 1978 – contributed to the cautious normalization of relations between the US and Hungary (Borbándi 2006, 6).

However, travel was extremely restricted (and immigration was practically prohibited) during the Communist years. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, new opportunities appeared for both temporary workers or would-be immigrants; however, today the primary destination for Hungarians in this regard is not the US but western and northern European countries, mostly within the EU.

The actual size of the Hungarian-speaking diaspora in the US is difficult to determine due to several factors. The 1890 census asked about the languages spoken in the US for the first time (United States Census Bureau 2021a), but this policy and the related questions have only been consistent (and the results comparable in a more-or-less reliable manner) since 1980 (United States Census Bureau 2021b). Even now, the self-reports based on the three relevant questions (“Does this person speak a language other than English at home?”; “What is this language?”; “How well does this person speak English (very well, well, not well, not at all)?”) reveal very little about the frequency of minority language use (in the private domain). Furthermore, we can only guess at the actual levels of heritage language proficiency, as the survey focuses only on the English language in this regard.

However, since 2005 the English proficiency and home language use-related questions have been transferred from the decennial census to the American Community Survey (ACS) (Zhou 2015, 209). The ACS is an ongoing survey that provides information on a yearly basis (United States Census Bureau 2022), but it is sent only to a sample of about 3.5 million addresses in the country – as opposed to the once-a-decade census, which attempts to count and gather information on every person living in the United States at the same time (United States Census Bureau 2023).

Consequently, the most recent decades are relatively well-documented as far as minority language use is concerned. Unfortunately, the survey figures indicate a steadily shrinking Hungarian-speaking diaspora in the US: while in 2010 1,501,736 people reported Hungarian
ancestry (United States Census Bureau 2010b), only 94,464 answered that they actually used Hungarian (at least to a certain degree) at home (United States Census Bureau 2010a). By 2021, the corresponding figures were 1,221,273 for the national origin question (United States Census Bureau 2021d), representing a 19% decrease, and 68,716 for home language use (United States Census Bureau 2021c) indicating a 23% drop within a decade.

3 The Officialization of English in the United States

Although the recorded history of de jure officialization efforts at state level dates back to the immediate post-World War I period, the more recent (and increasingly successful) Official English legislative attempts have been characterizing and sometimes dominating the language policy scene since the 1980s. In 2023, ProEnglish (a leading advocate of the issue) listed 32 states with symbolic or (in recent years, in particular) substantive and enforceable officialization policies (Official English Map).

At the federal level, the formal beginnings of the “Official English” movement are associated with Senator S.I. Hayakawa’s ambitious amendment proposal to the US Constitution in the form of a joint resolution (S.J.Res. 72, 97th Cong., 1st Sess.), introduced on April 27, 1981. Although the Hayakawa resolution failed, it catapulted the issue into the national limelight, and to date there have been more than one hundred similar bills and resolutions introduced in Congress – although none of them have been passed.

The proposal that came closest to being enacted was the Emerson “English Language Empowerment Act” (H.R. 123 EH, 104th Cong., 2nd Sess.), which reached the Congressional floor on August 1, 1996, and was passed by the House of Representatives. However, it was not even introduced in the Senate as then-President Bill Clinton promised to veto the measure, should it have been passed by the upper chamber as well.

The current flagship Official English proposal in the House is the “English Language Unity Act of 2023” (H.R. 997 IH, 118th Cong., 1st Sess.), and its identical sister bill in the Senate (S. 1109 IS, 118th Cong., 1st Sess.). If passed – the chances of which are negligible – the “English Language Unity Act of 2023” would declare English the official language of the United States, and “establish a uniform English language rule for naturalization”, including the requirement that “All citizens should be able to read and understand generally the English language text of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the laws of the United States” (H.R. 997, 118th Cong., 1st Sess., Sec. 3, “Ch. 6, “§164, “(a)).

According to James Crawford, since the 1990s “Official English” has become a “mainstream phenomenon” (2000, 4–5), a symbol of patriotism. This observation resonates with Deborah Schildkraut’s argument that a fuller elaboration and explanation of American identity requires the extension of the traditional but limiting interpretation of the essence of the concept, which is often simplistically equated it with “liberalism” – describing the United States as the “land of freedom and opportunity” (2005, 6). At the very minimum, Schildkraut proposes three other, frequently neglected aspects (“traditions”) of American identity to be taken into consideration, challenging the more or less traditional, liberal interpretation. These are the civic republican tradition (emphasizing the duties and responsibilities of the citizens, not only
the potential opportunities and benefits); the ethnocultural, “white Anglo-Saxon Protestant” tradition; and the incorporationist tradition (offering a middle ground between melting pot-style assimilation and minority cultural maintenance) (Schildkraut 2005, 6).

As far as Official English policies are concerned, the proponents of the liberal tradition are most likely to oppose official-language laws (e.g., for potentially violating the freedom of speech constitutional guarantee), while civic republicanism emphasizes the need to sustain a sense of community, and thus is more likely to endorse attempts to promote the national language (Schildkraut 2003, 473–74). Restrictions on minority language use are not alien to the ethnocultural tradition, either (Schildkraut 2003, 474); whereas incorporationism is more ambiguous in this respect, as it “celebrates ethnic diversity and praises maintaining cultural traditions while also supporting assimilation and the emergence of new, uniquely American traditions” (Schildkraut 2003, 493).

4 Aims, Method and Corpora

The current analysis focuses on the documented attitudes (and possible attitudinal shifts) of Hungarian-Americans toward the officialization of English, and tries to determine whether these manifestations represent more-or-less consistent language ideologies – i.e., “commonsense notions about the nature of language” (Woolard 1992, 235) and about the “proper” role of languages and language varieties in a community.

Several scholars have pointed out that popular, language-related beliefs in the United States are often dominated by strong, assimilation-oriented expectations, despite the routinely diversity-praising rhetoric (Macías 2000, 53; Wiley 2000, 84; Baron 2004; Cutshall 2004/2005). An earlier review of the relevant literature identified three major sets of arguments that dominate language ideology-related debates in the United States (Czeglédi 2008, 35–57):

(1) The (mis)interpretation of (immigrant) history in general and that of salient events or personal histories in particular;
(2) Unfounded beliefs about (second) language acquisition and the effectiveness of bilingual education;
(3) The extent to which the English (and exclusively the English) language is considered to be a/the key component of American identity and nationhood.

Obviously, it is not a coincidence that these categories overlap considerably with the major areas of language policy conflicts in the United States as identified by Schmidt (2000, 11): 1. “Bilingual” education (which may often mean the implementation of almost wholly English-monolingual models); 2. Ensuring linguistic access to (government) services (which is frequently equated with language rights guarantees); 3. Declaring English the (sole) official language of the United States (either in the form of a substantive constitutional amendment or bill; or by a symbolic concurrent resolution).

Attitudes or “orientations” towards policy proposals in these areas (and towards linguistic diversity, languages and language communities in general) can be classified in several ways, two of which have been used in the present analysis.
In 1984, Richard Ruíz outlined three possible orientations – language-as-problem, language-as-right, and language-as-resource – toward languages in society (1984, 15–34), defined as complex, unconscious and mostly pre-rational dispositions, “related to language attitudes in that they constitute the framework in which attitudes are formed” (1984, 16). Francis M. Hult and Nancy H. Hornberger (2016) elaborated further on Ruíz’s orientations by fine-tuning and expanding the original characteristics of each perspective. Accordingly, the language-as-problem orientation typically values monolingualism in the dominant language and sees minority languages as an overall threat – consequently, the quick mainstreaming of minority students into the dominant language is a desirable goal (Hult and Hornberger 2016, 33). Language-as-right focuses on granting linguistic access to government services, civil rights and to society in general, ideally involving legal guarantees against discrimination (negative rights), as well as codified rights allowing or even encouraging the use the minority languages in specific domains (positive rights) (Hult and Hornberger 2016, 33). The language-as-resource orientation values societal multilingualism and cultural diversity. Here, languages are thought to have both extrinsic (societal) and intrinsic (individual) value (Hult and Hornberger 2016, 33). Consequently, minority language maintenance efforts and foreign language learning/teaching are both encouraged.

Another easily applicable yet highly informative framework for formal language policy analysis has been developed by Terrence G. Wiley since the late 1990s (Wiley 1999, 21–22; Wiley and de Korne 2014, 1–2). Wiley classifies the full range of possible policies according to a spectrum of categories containing a promotion-, expediency-, tolerance-, restriction- or repression-orientation. Official English proposals are naturally considered to be promotive from the perspective of the English language; however, they are frequently restrictive (or could even be repressive) for minority languages (Czeglédi 2008, 101–4; 111–15). Expediency denotes short-term minority language accommodations – e.g., the provision of court interpreters, bilingual ballots, transitional bilingual education – which are not intended to foster minority-language maintenance (Johnson 2013, 35).

Both Ruíz’s and Wiley’s classification schemes have been used to determine the language-related attitudes of Hungarian-American minorities toward the English language, the Hungarian heritage language, and toward other minority languages in the United States.

Three corpora have been analysed for this purpose: 1. The homepages of Hungarian-American associations and clubs in the United States; 2. The legislative database of the Federal Congress; 3. The newspapers and magazines issued in the US by the Hungarian diaspora (in Hungarian). In all three sources, I have focused on those documents and articles that contained either the keywords “official English” AND “Hungar*” (in the English-language documents) or “hivatalos nyelv” [“official language”] AND “angol” [“English”] (in the Hungarian-language sources).

As the newspaper corpus turned out to be the most informative, keyword searches focusing on the other two main language policy battlegrounds – bilingual education [“kétnyelvű oktatás”] and language rights [“nyelvi jogok”] – were also carried out to corroborate (or disprove) the findings related to the issue of officialization.
5 Findings and Discussion

5.1 The Homepages of Hungarian-American Associations and Clubs in the United States

The largest Hungarian-American umbrella organization in the United States is the American Hungarian Federation (AHF) (“Amerikai Magyar Szövetség,” AMSZ in Hungarian), originally founded in 1906 in Cleveland, Ohio (The American Hungarian Federation 2023a). The homepage is available in the English language only, which indicates high levels of language shift among the potential target audience. The Federation makes no secret of the fact that “today there are many Hungarian-Americans who feel strongly about their heritage but may not speak the language” (The American Hungarian Federation 2023a). Inclusivity and reaching out to second, third-, etc. generation Hungarian-Americans thus require an approach that does not alienate those who have never had the chance to learn Hungarian. While the American Hungarian Federation has been supporting “educational and cultural preservation programs” through the Hungarian American Education and Cultural Fund (“Amerikai Magyar Oktatási és Kulturális Alap” (AMOKA)), these are mostly focused on helping the language and cultural maintenance of ethnic Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries, separated from the mother country by the post-World War I boundaries (The American Hungarian Federation 2023c).

The AHF homepage lists 70 member organizations and Hungarian-American clubs throughout the United States, 23 of which have linked homepages. Out of these 23, only four have at least some of their online content available in Hungarian. These are the Cleveland-based "Hungarian Association"/Magyar Társaság (https://www.hungarianassociation.com/); the Hungarian Club of Colorado (https://huclub.org/); the Hungarian Society of Massachusetts (https://bostonhungarians.org/); and the Metroplex Magyar Cultural Circle (in Texas) (https://magyarszo.net/).

The AHF has no resources related to the officialization of English in the US at all. The “official language” search string returned five, slightly outdated records from their database: four of which discuss the “Draconian language law” in Slovakia, which restricted the use of Hungarian in official domains (see, e.g., The American Hungarian Federation 2023b).

While the AHF clearly (and understandably) regards the Hungarian language as an invaluable asset in its minoritized, autochthonous context in the successor states to the former Austro-Hungary, the Federation appears to be somewhat more reluctant to mobilize its (definitely not unlimited) resources to delay (the presumably inevitable) language shift in the American melting pot.

5.2 Officialization-Related Attitudes in the Legislative Database of the Federal Congress

The online congress.gov database search returned five relevant records for the “official English” AND “Hungarian” query, mostly from the 1990s. In all of these contexts, assimilation-oriented opinions were expressed either directly or by referring to famous Hungarian-Americans who fulfilled the American Dream with the help of the English language.
The first such instance can be traced back to the Congressional Record in 1991, when the contemporary flagship Official English bill, the “Language of Government Act” (introduced by Representative Bill Emerson, R-MO) was discussed (or rather, promoted) by Rep. Emerson himself and his colleagues. Representative William L. Dickinson (R-AL) argued for officialization by enumerating several immigrant success stories which were made possible “only in America” (and only in English), e.g., the illustrious career of former Senator Samuel I. Hayakawa, the sponsor of the first recorded Official English proposal at the federal level in 1981, and that of Arnold Schwarzenegger, who was already one of the best-known movie stars in the early 1990s. Rep. Dickinson also recalled the story of a (supposedly) Hungarian immigrant, Stephen Baker, who became a highly successful advertising executive, and created some of the most memorable ad campaign slogans of the 1960s and 1970s, including “Let your fingers do the walking” for AT&T’s Yellow Pages (Dickinson 1991, 18876). In fact, Baker was born in Vienna as Steven Bacher, although he did indeed spend “much of his childhood” in Budapest (Bayot 2004).

The second context in which references to Hungarian-American minorities were recorded was the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization debate in 1994. Eventually, the Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA) that was passed in 1994 turned out to be the most language-as-resource oriented reauthorization of the ESEA (Czeglédi 2017, 15). However, it was weakened significantly in this regard after the “Republican Revolution of 1994”, when the Republican-dominated Congress quickly slashed funding for Title VII (the Bilingual Education Act, or BEA), and (abortive) efforts were made to rescind the BEA altogether (Schmidt 2000, 18).

Representing the assimilationist side, Congressman Toby Roth (R-WI) argued during the March 21 debate that immigrant children were retained too long in bilingual education programmes, which – according to him – paved the way toward the “disuniting of America” (referring to the title of Arthur Schlesinger’s critical reflections on multiculturalism, published a few years before), resulting in the US “turning into another Canada or another Yugoslavia” (Roth 1994, 5736). Rep. Roth also added that earlier he had a hearing on Capitol Hill with people of “Spanish background”, immigrants from the Soviet Union and Hungary, and “all of them opposed to bilingual education because it harms their people” (1994, 5736).

The most characteristic, firsthand Hungarian-American opinions related to officialization were recorded in 1995–96, during the Congressional hearings about the Bill Emerson “English Language Empowerment Act” (H.R. 123). The earlier version of the proposal (then called “The Language of Government Act of 1995”) was introduced in the House of Representatives on January 4, 1995 by Rep. Emerson, and was referred to the Committee on Economic and Educational Opportunities, then to the Subcommittee on Early Childhood Youth and Families. As there were several other Official English bills introduced in Congress in the very same year, all of them were discussed at two subcommittee hearings regarding “English as a Common Language”; the first of which occurred on October 18, 1995, and the second on November 1, 1995 (H.R. Rep. No. 104–723, 3–4 (1996)). During the second hearing, one of the witnesses was “Mr. Charles Gogolak, former professional football player and Hungarian immigrant” (H.R. Rep. No. 104–723, 4 (1996)). Although his testimony was not recorded,
Charles Gogolak has been an ardent supporter of Official English ever since – as evidenced by his several decades’ long membership on the Advisory Board of US English – together with, for example, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Francis Fukuyama (US English 2022). George Dozsa, the president of an old Hungarian-American organization, the Hungarian Reformed Federation of America (a fraternal life insurance society organized in Trenton, New Jersey, in 1896), also expressed their “full support of the goals and initiatives of the official English language policies with specific regard to H.R. 123, the Official Language of Government Act” in a letter sent to the subcommittee (H.R. Rep. No. 104–723, 18 (1996)).

Debates about the “English Language Empowerment Act of 1996” elicited further contributions, even from a legislator with Hungarian roots. On August 1, 1996, Representative Ernest Istook (R-OK) expressed his unequivocal support for H.R. 123, and explained the origin of his surname (coming from the Hungarian “Istók” – the name of his immigrant grandfather), illustrating the necessity of melting pot-type assimilation patterns through his own family history (Istook 1996, H9763). Rep. Istook mentioned that his father was bilingual (using Hungarian only at home), but he himself was not a “hyphenated American” – rather a “real” American who believed that the common tongue should be English (Istook 1996, H9763).

All of these legislative records indicated that Hungarian immigrant experiences, histories, and personal (and political) opinions unanimously supported the officialization of the English language in the United States. Only the English language was regarded to be a nation-building asset, and minority languages were implicitly categorized as problematic (although, obviously no one argued against heritage language use in the private domain).

5.3 Officialization-Related Attitudes in the Hungarian-Language Newspapers Published in the United States

From the three major databases for this analysis, it was the Arcanum Digitheca archive that provided the deepest insight into the focal issue, despite the fact that many of the Hungarian-language publications were discontinued years or even decades ago – a fact that in itself illustrates how rapid the language shift has actually been, more-or-less since the immigration restrictions of the 1920s.

As of February 2023, the Arcanum Digitheca database contained the digitized versions of 22 Hungarian-language newspapers and magazines (published in the United States at some point) which have at least one reference to Official English throughout the decades. The oldest of these is Amerikai Magyar Népszava (originally established in 1891, in New York), which merged with the Cleveland-based Szabadság in 1948, and continued to appear in print until 2019 (Wikipedia 2023, par. 1). The digitized issues in Arcanum cover the years between 1909 and 2018. In addition to Amerikai Magyar Népszava, New York was the headquarters of 12 other relevant Hungarian-language publications, while Pittsburgh had one, Cleveland three, Chicago three, and Los Angeles two.

The “hivatalos nyelv” [“official language”] AND “angol” [“English”] query produced 31 relevant records between 1958 and 2007, the geographical distribution of which was the following:
Table 1. The geographical distribution of officialization-related articles in the newspapers published by the Hungarian diaspora in the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City/Region</th>
<th>No. of Hungarian papers</th>
<th>Relevant articles (1958–2007)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New York, NY</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh, PA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleveland, OH</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles, CA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

New York and Los Angeles were the two cities/regions where Official English received the most journalistic attention. Here, two papers appeared to be the main publications in this regard: *Amerikai Magyar Népszava – Szabadság* (New York) printed twelve relevant articles, while *Californiai Magyarság* (Los Angeles) published nine.

The number of articles appearing in a given year largely reflected the intensity of the Official English debate: 1) the immediate aftermath of the introduction of Sen. Hayakawa’s S.J.Res. 72 in 1981 (see Section 2 above); 2) California’s own political debates about Proposition 63, the ballot measure which amended the state constitution in 1986 to declare English the official language there; 3) the partial success of H.R. 123 in 1995–96 (see Section 3 above); and the heightened “English-only” sentiments in 2006, which again raised the level of sponsorship behind the leading Official English bill in the House of Representatives to almost 38% – second only to H.R. 123’s 45.3% a few years before (Czeglédi 2018, 90).

Table 2. The timeline of officialization-related articles in the newspapers published by the Hungarian diaspora in the United States.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>City/Region</th>
<th>Relevant articles</th>
<th>City/Region</th>
<th>Relevant articles</th>
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<tr>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Szabad Magyarság</td>
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<td>1974</td>
<td>Őj Világ</td>
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<td>1978</td>
<td>Californi Magyarság</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Amerikai Magyar Népszava – Szabadság</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>Californi Magyarság</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>Amerikai Magyar Népszava – Szabadság</td>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>Californi Magyarság</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>Californi Magyarság</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Californi Magyarság</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>Szabad Magyarság</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>Chicago és Környéke</td>
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<td>1988</td>
<td>Californi Magyarság</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>Magyarság</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>Magyarság</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Transszfántia – Erdélyi Tájékoztató</td>
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As far as officialization-related attitudes were concerned, all of these articles were wholeheartedly supportive of the idea, regardless of the year or place of publication. The only quasi-exception was an interview in *Amerikai Magyar Népszava – Szabadság* with the bilingual education expert Ramon Santiago from Georgetown University, who argued that the melting pot concept was already an outdated interpretation of American identity and nation-building, and the preservation of ethnic languages and cultures should take precedence (“Négyszemközti: Bevándorlás és kétnyelvűség” 1983, 10). Nevertheless, the (anonymous) author/interviewer did not hide their pro-assimilation bias (and not-so-slight grudge against mostly Latino immigrants) by pointing out the fact in the opening sentences that when the Hungarian readers of the article arrived in the States, nobody rushed to translate the official documents for them (“Négyszemközti: Bevándorlás és kétnyelvűség” 1983, 10). Furthermore, they added, as the (de facto) official language of the US was English, it was everyone’s duty to learn it.

Clearly, the second part of the article on “immigration and bilingualism” (“Négyszemközti: Bevándorlás és kétnyelvűség 2” 1983, 10), which was published by *Amerikai Magyar Népszava – Szabadság* one week later, shared the opinion of the invited expert, ex-Senator S.I. Hayakawa on several issues, including the perceived need to discontinue the translation of official documents, eliminate bilingual education, and – obviously – to declare English the official language of the country.

In many ways, the Hayakawa interview represented the views of the other Hungarian-language articles in the corpus regarding not only officialization but also bilingual education and minority linguistic access to government services, civil rights or other (re)sources. Both bilingual education and the access guarantees were seen as harmful for nation-building purposes and unfair to earlier immigrants (who could not take advantage of these services prior to the 1960s and 70s).

As far as minority linguistic access was concerned, the articles were doubtful or even dismissive of these accommodations. A 1982 editorial in *Amerikai Magyar Népszava – Szabadság* found it moderately shocking to see a Spanish-English bilingual edition of the Sears Roebuck catalogue published (alongside the Spanish-language editions of the *Chicago Sun Times* and the *Arizona Republic*), pointing out that “we (i.e., Hungarian-Americans) were not pampered” (“minket nem kényeztették”) in this respect (“Minket nem kényeztették…” 1982, 2). Zoltán Mikó Kovács remarked sarcastically in *Californiai Magyarság* a year later that there was no official language – that is why ballot papers were printed in two languages (Mikó Kovács 1983, 3). In 1995, Éva Nádai briefly analysed the nature of the contemporary “language war” in the US, and concluded that many of the access-related minority language rights were absolutely against common sense: most glaringly, the possibility of taking the citizenship test in non-English languages (Nádai 1995, 2).

The Nádai article also focused on bilingual education, which was seen as the most heated battlefield in the language war, contributing to the emergence of “multicultural chaos” in the US (1995, 2). One and a half decades before, the columnist Dr. Endre Nánay had characterized bilingual education and its outcomes in rather simplistic terms. The author argued that as a result of educating schoolchildren in their native tongues the English
language would be relegated to a timetabled subject, and it was never going to be mastered at the necessary level, which could prevent minority students from obtaining tertiary education degrees (Nánay 1981, 1). According to Nánay, the most problematic immigrants were the Latinos, who refused to learn the English language and practiced ethnic separatism *en masse*—as opposed to Hungarians, who—despite cultivating their mother tongue at home—knew their obligations toward the English language as dutiful citizens. Furthermore, Hungarians had made significant sacrifices for the American ideal of freedom (by rising up against the occupying Soviet forces in 1956) even before arriving in the United States (Nánay 1981, 1).

A quarter of a century later, complaints about the declining quality of educational standards—attributed to the spread of bilingual education demanded mainly by Latinos—were featured in a few articles in the Hungarian-language press. One contributor, Tamás Devecseri described the experience of his son, who was learning first- or second-grade materials in mathematics in the fifth grade in a New Jersey elementary school, but he had Spanish lessons almost every day (Devecseri 2007, 8).

The Spanish language always appeared in a problem-oriented context, with frequent alarmist predictions that “the new immigrants were transforming American society” beyond recognition (“Az új emigránsok átalakítják…” 1986, 3), which was expected to be countered and remedied by the promotion and officialization of English.

The other minority language predominantly (mis)characterized as a historical threat to American nation-building was German. Between 1983 and 1994, the Hungarian papers published in the US uncritically repeated the “Muhlenberg legend” (i.e., the apocryphal story about German having missed becoming the official language of the US by only one vote after winning independence from Britain) not fewer than six times in the Official English context alone. The authors of these articles were Péter Halász (1983, 9); Dr. Endre Nánay (1985, 1); György Mikes (1986, 12); an unnamed author (“Milyen fontos egy szavazat?” 1992, 3); and Dr. Rezső Dabas (1994, 1). The only cautiously optimistic thought experiment related to the Muhlenberg legend was an article by Ottó Habsburg written in 1984, which—based on the assumption of the emergence of a German-speaking United States after independence—retroactively envisioned the peaceful (and permanent) secession of the Confederate states; the Great War ending in a draw; and the avoidance of a second global conflagration altogether (1984, 3).

With the exception of the previously mentioned Ramon Santiago interview in *Amerikai Magyar Népszava – Szabadság* (“Négyszemközt: Bevándorlás és kétnyelvűség” 1983, 10), minority languages were never considered to be a societal resource in general. The Hungarian language was mentioned twice as an invaluable cultural and linguistic asset for the Hungarian community (Metzger 1974, 3; Nánay 1981, 1), but in both cases this opinion was tempered by the simultaneous expression of unwavering loyalty to the United States and to the only language that was seen to bind the ever more diverse country successfully together: English.

Although there were 27 articles in the Hungarian-American press corpus that mentioned “bilingual education” at least once, the majority of these pieces expressed their concern about the lack of bilingual education opportunities offered to Hungarian autochthonous minorities in the neighbouring states (in Slovakia, Romania and Serbia)—at least at the time.
of their publication. Altogether 12 articles discussed bilingual education policies in the US (including the ones mentioned above in the context of Official English), and all of these were overwhelmingly dismissive of such policies, especially from 1981, after the introduction of S.I. Hayakawa’s Official English resolution in Congress. They typically emphasized the (allegedly) divisive nature of bilingual education (“A kétnyelvűséget ellenzi az új kormány” 1981, 2); raised the alarm about the danger of producing “semilingual illiterates” (Márer 1981, 10), and even urged immigration restrictions to stem these harmful tendencies (Dr. Ternovszky 1983, 10).

The few articles that touched upon the issue of language rights (bilingual ballots, translation services) were also extremely critical of these accommodations, especially when they were seen as unduly benefiting Hispanic Americans. There was not a single article among the examined pieces that could have been classified as a “language-as-right” (let alone “language as-resource”) oriented piece, which might have argued for the taxpayer-funded promotion (or even preservation) of immigrant minority languages, or would have supported expediency-oriented policies to ease the transition into the English-speaking mainstream (e.g., multilingual ballots, court interpreters or translation services).

6 Conclusion

This attempt to trace the potential attitudinal shifts of the Hungarian-American communities toward the officialization of English has proved to be a partial failure – since instead of shifts (and even slight changes) it was the monolithic uniformity of views throughout the examined decades that dominated the relevant language ideologies.

The census figures have been showing rapid assimilation patterns among Hungarian-Americans, who appear to have overwhelmingly supported the officialization of English, and regarded the attainment of English proficiency as a civic republican duty and an unmistakable symbol of loyalty toward their new home. While the desire to maintain (and pass on) the heritage language and traditions was occasionally expressed in minority newspapers, these efforts turned out to be rather ineffective in the American context.

The examined sources generally agree that “the good old immigrants of yesteryear” (Hungarians included) assimilated into American society without problems – although the frequent references to the myth that Germans attempted to have their language established as the only official language at the end of the 18th century somewhat contradicted these idealized views of the past (when Latino immigrants were few and far between). For Hungarian-Americans, Latinos and their supposed unwillingness to Americanize themselves quickly enough, plus their “unjustifiable” demands for expediency-oriented Spanish-language access to government services and for (the “strong” forms of) bilingual education represented the signs of ethnolinguistic separatism and even blatant disloyalty toward the United States. It is also clear that bilingual education in particular was discussed extremely superficially in the relevant sources of the corpus: psycholinguistic arguments were entirely missing both from the congressional documents and the newspapers or magazines (let alone the homepages of Hungarian-American organizations).
Without doubt, the findings indicate that the key component of American identity formation and nation-building for the Hungarian diaspora was the English language, and any, relatively recent bilingual accommodations were seen as unwarranted and unjust – especially from the perspective of those minorities that could not have benefited from similar measures in the past.

References


