

Language, society, and related exercises for students of Hungarian as a foreign language. Analysis and examples from three language books¹

1. Introduction

The present paper focuses on **teaching Hungarian** as a foreign language. **Hungarian as a foreign language** is a special field of **teaching the national language** in Hungary, and foreign students who learn Hungarian at secondary school can take a **school-leaving exam** at the end of their studies. Consequently, the **Framework Curriculum** has a detailed description with the topics to be taught in the field of Hungarian as a foreign language.

Since topics connected to **language and society** are important parts of the Framework Curriculum, too, it is worth analysing the occurrence of them, with regard to their relevance to the topic of the V4 project “Teaching of national languages in V4 countries”. The topics to be analysed are **language, society, and those related exercises** which occur in the analysed language books for foreign learners of Hungarian **at levels A2, B1, and B2**.

2. Aims and methodology of the analysis

At first, the present paper gives a **short overview** of the occurrence of the investigated topics, language and society in the case of **grades**

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below the target levels. It is important if the aim is to take a look at the competence of students at the target levels, when they enter levels A2–B2. This analysis is based on Hungarian National Core Curriculum (=NCC) and the Hungarian Framework Curriculum (=FC).

Secondly, **suggested topics** concerning language and society in the case of the target groups (grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 with A2–B2 competence) are going to be shown.

Thirdly, with the help of three new books available in Hungary, some **types of exercises** connected to the target topics and used within these groups are going to be analysed.

3. Importance and advantages of learning the language at different levels, in different school types

As Taylor and Sobel emphasise: “(...) learners arrive at the classroom with prior knowledge and life experiences”.² Consequently, in the case of a group with students from different countries and with different mother tongues, it sometimes **can be difficult for the teacher** to find out what students know about the target country (in general and especially about language, society, customs, history, geography, etc.). There are fields of knowledge in the topic of language and society in language books that belong to the so-called “big C” culture (e.g. holidays, literature), however, there are other topics that rather belong to the “little C” culture (e.g. legends, communicational norms).

When we enter a new culture (e.g. start to learn a new language or move into a new country), we become parts of a society with customs, history, language, etc. This situation, on the other hand, can give us the opportunity of being a part of **multilingual communities**, not to mention **globalization** in present-day world:

² Taylor/Sobel 2011, 189.

Having two languages may bring people into a different **multilingual community**. Or it may allow them to **belong to a global virtual community** in a possible social network unrelated to geographical proximity or to any common language identity in the usual terms.³

Why is it important to **adjust Curriculums** to the changes of society?
As Nisbet 1991 points out:

The demand for a Thinking Curriculum arises partly because of **rapid changes in modern society**. It is also the result of recent developments in cognitive psychology: the constructivist theory of learning argues that learners create their own framework of interpretation **in a search for meaning and understanding**.⁴

Parallel, while teachers put emphasise on the importance of linguistic knowledge, **opportunity for practicing** should be given to language learners:

Raising the language awareness of all participants is a place to start, but **increased awareness must be coupled with increased opportunity** for the practice and development of valued forms and functions of language.⁵

4. Related topics for age groups and levels under the target groups

As mentioned above, an **overview** of related topics for age groups and levels **under the target groups** are going to be given now, in order to sketch what knowledge students have to gain within the fields of language and society before they enter the target levels. The overview is based on FC.

³ Cook 2009, 57; bold letters are mine.

⁴ Nisbet 1991, 27, cited in Coyle 2000, 247–248; bold letters are mine.

⁵ McGroarty 1996, 36; bold letters are mine.

For Grades 1–8, the related topics of **society and culture** are the following:

- important traditions and symbols of the Hungarian culture (including traditional cuisine);
- place of living, Budapest, typical places in Hungary (e.g. big rivers, Lake Balaton, Hortobágy);
- important celebrations, holidays (e.g. birthdays, Christmas, Easter), connected customs, symbols, and objects;
- tales, songs, and cartoons adapted from Hungarian tales and legends (e.g. King Matthias);
- poems and adapted parts of literary works by Hungarian poets and writers.

The related **linguistic skills** and knowledge concerning **communicative competence** are the following:

- statements about everyday activities;
- questions (*y-n* and *wh* types);
- describing people and objects;
- describing the places and movement of people and objects (with the help of suffixes, definite and indefinite objects), definite and indefinite conjugation of verbs;
- referring to cause and reason;
- verbal prefixes;
- moods: Imperative, Conditional;
- tenses: Present, Past.

5. Related topics for the target groups (Grades 9–12)

According to FC for Hungarian as a Foreign Language, by the end of Grade 12, students have to reach **level B1 or B2**. Additionally, they have to get the opportunity to get to know the structure and requirements of the **school-leaving exam**, have experience in exercising, and learn those strategies that can be used during the exam.

The **related topics** for these age groups concerning the analysed topics are the following (based on FC):

Within the fields of **society and culture**:

- important family and national holidays; Hungarian customs;
- Hungarian state symbols;
- the most important dates, buildings, and famous people of Hungarian history and culture;
- the biggest geographical parts of Hungary;
- samples from Hungarian literature; proverbs;
- current cultural facts;
- Hungarian cuisine.

Important topics and knowledge of **linguistic skills and communicative competence** are the following:

- phonology;
- different pronouns;
- definite and indefinite verb conjugation;
- verbal prefixes;
- trinity of direction;
- cases of nouns;
- comparative and superlative forms of adjectives;
- possession;
- infinitive;
- auxiliaries (*szeret, tud, akar* = 'like', 'can/be able to', 'want').

6. Three new books for the target groups

In the following parts of the paper, **three books for the target groups** are going to be analysed in order to show those features and related exercises that focus on the topics of language and society. The books analysed have been published in the last few years (between 2011 and 2014), consequently, they can be considered as new ones that are widely used and can be bought in most bookshops in Hungary.

The title of the first book is *Jó szórakozást magyarul! Fun reading exercises* by Gabriella Kiss and Ilona Molnár and it contains shorter and longer texts with exercises. This book was first published in 2009

and then in 2011 by Molilla Könyv in Budapest. The web site of the book is: <http://joszorakozastmagyarul.com/?lang=HU>

The second book is called *Lépésenként magyarul: magyar nyelv külföldieknek: második lépés – magyar nyelvkönyv középfaladóknak. (Hungarian: Step by Step)* and was written by Péter Durst. It is the second volume of a series, and it was published in Szeged in 2012, and its web site is <http://www.lepesenkent.hu>.

The third book analysed is the second volume of a series, too, which is called *MagyarOK*. The title of this book is *MagyarOK. Magyar nyelvkönyv. 2. kötet (Hungarian Language Book, vol. 2)* and it was written by Szilvia Szita and Katalin Pelcz. The book was published in Pécs, by the University of Pécs, and its web site is http://magyar-ok.hu/hu/A2_intro.html?ver=2.0.

In the following section, detailed pieces of information from these books concerning the occurrence of language and society are going to be dealt with.

7.1 Related texts in the analysed books 1: Jó szórakozást magyarul! Fun reading exercises

In this book, the related readings and exercises can be grouped into three bigger topics: 1) Famous Hungarian people and inventions, 2) Places in Budapest, 3) Hungarian traditions, legends and tales, famous historical characters.

In the **first topic, famous Hungarian people and inventions**, some biographies, anecdotes, and stories can be found. The first one of this kind is an anecdote about Franz Liszt, the famous Hungarian composer (p. 17). The second one is about János Gundel, owner and founder of the famous Gundel Restaurant, can be found within the topic of “Restaurants and cafés” (pp. 33–43). The third related topic is about Albert Szent-Györgyi who discovered vitamin C: an exercise containing pieces of information about his work occurs within the topic “Vitamins” (pp. 54–55). The next text and plenty of related exercises are about the doctor and polymath Sándor Lénárd (pp. 165–166), while the last related topic is about Tivadar Puskás, inventor of the telephone centre: his biography and two anecdotes can be

read in the book (pp. 168–173). These topics are very important for students, as with the help of these short texts and exercises they can get a deeper insight into the “big C” part of Hungarian culture.

Within the **second topic**, there is a longer chapter (“Restaurants and cafés”) about the most **famous late restaurants and cafés in Budapest** (pp. 33–43). With the help of various short texts and exercises (e.g. gap-filling, matching, finding the odd-one-out) we can get a deeper insight into the gastronomical culture and history of Budapest and Hungary. Another topic is about the City Park (*Városliget*, pp. 134–135): a map, the story of the City Park, and an autobiography of a clown with exercises help students exercise and get to know more about this place in Budapest. These texts and exercises give very important details about the history and parts of Budapest, and again, can help build up students’ knowledge about “big C”.

The **third big topic** contains various subtopics that can be related to **Hungarian traditions, legends, tales, and famous historical characters**. A longer text gives an overview of marriage traditions of the Hungarian settlers in the 9th century (pp. 116–117). Later, typical Hungarian stories can be read: a tale about King Matthias (pp. 194–196), some folk tales (pp. 196–200), and extracts from the legend of the “Miraculous Hind” (*Rege a csodaszarvasról*, pp. 204–206). Important details can be learned with the help of these texts, and it is practical that students can get a deeper insight into different historical periods of Hungarian history.

It has to be emphasised, that all the above mentioned topics occur with many exercises, consequently, not only a simple text is given (or, to be more precise: usually not a simple text is given, but a text with gaps, missing sentences, or with mixed paragraphs), but many related exercises follow the topic.

In the next subsection, the typical types of exercises are going to be listed.

7.2 Typical related exercises in *Jó szórakozást magyarul! Fun reading exercises*

The most typical **types of exercises** in the book concerning the topics of language and society are the following: gap-filling, multiple choice tests, true or false questions (after longer texts), matching, meaning explanations, finding the odd-one-out, checking your memory, answering questions (concerning a concrete topic), finding examples in the text (for given criteria), giving titles for paragraphs, verb conjugation.

8.1 Related texts in the analysed books 2: *Lépésenként magyarul 2.*

In the second book analysed, *Lépésenként magyarul 2. (Step by step in Hungarian, vol. 2)*, five bigger topics concerning the related fields (language and society) can be found. In the present subchapter, these topics and texts are going to be dealt with.

The **first related topic** is Places in Hungary; Budapest. A text about Hungary's capital can be read (p. 63) with some exercises: there is a multiple-choice test before the text, so that students' previous knowledge about the topic can be checked by the teacher. After the text, four other exercises help language learners summarise the new pieces of information, practicing newly learnt expressions, and there is a chance for creative writing, too, as students have the opportunity to write about their own cities with the help of some given expressions (p. 64).

In another unit, there is a good chance for students to work in pairs: a list of various programs in a Big City is given (p. 111), and with their help, language learners can get a deeper insight about free time programs in Hungary, from sports to festivals. It is very practical that "Big City" is mentioned as the name of the venue, as it is not necessary to link the activities for a concrete city, but it can be anywhere where students imagine it.

The **topic of "Hungaricums"** (special Hungarian products, symbols) shows the reader two of this kind: paprika and Pick Sausage.

The topic of paprika (pp. 68–69) starts with some pre-reading exercises again, which focus on students' knowledge and vocabulary. Then a text about paprika is given, with important details about its history, features including the growing and treating of it. The work of Albert Szent-Györgyi is emphasised also in this book.

Another text in this category is about Pick Sausage (p. 178): after having read the text, students get the opportunity to put the steps of preparing the sausage into order. It is a very creative task, and gives a special vocabulary for language learners.

Within the **topic of national holidays**, two short texts about Santa Claus & Christmas and about Easter holidays in Hungary are given (p. 90). With the help of some pre-reading tasks students in pairs and in group can talk about the Hungarian customs and about their own impressions.

A longer text concerning **the education system in Hungary** can be listened to within the field of Society (pp. 168–172). As a listening activity, this part contains various related activities. The topic gives students a wide range of vocabulary including the names of school-related activities, subjects, language learning, etc., and offers the opportunity to talk about their own experiences in language learning.

The last biggest related topic in this book is about **famous historical characters**, legends, and tales. A short summary about King Matthias's importance with some questions gives students an insight into our famous king's life and importance (p. 112). In another unit, a tale, *Lúdas Matyi (Mattie the Goose-boy)* (pp. 219–222) is given: here, students can read a longer text, which is accompanied with various exercises.

8.2 Typical related exercises in Lépésenként magyarul 2.

In the related chapters of this book, various and creative **exercises** help students not only expand their vocabulary, but argue and talk in groups or in pairs, and listen to shorter and longer texts and conversations.

The **typical exercises** concerning this topics are gap-filling, multiple choice tests, true or false questions, matching (e.g. expressions

with pictures), meaning explanations, answering questions, pair work: discussions, arguing, listening comprehensions.

9.1 Related texts in the analysed books 3: MagyarOK 2 (Students' Book)

In the case of this book, five bigger topics can be distinguished within the field of Language and Society. These topics are mostly connected to the topic of language, however, with the help of various exercises they give students a lot of possibilities to expand their language knowledge. At the beginning of each topic, this book usually gives the most important expressions concerning the topic. It is worth mentioning that there is a big amount of beautiful, colourful photos and function-based colourful charts in this book.

The **first related topic** is **Places and Living in Hungary**. Up-to-date questions and subtopics occur within this field, such as the tendencies of buying or renting a flat (especially in Hungary, pp. 43–44), the comparison of countryside and city life (pp. 52–54), a weekend in the mountains of Bükk (pp. 88–94), and a weekend in Tihany (pp. 99–102). In the case of the renting or buying a flat topic, students can read and listen to a short text. After the listening and reading exercise, various activities and exercises are given, in order to improve as much skills as possible. Students can match, talk, compile short texts, etc., and as a result of these activities, they can collect many important pieces of information concerning the “small c” cultural features of Hungary.

In the case of the city and countryside topic, students have to contrast the two lifestyles by collecting arguments for the pros and contras. This activity is followed by a listening one, when summaries about two people living in two different places can be heard.

In the case of the weekend topics, the key grammar is Past Tense. Besides this, there are other features that collect the two topics: in the case of each one, a person's excursion is depicted, with listening and reading comprehension and lots of geographic and cultural information about the places.

There is another subtopic, too, that can be found in this group: an excursion to Pécs (pp. 173–180). Here various topics and exercise types occur, like the sights of the city, the map of Pécs, famous paintings in the museums of Pécs, or planning programs around the city; listening and reading comprehension, talking, writing activities, in order to give students great opportunities to improve both their receptive and their productive skills.

The **second bigger topic** is **Travelling and holiday**, but it is closely related to the above mentioned topic, as here two hotels by Lake Balaton are dealt with (pp. 159–164). With useful vocabulary and situations (e.g. how to check in at a hotel, what are the most important details in an advertisement about a hotel) students can get an insight into the actual features of tourism in today's Hungary.

The **third topic** to highlight is **Festivals**, however, many smaller pieces of useful information occur from this topic in other topics, too (e.g. museums in Pécs in the above mentioned topic). An interesting and exciting conversation in a group can be conducted with the help of the beginner questions of Hungarian Music Festivals (p. 77). After a text about the famous Sziget Fesztivál, students can compile summaries about two other Hungarian festivals. Finally, with the help of the learnt vocabulary, they can write about festivals in their countries.

The next related topic is **Museums and Exhibitions** (pp. 80–82). Three of them in Budapest are shown in this chapter, and various exercises are given, including the linguistic knowledge of asking for permission in a museum, which help students not only deepen their grammatical competence, but gives important knowledge about the "small c" as well.

Another big topic concerning Language and Society is **School System**. Two subchapters deal with this topic, the first is Secondary School and University System (pp. 112–125), the second is Hungarian Universities (p. 127). In the subchapter about Secondary Schools, a wide overview of school terminology is given. Students can learn about school subjects, notes, the school system, and about positive and negative characteristics of a person (e.g. a teacher). Then the university system and experiences are shown, and students can talk (e.g. compare) their own experiences with the Hungarian. At the end

of this topic, the most ancient universities of the world and Hungary's oldest universities are introduced. Various exercises: reading and listening comprehensions, topics to write or talk about help get an overall picture of this topic.

Last but not least, this book, too, gives a definition for **Hungaricums**, and adds a list of Hungarian foods and drinks, which fall into this category. Students can talk about their experiences, and introduce special foods and drinks from their home countries. Such way, students can get an insight not only to Hungaricums, but to other culture's specialities, too, and hence they can improve their "small c" competence.

9.2 Typical related exercises in MagyarOK 2 (Students' Book)

As already mentioned some of them, there is always a big amount of **exercises** in this book for practicing. This book puts great emphasis on talking, role-play, and using various and modern sources, like the internet while getting a deeper insight into a topic.

The most frequent type of exercises concerning the analysed topics are the following: gap-filling, true or false questions, matching, meaning explanations, answering questions, pair work: discussions, pair work: role-play, arguing, collecting information on the Internet, finding the odd-one-out, verb conjugation, listening comprehensions.

Summary

According to **the aim** of the analysis, the present paper has pointed at some **topics and typical exercises** that can be related to the topic "**Language and Society**". The analysis has been conducted in in three new Students' Books for **learners of Hungarian as a Foreign Language**.

The importance of the analysis is that all of the books examined can be useful help in classes of secondary schools, where students have to prepare for the school-leaving exam. The analysed topics and exercises can help improve students' **knowledge of Hungarian culture, society**, as well as **improve their communicative competence**.

What is more, the books are useful and popular nowadays among **adult learners of Hungarian** in language schools, too.

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NCC = National Core Curriculum.

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