

Etelka Tóth & Tamás Csontos

Simonyi competition in the teaching of Hungarian as a first language in the Carpathian Basin

Variation in the results

Abstract

This paper presents the research results related to Simonyi Zsigmond Orthographic Competition in the Carpathian Basin. We introduce the competition and a corpus of students' answers which already contains millions of pieces of data that can be analysed from different fields of science, e.g. linguistics, methodology and pedagogy. We focus on those questions which posed serious problems for the students (and try to identify the factors which may be responsible for the poor results), investigate the answers given by the Hungarian students from Slovakia and compare them with the results of the students from Hungary.

Keywords: orthography, competition, first language pedagogy, student corpus, Hungarian students from Slovakia

1 Introduction

The social relevance of applied linguistics can be supported by the growing interest in Hungarian orthography among Hungarian speakers. This is also confirmed by the fact that the first book of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (then known as the Hungarian Learned Society) founded in 1825, was published in this topic in 1832 under the title *Magyar helyesírás és szóragasztás főbb szabályai* (The Basic Rules of Hungarian Orthography and Affixation). Nowadays, it is largely due to this keen interest that orthographic competitions are organised at all levels of education in Hungary and abroad. University students can participate in the Nagy J. Béla Orthography Competition dating back to the mid-1980s. Secondary school students can take part in the Implom József Orthographic Competition, whereas the Simonyi Zsigmond Orthographic Competition in the Carpathian Basin is organized for primary school students from grade 5 to 8 every year.

Although the first Simonyi competition was launched later than the two other orthographic competitions mentioned above, it mobilises the largest number of students and teachers in the Carpathian Basin. It is announced by the Hungarian Linguistic Society and was organized by Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) Department of Modern Hungarian Linguistics until 2020 (Antalné Szabó 2020). Since the academic year of 2020/2021, the competition has been organized by Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church (KRE) Faculty of Pedagogy. The new organisers reformed the competition and designed its digital framework (Tóth 2021) replacing its traditional paper-based format. This provided the opportunity to create the basis of a corpus of the participants' answers and analyse the competition results from two aspects,

i.e. linguistics and first language pedagogy (Bárdos & Tóth 2023). In addition, the research group ‘Linguistic competencies in space and time’ supported by KRE investigates the pedagogical, linguistic and socio-economic factors which influence the indicators of linguistic competence using interdisciplinary resources from the perspective of three fields of science – pedagogy, linguistics and economics/sociology.¹

2 The Simonyi competition

The knowledge of the linguistic system and the conscious use of linguistic regularities are one of the pillars of successful reading comprehension and written text production and, at a higher level, of abstract thinking. According to the *Nemzeti Alaptanterv* (NAT) (“National Core Curriculum”), the main objective of teaching Hungarian language and literature is “to train students who use their mother tongue consciously, have secure reading comprehension and writing skills, and communicate effectively through the conscious and reflective use of language, [...] they are able to express themselves in writing accurately, in accordance with the given situation and genre, and behave properly as well as use their mother tongue adequately” (NAT 2020: 300). One of the basic principles of this is that students should also follow the rules of Hungarian grammar and orthography when expressing themselves orally or in writing (NAT 2020: 301).

Schools therefore play an important role in highlighting the importance of orthography. In relation to communication skills, the interpretation and application of orthographic rules is a fundamental requirement in the National Core Curriculum and the Frame Curricula. Orthography is an assessment criterion in the evaluation of written text production at all levels of education. This can account for the popularity of orthographic competitions in the last three decades throughout the Carpathian Basin.

The Simonyi competition organized for the 27th time in 2024 attracts tens of thousands of students every year. Its popularity is still increasing despite significant changes in the organisation process over the last four years due to the digital transition. The creation of the digital platform and the task bank posed a major challenge to the developers – the staff of KRE Faculty of Pedagogy – who had to take into account the fact that the new form of competition requires a huge change in the attitude of teachers. It was difficult for many teachers, especially for the older generations, to understand and accept the new situation. However, most of them were happy about the innovation and considered it as a novelty necessitated by the digital age. They understood the intention of the developers, i.e. this approach would positively enhance the opportunities for students to learn about and use the digital world while developing their digital skills and shaping their attitudes towards digital culture.

This assumption is confirmed by the fact that, despite the change, tens of thousands of students participate in the competition. The numbers have been increasing, but the server capacity available means that only 10 children per grade from any school can enter the competition. In the academic year of 2020/2021, i.e. during the pandemic, more than 16,000 students filled in the application form and more than 11,000 students participated in the

¹ The present paper was written within the framework of the research project *Linguistic competencies in space and time* supported by Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church. Its members include Tamás Csontos, Katalin Dancsi, Andrea Miklósné Zakar, Krisztina Streitman, Anne Tamm, Ágnes Tolnai, Etelka Tóth, Gyöngyvér Fazekas, Dorottya Lehel, Kamilla Vajda and other university students.

competition. Two years later these numbers were 22,000 and over 16,000, respectively. In 2023/2024, almost 18,000 children joined the first stage (Table 1).

The figures for 2022 to 2024 do not include students from Transylvania, as the co-organiser of the competition, *Anyanyelvőpolók Erdélyi Szövetsége* (Association of the Protectors of the Mother Tongue in Transylvania), have to use the old paper-based format due to the Romanian educational regulations. This means approximately an additional 100 schools and 6,000 students.

Academic year	Number of institutions	Number of applicants	Number of participants in stage 1	Number of participants in stage 2
2020/2021	794	16,155	11,224	2,806
2021/2022	1,184	22,300	16,144	4,564
2022/2023	1,189	21,916	16,165	4,643
2023/2024	1,273	23,974	17,908	4,939

Table 1. Numbers related to the participants of the Simonyi competition between 2020 and 2024
 (number of participants = number of those schoolchildren who complete and submit their worksheets)

The competition consists of three stages. Schoolchildren in grades 5–8 from Hungary and Hungarian schools in Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia compete first at local (school) level, then at county level (students from Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia at national level) and lastly in the Carpathian Basin final. Taking into account the regional distribution, 25% of the students with the best results will qualify for the second stage. In the third stage, the best 140 students compete in accordance with the competition regulations. However, due to the possibility of online competition, this number can be increased; for example, in 2020/2021 there were 170 students.

3 Tasks

Contestants can achieve 100 scores in every stage and every grade. According to the competition regulations, every student completes the same worksheet in every stage irrespective of where they are from. The worksheet compilers do not take into account the fact that content and the structure of the curricula in the neighbouring countries can also differ. Therefore, the organizers specify the requirements by grade on the website of the competition in accordance with the National Core Curriculum and the Frame Curricula (1).

While designing the worksheet, compilers apply several principles concerning content and structure (cf. Antalné Szabó 2015). Taking into account the age specific characteristics of the contestants is an overarching principle, both in terms of content (e.g. number of technical texts) and structure (e.g. fewer tasks which require typing). In addition, the content is primarily related to the curriculum by grade which is clearly determined by the functional use of language. The intention of the compilers is to raise awareness of the fact that orthographic rules do not exist for their own sake, but they make texts clearer and easier to understand. When selecting specific texts, it is important to make sure that they use present-day language, contain new words and expressions, while reflecting the richness of the language and using elevated language which

has inspired the competition for almost 30 years. Of course, there are also tasks focusing on the orthography of individual word forms, and these are selected in the same way as the texts.

The current framework of the digital competition is not really suitable for dictation that is common in orthographic competitions. (There is no obstacle to developing this type of task, but as it requires additional tools on the user's side, dictation tasks are not yet included). To compensate for this, tasks which focus on expressiveness rather than receptivity have been developed, i.e. a large number of error-correction tasks and other multi-step tasks requiring creative use of knowledge and logical connections and conveying academic and cultural knowledge.

Tasks are displayed on a specially designed digital interface in Moodle (Figure 1). The interactive presentation follows strict structural rules. The task sets consist of the following types of tasks: true/false questions, single select multiple choice questions (from a dropdown menu or drag and drop), multi select multiple choice questions (from a dropdown menu), matching tasks (from a dropdown menu or drag and drop), creating groups (drag and drop), gap-fill tasks: writing one or more letters, numbers, words or phrases. As far as gap-fill tasks are concerned, the length of the text to be typed should not exceed the level of phrases, even if the questions refer to a text consisting of several sentences; otherwise, the answers cannot be evaluated. If the answer is evaluated in relation to a longer unit than a phrase, e.g. a sentence or a whole text of greater length, the contestant will be given no scores in case of any mistake due to the limitations of the framework. It would therefore be pointless to include a task requiring a higher level of thinking.

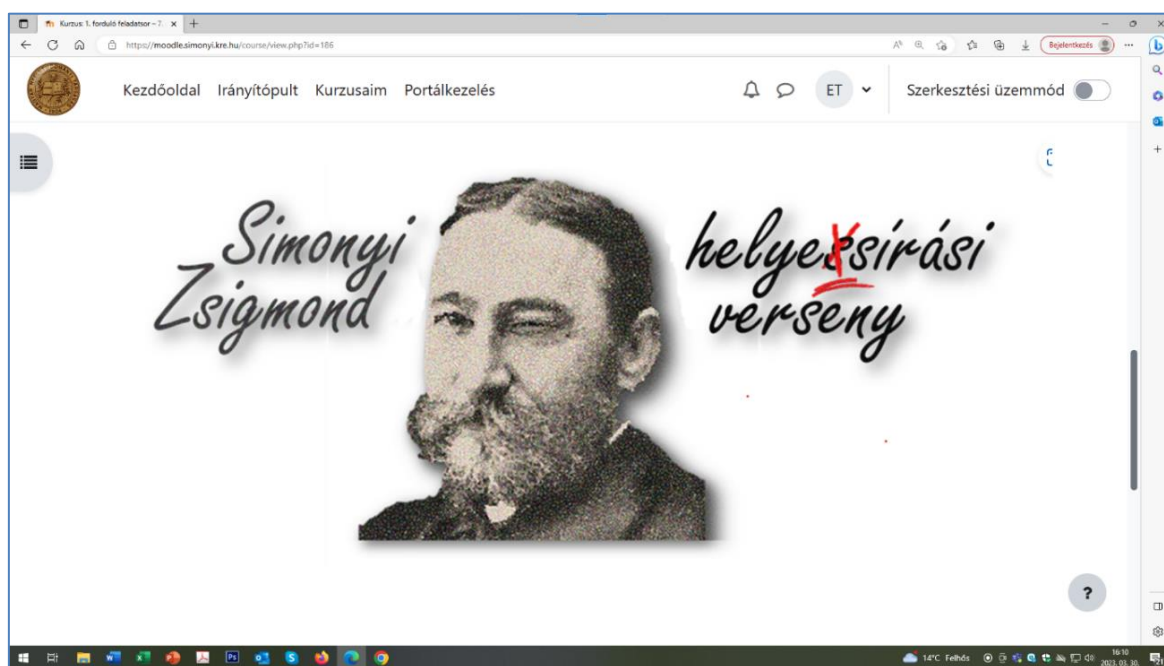


Figure 1. The digital platform of the Simonyi competition

The answers are evaluated by the Moodle system. This is a practical solution, because the large number of participants means that consistent evaluation would not be feasible using only human resources. Although all the tasks are pretested multiple times before they are actually used in the competition, students and their teachers have the opportunity to double-check the answers,

results and scores. If they have objections, they can make an appeal and if justified, the organizers will accept it. This process ensures that the competition still has “a human face”.

4 The Simonyi corpus

Due to the digital platform, every authorised login and every activity performed are recorded. This forms the basis of the database, which therefore includes the results related to the three stages of the competition – each of which contains 25–30 tasks, the key to the these questions and the data of the applicants.

The corpus already contains two million pieces of linguistic data. We are currently tagging them according to different dimensions, which allows us to analyse the whole corpus from several aspects. We assume that this huge amount of data gathered for several years can give us the opportunity to provide Hungarian teachers with methodological guidelines in first language pedagogy and identify certain tendencies in language use – primarily in writing.

As we have information about the location of the participating schools, it is possible to analyse the data from a geographical perspective as well. In addition, the economic and social background of a given region can be used as a starting point to investigate whether the geographical location, and more specifically the economic development of the region, are related to the effectiveness and efficiency of learning.

Working with quantitative results has many advantages. For example, it is possible to compare and track the results in every competition year, both in terms of grades and competition stages, and even with respect to the correct answers to certain types of tasks. An example of comparability is shown in Table 2, which illustrates the results for 5th graders between 2020 and 2024. The table reveals that their performance was 10 percent lower in 2020/2021 than in the following years. Also, an example of traceability can be seen in Table 3. The average in grade 5 in 2020/2021 was 64.6%. In 2021/2022 and 2022/2023, i.e. when the same year group was in grade 6 and 7, the students reached 69.78% and 61.89%, respectively. In 2023/2024, they achieved 66.42%.

Academic year	Grade	Average (%)	The average of the qualifiers for the next stage (%)	Highest score
2020/2021	5	64.60	84.10	100.00
2021/2022	5	73.08	81.28	100.00
2022/2023	5	72.05	85.64	99.25
2023/2024	5	73.92	87.42	100.00

Table 2. Results of the 5th graders between 2020 and 2024

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Academic year	Grade	Average (%)	The average of the qualifiers for the next stage (%)	Highest score
2020/2021	5	64.60	84.10	100.00
2021/2022	6	69.78	79.43	99.50
2022/2023	7	61.89	80.31	99.50
2023/2024	8	66.42	80.90	99.68

Table 3. Results of the same year group between 2020 and 2024

It also follows that the corpus can be the basis of longitudinal studies in every dimension that we are focusing on if we continue analysing the tasks and answers in the future as well. As the corpus is still being constructed, this paper is considered as a model that offers certain analytical possibilities based on our data.

5 Results of the students from Slovakia

As already mentioned above, a large number of Hungarian students from Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Ukraine participate in the competition despite the fact that the number of children attending Hungarian schools in Hungarian-inhabited areas in these neighbouring countries is gradually decreasing (Tátrai et al. 2022; Ibos 2023a, 2023b). This is the reason why the language use of these minorities plays a prominent role in our research. Also, it is crucial to explore how and to what extent the majority language environment affects the results of the participants. Corpus data allows us to analyse the answers of students from given regions. This gives us the opportunity to identify differences and similarities between the results of students from Hungary and Hungarian schoolchildren living in the neighbouring countries.

Most of the contestants who do not live in present-day Hungary are from Transylvania. They are followed by the students from Slovakia who can be only 7th or 8th graders according to local competition regulations. Their number is usually around 200. The third group consists of students from Serbia and Ukraine with 100-100 participants in all of the four grades. Since we have incomplete data on the results of the students from Romania and the performance of the participants from Serbia and Ukraine is less suitable for analysis due to the small sample size, our research study focuses on the results of the students from Slovakia.

It is important to highlight the fact that all students meet the same requirements and complete the same worksheet irrespective of where they are from. In this context, the results of the participants from Slovakia are remarkable. As illustrated in Table 4, their performance was 6-8% above the average of the whole year group both in 2021/2022 and 2022/2023².

² We excluded the academic year of 2020/2021, because of the radically new format of the competition. Note also that the data for 2023/2024 are still being processed.

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Academic year	Grade	Slovakia (%)	The average of the given year group (%)
2021/2022	7	70.62	64.24
2021/2022	8	75.30	68.78
2022/2023	7	69.08	61.89
2022/2023	8	78.68	70.28

Table 4. Results of the students from Slovakia in stage 1 compared to the average of the whole year group

In the school year of 2021/2022, the average performance of the 7th graders in Stage 1 was 64.24%. The Hungarian students from Slovakia performed above this average reaching 70.62%. As for the 8th graders, the average performance was 68.78%, while the students from Slovakia achieved 75.30%. In the academic year 2022/2023, the average performance of the 7th graders in Stage 1 was 61.24%. The Hungarian students from Slovakia again performed well above this achieving 69.08%. As for the 8th graders, the average performance was 70.28%. The performance of Hungarian students from Slovakia (78.68%) was much better than this. (Note that there were many 8th graders who took part in the competition in the previous year as 7th graders.)

When comparing the results, the number of the participating students needs to be taken into consideration. The small number of participants is clearly explained by the small amount of Hungarian schools in Slovakia – there are 208 primary schools registered in the Suli.Sk School Information System (2). While the number of Hungarian students from Slovakia per grade was less than 100, there were 4,000–5,000 students competing in every grade at the same time. However, this can only partially account for the fact that the Hungarian students from Slovakia achieved better results. A broader approach to our research – taking linguistic, pedagogical and social problems into consideration – may explain this phenomenon. In the next section, we present tasks and questions from the 2022/2023 school year (Stage 1) which proved to be difficult for the contestants and we give practical advice to teachers about what elements and aspects of orthography they should focus more on in the Hungarian grammar lessons.

We will see that regardless of the geographical location, these task results were below the average performance of the whole year group on the whole test (cf. Table 4).

6 Examples

6.1 Alphabetical ordering

Alphabetical ordering plays an important role in everyday life (e.g. compiling a list of names or putting files in order). Nevertheless, these kinds of tasks proved to be difficult in every grade although alphabetical ordering is part of the curriculum in lower grades (Galuska & Szinger 2023: 18–24). In grade 7, there were two different types of tasks related to alphabetical ordering (Figure 2: Task 4 and 5). One of them was a multiple choice question: *Which list contains words in correct alphabetical order?* The performance of the students (60/54%)³ was below average (69.08/61.89). But if we take a look at Task 5, we can see that their performance is even poorer

³ The first number in brackets refers to the results of the Hungarian students from Slovakia. This is followed by the results of the students from Hungary in %.

(33/20%). In this task, a sequence of numbers had to be entered according to the correct alphabetical order. Both tasks required multiple logical operations. Firstly, the students had to be familiar with the principles of alphabetical ordering and they also had to replace the words with numbers, i.e. use a different code system. Note that the instruction specifies certain syntactic requirements which many students ignored. This can also account for their poor performance. The correct order of words in task 4 was *bíró*, *birodalom*, *bíróság*, *birtoklás*, *birtokol*, while in task 5, the participants had to enter the sequence 25341.

4. feladat
 Még nincs rá válasz
 Max. 1,00 pont
 A kérdés megjelölése
 Kérdés szerkesztése

Válaszd ki! Melyik felsorolásban vannak helyes betűrendben a szavak?

- ☐ bíró, birodalom, bíróság, birtoklás, birtokol
- ☐ sajog, sajnál, sólya, sója, sólyom
- ☐ Virág, virág, virtus, vírus, visszér

5. feladat
 Még nincs rá válasz
 Max. 1,00 pont
 A kérdés megjelölése
 Kérdés szerkesztése

Hogyan követik egymást betűrendben az alábbi szavak? (Ügyelj arra, hogy felesleges szóköz ne legyen a megoldásodban! A válaszmezőbe csak a számjegyeket írd be folyamatosan! Például: 123 stb.)

1) Ötvös 2) Eötvös 3) Opera 4) ötvös 5) opera

Válasz:

Figure 2. Alphabetical ordering⁴

Grade 7, Task 4; Hungarian students from Slovakia: 60; the average performance of students from Hungary: 54% (rounded data)

Grade 7, Task 5; Hungarian students from Slovakia: 33%; the average performance of students from Hungary: 20% (rounded data)

6.2 Interpreting and applying orthographic rules

A typical example of a reading comprehension task is a technical text where students have to interpret rules. First, they had to complete an orthographic rule related to the principle of word analysis with one of the answer options (Figure 3, Task 18). Secondly, they had to select corresponding examples from a list, i.e. words where the full assimilation of the suffix beginning with /j/ can be observed with verbal stems ending in /s/, /j/, /z/, /dz/. There are four correct answers, i.e. *mosson*, *vonzza*, *játsszanak* and *peddzék*, as indicated by the four horizontal lines.

This task is complex, as it requires some grammatical knowledge as well. Students were to identify the verbs with the relevant stem as well as words with a suffix beginning with /j/. As the results show, this task was quite difficult. The students from Slovakia performed better (53%) than the students from Hungary (40%) in this task as well. But note that these scores are below their average performance on the whole test.

⁴ The source of data is the digital platform of the Simonyi competition.

18. feladat

Még nincs rá válasz

Max. 3,00 pont

🚩 A kérdés megjelölése

⚙️ Kérdés szerkesztése

Válaszd ki azt a kifejezést, amelyik megfelelően egészíti ki a helyesírási szabályt! Ezt követően a megadott példák közül válaszd ki azokat, amelyek a kiegészített szabályt szemléltetik!

Ha az *s, sz, z, dz*-re végződő ige-tőhöz *j*-vel kezdődő toldalék kapcsolódik, akkor a *j* _____. **Például:** _____, _____,

- ☐ kiesik
- ☐ hasonul
- ☐ teljesen hasonul
- ☐ hasson
- ☐ mosson
- ☐ húztátok
- ☐ vonzza
- ☐ játsszanak
- ☐ viszi
- ☐ peddzék
- ☐ edzettetek

Figure 3. Completing an orthographic rule – Grade 7, Task 18
 Hungarian students from Slovakia: 53%; the average performance of students from Hungary: 40% (rounded data)

Besides interpreting orthographic rules correctly, it is also important to know and apply them simultaneously. This is exemplified by Task 16 (Figure 4). Students were asked to select those words where the principle of simplification⁵ applies. The correct answers are *fröccsen*, *tollal*, *tetté* and *eddzétek*. Without any hints, students were to use the relevant principle productively. It can be seen that this task was challenging for the students. The students from Slovakia reached 62%, while the participants from Hungary achieved 48%,

16. feladat

Még nincs rá válasz

Max. 3,00 pont

🚩 A kérdés megjelölése

⚙️ Kérdés szerkesztése

Válaszd ki azokat a szavakat, amelyeknek az írásában jelen van az egyszerűsítő írásmód!

- ☐ tetté
- ☐ eddzétek
- ☐ tollal
- ☐ fröccsen
- ☐ sakkozik
- ☐ koppan

Figure 4. Applying orthographic rules – Grade 7, Task 16
 Hungarian students from Slovakia: 62%; the average performance of students from Hungary: 48% (rounded data)

⁵ Cf. AkH.¹² (91–95). Consonant digraphs and trigraphs in Hungarian include *cs, dz, dzs, gy, ly, ny, sz, ty* and *zs*. Long digraphs and trigraphs in roots or affixed word are marked by the duplication of their first letter, e.g. *meggy* (“sour cherry”) instead of **meggygy*. Irrespective of the number of letters, a similar simplification rule applies when – as a result of affixation – three identical consonants are placed next to each other. In this case, these three consonants are reduced to two, e.g. *meggy* (“sour cherry”) + *gyel* (“with”) becomes *meggyel*; *toll* (“pen”) + *lal* (“with”) results in *tollal*. This rule of simplification was proposed by Zsigmond Simonyi, after whom the competition was named, and was accepted by the Academy after long debates in 1922.

6.3 Proper names – geographic names in different types of tasks

Writing proper names correctly is one of the most difficult areas of Hungarian orthography. Writing geographic names correctly requires the knowledge and the application of several rules. In other words, language users run multiple algorithms simultaneously before deciding how to write a given geographic name correctly; i.e. as one word, with hyphens or spaces. As Figure 5 illustrates, Task 15 is difficult, because a relatively large number of items has to be put in the right column and arranged alphabetically as well.⁶ The correct answers are *Herkulesfürdő*, *Martonvásár*, *Nagyida*, *Pétervárad* and *Tiszaabogdány*; *Baranya megye*, *Füzéri járás*, *Szörényi bánság*, *Tordatúr község* and *Ung vármegye*; *Alacsony-Táttra*, *Kőhát-hegység*, *Tatár-hágó*, *Vaskapu-szoros* and *Vörös-tó*. The participants from Slovakia achieved 50%, whereas the students from Hungary reached 41%.

15. feladat

Még nincs rá válasz

Max. 12,00 pont

🔍 A kérdés megjelölése

⚙️ Kérdés szerkesztése

Hogyan írjuk az alábbi földrajzi neveket? Alkoss csoportokat úgy, hogy a csoportok elemei növekvő ábécérendben kövessék egymást!

Egybe	Külön	Kötőjellel

KŐHÁT+HEGYSÉG	HERKULES+FÜRDŐ (város)	FÜZÉRI+JÁRÁS	MARTON+VÁSÁR	PÉTER+VÁRAD
TATÁR+HÁGÓ	SZÖRÉNYI+BÁNSÁG	UNG+VÁRMEGYE	TISZA+BOGDÁNY	TORDATÚR+KÖZSÉG
BARANYA+MEGYE	VÖRÖS+TÓ	VASKAPU+SZOROS	NAGY+IDA	ALACSONY+TÁTRA

Figure 5. Geographic names – Grade 7, Task 15

Hungarian students from Slovakia: 50%; the average performance of students from Hungary: 41% (rounded data)

In another task, students were to add the affix '-i' to geographic names to form adjectives (e.g. *Jeges-tenger* + *-i* = *jeges-tengeri*; *Sándor-hegy* + *-i* = *Sándor-hegyi*). Although they had to write down whole words correctly, they achieved much better results. The performance of the students from Slovakia was above average (78%), while students from Hungary reached 60%. This phenomenon can be explained by the fact this task is primarily based on the subrules (175), (179) and (182) of the Rules of Hungarian Orthography (AkH.¹², 2015) that the participants are familiar with. Secondly, their printed coursebooks and workbooks contain many similar types of exercises, so students have the necessary skills to solve these tasks quite successfully.

This assumption can be supported by a different type of question, the so-called gap-fill task, presented in Figure 6. It contains three sentences with geographical names that had to be segmented into constituents and written correctly. This task requires more time and a lot of concentration. The students from Slovakia and the students from Hungary achieved almost the same results: 51% and 52%, respectively. Of course, there is far more to be said – we are just scratching the surface. Further research is needed to identify the types of mistakes made by the

⁶ It is a fact that this task deals with two different types of problems at the same time, but it was the common decision of the content developers to include such a complex task. As all the items can be moved, they can be flexibly arranged in correct alphabetical order once the groups have been formed.

contestants and compare the answers of the two groups in depth. This would allow us to draw conclusions about regional language varieties.

26. feladat

Még nincs rá válasz

Max. 9,00 pont

🚩 A kérdés megjelölése

⚙️ Kérdés szerkesztése

Tagold tovább, és írd le helyesen, a folyóírás szabályainak megfelelően a mondatot! (Ügyelj arra, hogy felesleges szóköz ne legyen a megoldásodban! Ahova kell, mindig csak egyet-egyet tegyél!)

MAGYARORSZÁGEURÓPAKÖZÉPSŐRÉSÉN, KELETKÖZÉPEURÓPÁBAN

FEKSZIK.

ORSZÁGUNKAKÁRPÁTMEDENCE KÖZÉPSŐRÉSÉTFOGLALJAE.

HÉTSZOMSZÉDOSORSZÁG VESZIKÖRÜL:SZLOVÁKIA

UKRAJNAROMÁNIA SZERBIAHORVÁTORSZÁG

SZLOVÉNIAÉSAUSZTRIA.

Figure 6. Geographic names in sentences – Grade 7, Task 26
 Hungarian students from Slovakia: 51%; the average performance of students from Hungary: 52% (rounded data)

6.4 A complex task

In the task set there is a complex gap-fill text-based task which was designed to replace dictation exercises (Figure 7). It consists of a longer text broken down into shorter parts. The students had to decide if these units were written correctly and if so, they had to mark them with the symbol @. Otherwise, they had to correct the mistakes. This task required great precision and a lot of productivity, as the children did not get any receptive stimuli – as opposed to a dictation exercise. The text can be fiction, non-fiction or a technical text and needs to be treated as a whole although it is broken into parts so that students can get maximum scores. In this respect, this task is more than just a dictation exercise, because participants have to rewrite the text based on their interpretation of it.

As can be seen, the average result of the students from Slovakia (70%) is above average. Due to the complexity of this task, it is particularly important to analyse the answers and identify the types of mistakes (Kiss & Kozmács 2023). This can help us to draw conclusions about reading comprehension processes and changes in the language.

25. feladat

Még nincs rá válasz

Max. 14,00 pont

A kérdés megjelölése

Kérdés szerkesztése

Olvasd el az alábbi, részekre tagolt szöveget! Ha úgy gondolod, hogy valamelyik szövegegység hibás, írd le helyesen az egész szövegegységet az utána található szövegdobozba! Ha nincs benne hiba, írd egy @ jelet a szövegdobozba! (Ügyelj arra, hogy felesleges szóköz ne legyen a megoldásodban!)

Végül az 1848-as forradalom hozott áttörést. Elfogadták a polgári átalakulást biztosító Áprilisi Törvényeket, és megalakult az első felelős, független Magyar Kormány Batthyány Lajos vezetésével. A Császári Udvar azomban katonai erőt vetett be a Magyar Alkotmány eltiprására. 1849-ben, a Tavaszi Hadjárat magyar győzelmei után az Országgyűlés kimondta a Habsburg ház trónfosztását. Az orosz beavatkozást követően azonban a túl erő miatt a szabadság harc elbukott. Görgey-tábornok világosnál letette a fegyvert.

Figure 7. Complex written text production – Grade 7, Task 25
 Hungarian students from Slovakia: 70%; the average performance of students from Hungary: 62% (rounded data)

6.5 An example of the principle of pronunciation

Task 8 is a multiple choice question related to the principle of pronunciation. The Hungarian word *dicsér* is spelt with a short /i/. However, it is often pronounced with a long /i:/ in everyday conversations, which may affect its spelling. This difference is reflected by the answers of the 7th and 8th graders. Also, the wording of the question, i.e. *Which word is not spelt correctly?*, made it more difficult for the students to select the correct answer. As the results demonstrate, the Hungarian students from Slovakia were insecure about the correct spelling of the word. However, the students from Hungary performed even worse as far as *dicsér* and *dicsér* are concerned (70/57%).

8. feladat

Még nincs rá válasz

Max. 3,00 pont

A kérdés megjelölése

Kérdés szerkesztése

Melyik írásmód nem helyes? Válaszd ki!

- ☐ hidak
- ☐ dícsér
- ☐ guggol
- ☐ beiratkozás
- ☐ hirdetés
- ☐ szervíz

Figure 8. Using the principle of pronunciation – Grade 7, Task 8
 Hungarian students from Slovakia: 51%; the average performance of students from Hungary: 38% – the whole task (rounded data)

In another question – a simpler true/false task – the 8th graders were asked to determine if the statement *dicsér* (without any context) *is the correct spelling* is true or false. 75% of the students from Slovakia and 67% of the students from Hungary considered this statement as false. In other words, they knew the correct spelling of the word. However, the relatively large number of incorrect answers (25% and 33%) may indicate that there is a new tendency in the Hungarian

language, i.e. a shift towards using the long vowel irrespective of language regions, which is confirmed by the written answers of the students. It goes without saying that this assumption can be confirmed (or rejected) if we have all the relevant data, i.e. results of the participants from all the regions for over many years. This can be achieved by developing the task bank and analysing the competition data continuously.

7 Conclusions and summary

Our aim was to demonstrate some of the potential of the Simonyi corpus by analysing the tasks that posed serious problems for students. To sum, we can reach the following conclusions:

- Hungarian students from Slovakia and students from Hungary have difficulties with the same tasks.
- Students achieve better results if they have to do tasks that they are already familiar with and have the necessary skills irrespective of whether it is a paper-based or digital worksheet.
- Students' performance does not always depend on whether they need to solve a word-level, sentence-level or text-level problem – a word-level question can also be difficult for them.
- The results are poorer when a task requires the application of multiple transformations.
- The results are poorer when a task requires some grammatical knowledge as well.
- The results are poorer when a task is longer and more complex requiring a longer concentration span.
- Poorer performance can also be accounted for by changes in language usage which need to be taken into consideration when editing newer orthographic dictionaries.
- Students' performance can be affected by technical changes as well – nowadays it is no longer necessary to look up a word in a dictionary where it is arranged in an alphabetical order but they can enter it in the search field and get the answer immediately.

The question which we need to answer is why Hungarian students from Slovakia perform better than students from Hungary. Can this difference be attributed to the fact that they are a minority? What is the role of the effort to preserve their culture and mother tongue? Does bilingualism have an effect on the results? In the light of the differences in the numbers of the participants, further research – focusing on language use, pedagogy and socioeconomics – would be necessary in order to answer these question.

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(1) <https://simonyi.kre.hu/>

(2) <https://www.suli.sk/cimlap.php>

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