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# Hungarian-American Attitudes to Language Maintenance and Bilingual Education in the United States

**Abstract:** The paper attempts to map the potentially shifting attitudes and opinions of the representatives of Hungarian-American communities in the United States regarding the issue of first language maintenance and bilingual education. Relying on Graedler's observation that newspapers play a substantial role "in the expression and mediation of a society's language attitudes," the present analysis focuses on the digitized versions of the printed newspapers and magazines published in the Hungarian language in the United States (available via Arcanum Digitheca) in order to chart the diachronic language ideological changes toward minority-language maintenance in the context of Hungarian and other minority languages. The analysis utilizes Richard Ruíz's "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 private domains), they have been critical of mostly Hispanic Americans for their explicit and repeated demands for taxpayer-funded minority-language accommodations, which were seen by many Hungarian-Americans as evidence of disloyalty and even ethnic separatism.

## Introduction

According to the homepage of the Hungarian Embassy in Washington, currently there are approximately 1.4 million[1] Americans of Hungarian descent living in the United States. The embassy's page that focuses on Hungarian-American cultural relations cites the even more ambitious figure of "almost 1.5 million."[2]

1 "Hungarian Americans," Embassy of Hungary, Washington. Available at https://washington.mfa.gov.hu/eng/page/hungarian-americans; accessed 8 March, 2025.

2 "Hungarian-American Cultural Relations," Embassy of Hungary, Washington. Available at https://washington.mfa.gov.hu/eng/page/hungarian-american-cultural-relations; accessed 8 March, 2025.

These numbers are too optimistic as far as the real size of the Hungarian-American diaspora is concerned. First, the latest available American Community Survey (from 2023) quotes a lower figure (1,220,215)[3]—the link on the embassy's page points to the 2019 data.[4] These numbers also include those respondents who reported having multiple ancestries—the "single ancestry" figures are considerably lower: in 2023, only 384,000 Hungarian-Americans belonged to this category.[5]

Information about Hungarian language use is more difficult to obtain, as Hungarian-Americans do not represent a sizeable group compared to, for example, the speakers of "Spanish," "other Indo-European languages," or "Asian and Pacific Island languages," about whom reliable data are easily available from the "Language Spoken at Home" table of the American Community Survey.[6] Nevertheless, the American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Samples (PUMS) can offer valuable insight into Hungarian home language use, and the figures are somewhat shocking when compared to the ancestry data: there are only 72,252 more-or-less active Hungarian home language users versus the 1.22 million who at least partly identified as Hungarian.[7] Obviously, these figures may not be absolutely correct as the answers are entirely based on self-reporting, and the proficiency level of the non-English language is not even asked about. This contrasts with Question 14a, which asks respondents to assess their English proficiency level on a scale ranging from "very well" to "not at all."[8] Furthermore, the Census/American Community Survey questionnaire does not ask how often the respondent speaks the minority language at home (or with whom).

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3 "B04006, People Reporting Ancestry (2023): ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables," American Community Survey. Available at: https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.B04006?q=B04006&t=Ancestry&hidePreview=false; accessed 8 March, 2025.

4 "B04006, People Reporting Ancestry (2019): ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables," American Community Survey. Available at: https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2019.B04006?q=B04006&t=Ancestry&hidePreview=false; accessed 8 March, 2025.

5 "C04004, People Reporting Single Ancestry (2023): ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables," American Community Survey. Available at: https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.C04004?q=Ancestry; accessed 8 March, 2025.

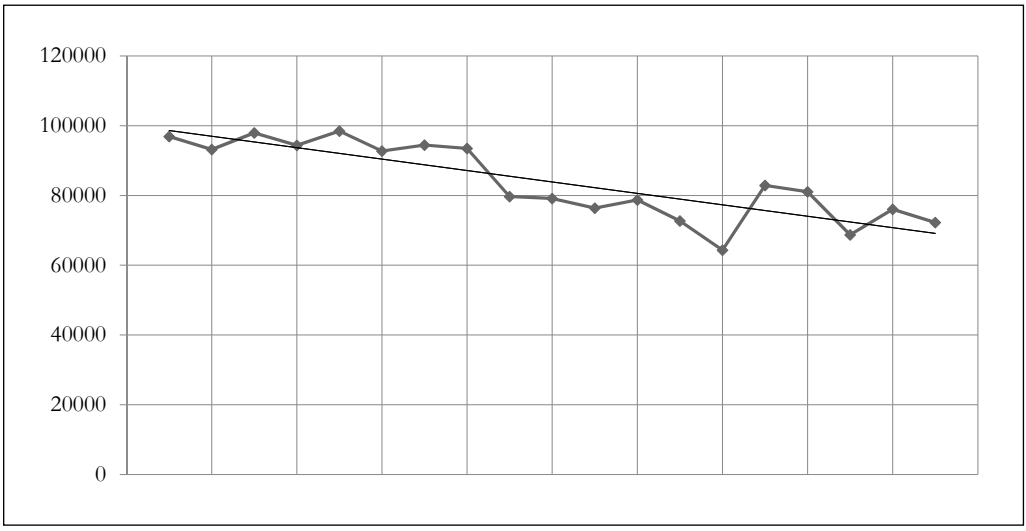
6 "S1601, Language Spoken at Home (2023): ACS 1-Year Estimates Subject Tables," American Community Survey. Available at: https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S1601?q=languages+spoken+at+home; accessed 8 March, 2025.

7 "LANP, Language Spoken at Home (2023): ACS 1-Year Estimates Public Use Microdata Sample," American Community Survey. Available at: https://data.census.gov/app/mdat/ACSPUMS1Y2023/table?rv=LANP&wt=PWGTP; accessed 8 March, 2025.

8 "Why We Ask Questions About... Language Spoken at Home," American Community Survey. Available at: https://www.census.gov/acs/www/about/why-we-ask-each-question/language/; accessed 8 March, 2025..

While the Hungarian ancestry numbers have been dwindling steadily for the past decades—from the more than 1.5 million in 2010[9]—the much lower language use figures have also declined for the past two decades.

***Figure 1: Number of Hungarian-Americans who use their minority language at home (2004–2023)***




*Source: LANP American Community Survey data summaries, 2004–2023*

Although fluctuations have been recorded over the years, the downward trend is clearly noticeable, with a decline of 96,920 respondents in 2004 to 72,252 in 2023. However, this assimilationist trend is by no means unique: Camille Ryan pointed out that between 2000 and 2011 the numbers of German and French speakers had also declined by approximately 20% in the United States.[10]

While the reasons for rapid assimilation are manifold, those characteristics of immigration that were seen as serious threats to American culture and even to the territorial integrity of the United States in the long run by Samuel P. Huntington with respect to Hispanic immigration[11] (contiguity, scale, illegality, regional concentration, persistence, and historical

9 "B04006, People Reporting Ancestry (2010): ACS 1-Year Estimates Detailed Tables," American Community Survey. Available at: https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2010.B04006?q=B04006&t=Ancestry&hidePreview=false; accessed 8 March, 2025.

10 Camille Ryan, *Language use in the United States: 2011*. American Community Survey Reports, U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013, 7. Available at: https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/2013/acs/acs-22/acs-22.pdf; accessed 8 March, 2025.

11 Samuel P. Huntington, "The Hispanic Challenge," *Foreign Policy* 141 (2004): 30–45. Available at: https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/10/28/the-hispanic-challenge/; accessed 8 March, 2025.

presence) are definitely missing in the context of Hungarian-Americans. Consequently, the successful retention of the Hungarian language has been seriously compromised due to the absence of some of these factors and has been made worse by the fact that, as "low incidence language" speakers, Hungarian-Americans have not been able to take advantage of the government-supported bilingual education programs that were launched in the wake of the first Bilingual Education Act in 1968.

This "minority amongst language minorities" status has sometimes resulted in the desire to assimilate as quickly as possible and to support the officialization of English (practically unequivocally) as a solid proof of loyalty toward their adopted country.[12] More recently, however, Hungarian language maintenance initiatives have potentially been strengthened by implementation of the Seal of Biliteracy in all 50 states and Washington, D.C., to recognize (roughly A2–B2 level) student proficiency in English and another language. By the end of 2024, even Hungarian was listed among the legitimate target languages in 13 states.[13]

This examination attempts to chart the attitudes and opinions of the Hungarian-American communities regarding heritage language maintenance and bilingual education by analyzing the relevant Hungarian-language newspaper and magazine articles published in the United States and digitized by Arcanum Digitheca.[14] Unfortunately, the sharply declining number of Hungarian-language publications in the U.S. for the past decades itself indicates that the position of Hungarian in the U.S. has become close to "threatened" or "shifting," characterized by weakening intergenerational transmission and fewer speakers (besides fewer domains of use).[15]

## Hungarian Immigration Waves and Language Maintenance in the U.S.: A Brief Overview of Past and Present Efforts

The most numerous (although shrinking) Hungarian diaspora community is in the United States; however, reliance on the ancestry figures alone may be misleading (as discussed above). Currently, the majority of Hungarian-Americans live in the states of California,

12 Sándor Czeglédi, "Attitudes of the Hungarian-American Diaspora to the Officialization of English in the United States," *ELOPE: English Language Overseas Perspectives and Enquiries* 21, no. 1 (2024): 45–61.

13 Samuel Aguirre and Arthur Chou, *The Seal of Biliteracy 2024 National Report for the 2022-2023 School Year* (SealofBiliteracy.org, 2025), Available at: https://sealofbiliteracy.org/doc/2024-National-Seal-of-Biliteracy-Report-Final.pdf; accessed 8 March, 2025.

14 Arcanum Digitheca. Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/; accessed 8 January, 2025.

15 Paul M. Lewis, and Gary F. Simons, "Assessing Endangerment: Expanding Fishman's GIDS," *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique (RRL)* 2 (2010): 112, Available at: https://www.lingv.ro/RRL%202%202010%20art01Lewis.pdf; accessed 8 March, 2025.

New York and Ohio, with their most significant cultural centers in the cities of Los Angeles, New York, and Cleveland, respectively.[16]

Dániel Gazsó identifies several major Hungarian migration waves, during which a major destination was the United States.[17] The first period—before the defeat of the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in 1849 by the joint Austro-Russian military forces—witnessed the outflow of explorers, adventurers, and fortune seekers. Then, after 1849, mostly political immigrants arrived in the U.S. who were escaping Austrian retaliation. The Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 represented another watershed: between the 1870s and the outbreak of World War I, roughly 2 million Hungarian citizens (predominantly economic migrants) left the mother country. (Obviously, not all of them were ethnic Hungarians—perhaps only 25%.)[18]

During these decades, Hungarian-speaking immigrants—who typically found employment in mines and heavy industries—settled in the northeastern and midwestern United States, primarily in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Indiana.[19] This "peasant exodus" resulted in the near-depopulation of certain Hungarian regions—but, on the other hand, it contributed to the establishment of more-or-less stable diaspora communities in the United States—despite the fact that roughly one quarter of these immigrants were "sojourners" who eventually returned to their home country. Consequently, before World War I, more than 100 different Hungarian newspapers appeared in the U.S. However, the majority were short-lived, local publications.[20]

The post-World War I boundary adjustments, which resulted 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, as the United States implemented restrictive immigration quotas in the 1920s.[21]

After World War II, tens of thousands of "displaced persons" (DPs), refugees from the communist regime, and "'56ers" after the failed Hungarian Revolution of 1956 found their new home in the U.S. The approximately 40,000 '56ers who ended up in the U.S. represented the last major wave of political emigration from Hungary.

16 Dániel Gazsó, *Otthon és itthon: A magyar diaszpóra és anyaországa* [At Home Both Here and There. The Hungarian Diaspora and Its Kin-State] (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2022), 76–78.
17 Ibid., 81–108.
18 Ibid., 83.
19 Anna Fenyvesi, "Hungarian in the United States." in *Hungarian Language Contact Outside Hungary: Studies on Hungarian as a Minority Language*, ed. Anna Fenyvesi (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2005) 267.
20 Gazsó, *Otthon és itthon*, 86.
21 Ibid., 88–89.

Between 1960 and 1989, approximately 130,000 emigrants left Hungary (fewer than half of them legally).[22]

In the U.S., the abolition of the quota system by the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 also contributed to the increasingly multiculturalist reinterpretation of American identity. This development re-energized Hungarian heritage language and cultural maintenance efforts as well.[23] However, the lack of large-scale replenishment has been a major cause of linguistic and cultural assimilation in the shrinking diaspora communities ever since.[24] The gradual softening of the communist dictatorship after 1963 and the peak years of détente around 1975 (which also witnessed the return of the Holy Crown of Hungary from the United States in 1978) contributed to the cautious normalization of relations between the U.S. and Hungary.[25]

After Hungary's accession to the EU in 2004, Germany, Austria, and the UK became the main destination countries for young Hungarian (mostly economic) immigrants.

Organized attempts to help the maintenance of the Hungarian heritage language can be traced back to the establishment of the first "bilingual" Catholic elementary schools in 1893 in Cleveland and a few years later in Toledo, Ohio, in 1899 and South Bend, Indiana, in 1900.[26] At these schools, although the language of instruction was predominantly English, "Hungarian reading, writing, and history was also being taught, usually an hour a day, by the parish priests."[27] However, despite several attempts (and support by the Hungarian government), genuinely bilingual schools could not be maintained permanently, and the organization of regular weekend and summer courses was to represent a less effective alternative.[28] The factors that contributed to the failures of bilingual (parochial) schools were numerous and included the relative poverty and linguistic diversity of the congregations; the lack of available or affordable buildings; sometimes restrictive state-level educational laws (requiring the simultaneous hiring of English-language and content teachers as well); and general skepticism about the usefulness of Hungarian for career-building in the United States.[29]

22 Ibid., 101.
23 Ibid., 102–103.
24 Ibid., 105.
25 Gyula Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció életrajza 1945–1985* (Hungarian Electronic Library, 2006), 6, Available at: https://mek.oszk.hu/03400/03472/html/emigr1.htm; accessed 8 March, 2025.
26 Zoltán Fejős, "Education in the Mother Tongue: The Perpetuation of Ethnic Consciousness among Hungarian-Americans, 1890-1920," *Hungarian Studies Review* 33, no. 1–2 (Spring-Fall 2006): 17.
27 Fejős, "Education in the Mother Tongue," 18.
28 Ibid., 19.
29 Ibid., 21–22.

Overall, the two decades before the outbreak of World War I had not been enough for the development of stable Hungarian or bilingual educational institutions. The outbreak of World War I and the strict quota laws of the 1920s reduced immigration to a trickle, and at the state level, harsh new laws were passed in many states that practically disallowed the teaching of non-English languages in schools to children under 14 years of age, deliberately minimizing the chances of the intergenerational transmission of "foreign" languages. The harshest measure of this type, Nebraska's Siman Act (1919), stipulated that "no person, individually or as a teacher, shall, in any private, denominational, parochial or public school, teach any subject to any person in any language than the English language."[30] Although the Supreme Court struck down the state-level bans on the teaching of non-English languages in the landmark *Meyer v. State of Nebraska* ruling in 1923, by then public attitudes had changed fundamentally: foreign-language learning seemed to be an unpatriotic exercise. While German was the most popular foreign language in 1915 (with 24% of secondary school students enrolled in German classes), seven years later less than 1% of the students were studying the language.[31] Despite these challenges, the churches and the weekend and summer schools as well as the scout movement (which was reorganized in 1945) played an instrumental part in preserving ethnic identity and, to some degree, heritage language proficiency after World War II. Over time, nonprofit organizations and folk-dance groups have also played significant roles.[32]

The influx of '56ers contributed to the foundation of additional schools. Among the newly established programs and institutions was the Hungarian School in New Brunswick, New Jersey, founded by Hungarian students at Rutgers University.[33] At first, in 1960, there were just Saturday classes, and then a kindergarten followed the next year.[34] By the early 2000s, however, the level of Hungarian spoken by the students at the Hungarian Saturday School had decreased noticeably, often due to the ethnolinguistically mixed background of the parents.[35]

30 Raymond Tatalovich, *Nativism Reborn? The Official English Language Movement and the American States* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 34.

31 James Crawford, *Educating English Learners: Language Diversity in the Classroom* (Los Angeles: Bilingual Educational Services, 2004), 91.

32 Rita Gardosi, "Teaching Hungarian as Heritage Language in North America," in Handbook of Research and Practice in Heritage Language Education, eds. Peter Pericles Trifonas and Themistoklis Aravossitas (Springer International Handbooks of Education, Springer, Cham, 2016), 4–7.

33 Susan Mary Nagy, *Hungarian Saturday Classes, New Brunswick, New Jersey* (American Folklife Center, Ethnic Schools Project, Library of Congress, 1982), 3. Available at: https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc1993001.afc1993001_09_001/?st=pdf; accessed 8 March, 2025.

34 Nagy, *Hungarian Saturday Classes*, 4.

35 Katalin Pintz, "Hungarian Heritage Maintenance in the USA: New Brunswick, N.J., as a Magyar Ethnic Island," *Hungarian Studies Review* 38, no. 1–2 (2011): 85.

After the fall of the communist regime in 1989, thousands of young Hungarian workers decided to emigrate to the U.S., which entailed the foundation of daycare centers, preschools, and kindergartens for their children.[36] However, these parents frequently had difficulties with the English language and wanted to ensure that their children would not experience the same handicap, which led them to use English at home as well.[37]

Reacting to the alarming speed of language shift among the members of the Hungarian diaspora, the Hungarian government launched the Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program[38] and the Petőfi Sándor Program[39] in the mid-2010s to support the language/cultural maintenance and community-building efforts of both the allochthonous (i.e., immigrant) and autochthonous Hungarian minorities, respectively. Additionally, the Balassi Scholarship Programs[40] by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade also provide learning opportunities for diaspora members.

According to the *American Hungarian Community Yearbook of 2020*, a few years earlier there had been 78 Hungarian churches[41] across the United States (affiliated with the Reformed Protestant, Baptist, and Catholic denominations) and 33 Hungarian schools[42]; however, one-third had moved their classes and activities online.

The American Hungarian Schools Association[43]—a non-profit umbrella organization for weekend Hungarian schools in the United States—has been assisting parents and other groups in establishing Hungarian language and heritage schools. Moreover, it was instrumental in developing the Program for Hungarian Language and Cultural Foundation in 2021 and organizes conferences to facilitate community organization, networking, and professional development. However, in the final analysis, it is the willingness and sustained dedication of the families that perhaps count most in fighting language shift.

36 Szilvia Németh, "Hétvégi magyar iskolák az USA-ban," in *Beszédből világ. Elemzések, adatok amerikai magyarokról*, ed. Attila Papp Z. (Budapest: Magyar Külügyi Intézet, 2008), 264–297, 264.

37 Pintz, "Hungarian Heritage Maintenance," 86.

38 Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program. Available at: https://www.korosiprogram.hu/diaszpora; accessed 11 March, 2025.

39 Petőfi Sándor Program. Available at: https://www.petofiprogram.hu/; accessed 11 March, 2025.

40 "Study Programs," Balassi Education Programs. Available at: https://balassieducation.hu/en/study-programmes/; accessed 8 March, 2025.

41 American Hungarian Community Yearbook 2020 (American Hungarian Foundation), 12. Available at: https://www.ahfoundation.org/3d-flip-book/hungarian-american-community-yearbook-2020/; accessed 8 March, 2025.

42 *American Hungarian Community Yearbook 2020*, 29.

43 American Hungarian Schools Association. Available at: https://amit-ny.org/; accessed 3 February, 2025.

## Aims, Corpus, and Methodology

This analysis attempts to chart the attitudes and potential attitude shifts of the Hungarian-American diaspora with respect to language maintenance and bilingual education. The term "attitude" is understood here broadly as "a general and enduring positive or negative feeling about some person, object, or issue."[44] Working on the assumption that newspapers play a substantial role "in the expression and mediation of a society's language attitudes,"[45] the present examination focuses on the digitized versions of printed newspapers and magazines published in the Hungarian language in the United States. In order to build the corpus of relevant articles, I used the Arcanum Digitheca[46] database, which, at the time of the data collection phase in December 2024 and January 2025, contained more than 70 million pages of newspapers, magazines, scientific journals, and other content. All those articles that contained any of the following terms were selected for further analysis: "*nyelvmegőrzés*" (language preservation), "*nyelvmegtartás*" (language maintenance), and "*kétnyelvű oktatás*" (bilingual education).

This was done on the basis of Richard Ruíz's "orientations" in language planning framework[47] (i.e., "language-as-problem," "language-as-right," and "language-as-resource"), elaborated further by Francis M. Hult and Nancy H. Hornberger.[48] The mapping of attitudes toward the English language, the Hungarian language, and other minority languages was intended to determine whether these beliefs and opinions had coalesced into more-or-less consistent language ideologies throughout the decades.

Language ideologies were defined by Kathryn Woolard and Bambi Schieffelin as "commonsense notions about the nature of language" and about the seemingly "proper" role of languages and language varieties in a community.[49] These beliefs and ideological expectations (i.e., opinions about "what should be done") may lead to explicit language management efforts,[50] which, in our case, are focused specifically on heritage language maintenance.

44 Richard E. Petty, and John T. Cacioppo. Attitudes and Persuasion: Classic and Contemporary Approaches. (New York: Routledge, 2018).

45 Anne-Linne Graedler, "Attitudes towards English in Norway: A corpus-based study of attitudinal expressions in newspaper discourse," *Multilingua* 33, no. 3–4 (2014): 296.

46 Arcanum Digitheca. Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/; accessed 8 January, 2025.

47 Richard Ruíz, "Orientations in Language Planning," *NABE Journal* 8, no. 2 (1984): 15–34.

48 Francis M. Hult, and Nancy H. Hornberger, "Revisiting Orientations in Language Planning: Problem, Right, and Resource as an Analytical Heuristic," *The Bilingual Review/La Revista Bilingüe* 33, no. 3 (2016): 33.

49 Kathryn. A. Woolard, and Bambi B. Schieffelin, "Language Ideology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23, no. 1 (1994): 58.

50 Bernard Spolsky, *Language Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14.

## Findings and Discussion

At the time of the data collection phase (in December 2024–January 2025), there were 32 relevant newspapers and magazines listed in the Arcanum Digitheca database, covering the period from 1908 (*Előre,* published in New York until 1937[51]) to 2018 (*Amerikai Magyar Népszava—Szabadság*, New York, 1909–2018[52]).

The keyword search, focusing on "*nyelvmegőrzés*" (language preservation) and/or "*nyelvmegtartás*" (language maintenance) and/or "*kétnyelvű oktatás*" (bilingual education), returned altogether 39 relevant articles according to the following distribution and timespan:

***Table 1: The distribution of the relevant articles in Hungarian-American newspapers dealing with "nyelvmegőrzés" (language preservation) and/or "nyelvmegtartás" (language maintenance) and/or "kétnyelvű oktatás" (bilingual education) in the Arcanum Digitheca database in January 2025.***

| Title of the newspaper | Number of records (individual articles) | Date range |
|---|---|---|
| *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* | 10 | 1978–1998 |
| *Amerikai Magyar Népszava—Szabadság* | 5 | 2008 |
| *Californiai Magyarság* | 9 | 1981–2003 |
| *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja* | 6 | 1955–1979 |
| *Magyarság* | 3 | 1980 |
| *Chicago* és *Környéke* | 2 | 1972, 1980 |
| *Új Világ* | 2 | 1980, 1983 |
| *Képes Magyar Világhiradó* | 1 | 1974 |
| *Amerikai-Kanadai Magyar Élet* | 1 | 1977 |

51 *Előre* (1908–1937), Arcanum Digitheca. Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/collection/EloreUSA/; 10 December, 2024.

52 *Amerikai Magyar Népszava—Szabadság* (1909–2018), Arcanum Digitheca. Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/collection/AmerikaiMagyarNepszava/; accessed 8 March, 2025.

The papers with the highest number of relevant articles (*Amerikai Magyar Népszava—Szabadság*; *Californiai Magyarság*; and *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja*) were published in New York, New York; Los Angeles, California; and Youngstown, Ohio, respectively. By far the most frequently occurring phrase was "*kétnyelvű oktatás*" (bilingual education), appearing in 35 articles, while "*nyelvmegőrzés*" (language preservation) was recorded three times, and "*nyelvmegtartás*" (language maintenance) only once.

The single "language maintenance"-related article was published in 1972 in *Chicago* és *Környéke*, which set the members of the Jewish diaspora as examples to follow in heritage language maintenance and condemned those Hungarians who chose to abandon their language and identity.[53]

Two of the three "language preservation"-focused articles published in the *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja* by the same author (Viktor Fischer, Jr.) in two parts in 1971 discussed the relevant efforts of the Hungarian-American diaspora in considerable depth. The first part (in the March 7th issue of the paper) relished the fact that diaspora members appeared to be paying more attention to heritage language and identity preservation (as compared to the situation 15 years before), illustrated by the heightened interest in weekend schools, quality teaching material development, and the scout movement.[54] However, as the author rightfully pointed out, none of these institutions and efforts could become successful without the active support of the families, and overcoming the still prevalent indifference in many Hungarian-American homes was a first priority.[55]

The second part of the report (published a week later) tried to present the Hungarian language as an American national security resource by arguing that it had already been taught at the Defense Language Institute, and altogether 14 colleges and universities had Hungarian studies programs and courses.[56] On the other hand, he warned that code mixing and "semilingualism" (when neither the Hungarian nor the English proficiency levels were developed enough) should be avoided. Fischer identified several "great problems" that threatened the successful intergenerational transmission of Hungarian language and identity. Among these were huge deficiencies in teacher training and the development of

53 Áron Gábor, "Az események nyomában" [Following the events], Chicago és Környéke, August 19, 1972, 5, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/ChicagoEsKornyeke_1972/?query=nyelvmegtart%C3%A1s&pg=200&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

54 Viktor Fischer, Jr., "Magyarságnevelés külföldön" [Educating Hungarians abroad], *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja*, March 7, 1976, 6, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/KatolikusMagyarokVasarnapja_1971/?query=nyelvmeg%C5%91rz%C3%A9s&pg=61&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

55 Ibid.

56 Viktor Fischer, Jr., "Magyarságnevelés külföldön" [Educating Hungarians abroad]. *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja*, March 14, 1971, 6, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/KatolikusMagyarokVasarnapja_1971/?query=nyelvmeg%C5%91rz%C3%A9s&pg=69&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

materials, but he also argued against mixed marriages, where the Hungarian language would automatically find itself in a weaker position.[57]

The third "language preservation" article appeared in 1980, when the language policy battles intensified in the United States in several areas. The strong forms of bilingual education were coming under serious attack by the Republicans (who also promised to abolish the newly created Department of Education), and the first federal-level Official English proposals were soon to be introduced in Congress. However, the indignant article in *Chicago és Környéke* did not discuss U.S. language battles at all—instead, the author castigated those linguists and Hungarian organizations in the mother country that were spreading communist propaganda in the Hungarian diaspora under the guise of helping language maintenance in these communities.[58]

The *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja* had raised similar concerns two years before, in 1978. The author ("Csíkmenasági") strongly disapproved that the "recently legitimated Kádár régime"—a reference to the much-debated return of the Holy Crown of Hungary from the U.S. in the same year—was sending carefully vetted language teachers to Hungarian diaspora schools (e.g., to Albany, Louisiana, which at its founding in 1896 was named "Árpádhon"). These teachers were seen as agents who were poisoning the minds of the diaspora youth by turning them into "godless, Marxist communists."[59] The settlement was unique because it housed the only English–Hungarian bilingual day school, which had established its (relatively short-lived) bilingual education program in 1977, relying on federal support made available after the passage of the first Bilingual Education Act in 1968.[60] A teacher exchange program was launched in the same year with the support of the "Hungarian Program" of the U.S. federal government, which lasted until 1984.[61]

Bilingual education was by far the most frequently appearing phrase in the examined corpus. The earliest reference dates back to 1955, while the most recent printed (digitized) article was published in 2009.

57 Ibid.

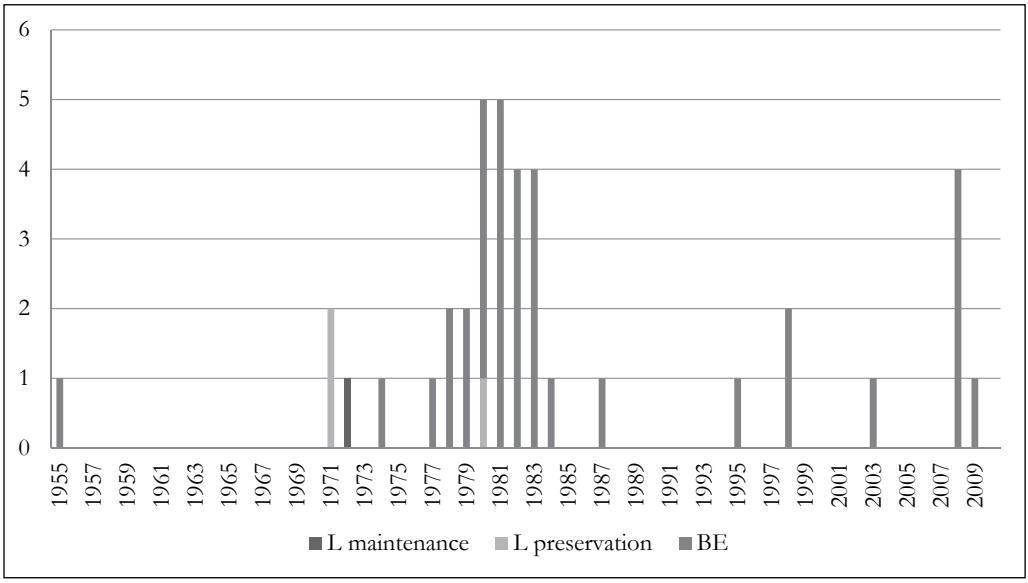
58 B. Sz. A., "Hihetetlen…" [Unbelievable...], *Chicago* és *Környéke*, July 12, 1980, 5, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/ChicagoEsKornyeke_1980/?query=nyelvmeg%C5%91rz%C3%A9s&pg=320&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

59 Csíkmenasági, "Magyar kommunista tanítónők Albanyban," [Hungarian communist teachers in Albany] *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja*, May 21, 1978, 2, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/KatolikusMagyarokVasarnapja_1978/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=153&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

60 Ibid.

61 Bence, Földi, "Árpádhon, egy magyarok alapította település küzdelmei Amerikában," [Árpádhon—the struggles of a Hungarian-founded settlement in America] *Medium*, October 8, 2019, Available at: https://medium.com/a-benyoblog/%C3%A1rp%C3%A1dhon-egy-magyarok-alap%C3%ADtotta-telep%C3%BCl%C3%A9s-k%C3%BCzdelmei-amerik%C3%A1ban-dd42f4251b25; accessed 8 March, 2025.

***Figure 2: The timeline of references to "language maintenance," "language preservation," and "bilingual education" in Hungarian-language newspapers published in the United States***




*Source: Arcanum database*

In 1955, István Eszterhás expressed his criticism about a newly published Hungarian-language spelling book/reader for 1st and 2nd graders (*Séta Betűországban* by Jenő Pohárnok, Cleveland, 1955) for adopting the whole word method for teaching reading instead of focusing on letter–sound correspondence, which, he argued, was more suitable for Hungarian heritage language speakers.[62] Eszterhás pointed out that his young son, who had learned to read in Hungarian at home with the help of the former method, later became one of the best readers in his English class (where they relied on whole word techniques) due to this solid foundation.[63] He could not have been exaggerating, as the "young son" was to reach global fame as Joe Eszterhas, screenwriter for Hollywood blockbusters, including *Flashdance* (1983) and *Basic Instinct* (1992).

In 1974, András Lux proudly stated that Hungarian studies had been offered at Cleveland State University since the late 1960s, which was undeniably a major cultural achievement, but he admitted that interest in the Hungarian language was waning, despite the cognitive

62 István Eszterhás, "Ahogy mi látjuk…" [As we see it...], *Katolikus Magyarok Vasárnapja*, November 6, 1955, 3, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/KatolikusMagyarokVasarnapja_1955/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=58&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

63 Eszterhás, "Ahogy mi látjuk," 3.

and academic advantages of bilingualism.[64] To counter this alarming trend, the representatives of several Hungarian associations offered scholarships to future Hungarian language learners at the university.[65]

Bilingual education began to appear in a critical light in the examined newspapers and magazines from the late 1970s, when it began to be seen as an unjust and unwarranted entitlement program benefiting mostly Hispanic immigrants. For example, article titles from this period include: "Bábeli nyelvzavar a chicagói iskolákban" (Babel' in Chicago's schools, 1977)[66] and "Kétnyelvű oktatásra 86 millió" (86 million dollars for bilingual education, 1978).[67] Meanwhile, Tibor Flórián in *Új Világ* expressed his grave concerns about the deterioration of Hungarian language proficiency among diaspora members, arguing that the new generations hardly achieve more than "family-level" proficiency, and thus the proper "academic" and "creative" levels remain beyond reach.[68] According to Flórián, it was a huge mistake (perhaps due to disorganization and diffidence) not to secure at least some Hungarian language rights, citing that at that time even in Connecticut, where there were fewer Hispanic immigrants than Hungarians, the former group could receive official bilingual documents from government institutions.[69] This article was the only one in the entire corpus that used the phrase "*nyelvi jogok*" (language rights).

From 1981, anti-Hispanic sentiments were becoming stronger, and simultaneously, bilingual education was increasingly cast as an unjustifiable accommodation benefiting mostly Latin American immigrants. In this vein, Dr. Endre Nánay predicted the decline and fall of the United States due to bi- and multilingualism, resulting from the massive Latino influx and their alleged refusal to learn the English language and demands for bilingual education and services.[70] Hungarians, on the other hand, were characterized by the author

64 András Lux, "Az egyetemi magyar oktatás támogatása" [Supporting Hungarian-language teaching in higher education], *Képes Magyar Világhiradó*, December 1, 1974, 21, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/EML_KepesVilaghirado_1974/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=472&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

65 Lux, "Az egyetemi magyar oktatás támogatása" [Supporting Hungarian-language teaching in higher education] 22.

66 "Bábeli nyelvzavar a chicagói iskolákban" [Babel in Chicago's schools], *Amerikai–Kanadai Magyar Élet*, October 29, 1977, 2, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AmerikaiKanadaiMagyarElet_1977_10/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=81&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

67 "Kétnyelvű oktatásra 86 millió" [86 million dollars for bilingual education], *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, January 6, 1978, 6, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AmerikaiMagyarNepszava_1978_1/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=5&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

68 Tibor Flórián, "Mire tanít az erdélyi magyarság?" [What do Transylvanian Hungarians teach us?] *Új Világ*, September 19, 1980, 8, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/UjVilag_1980-2/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=115&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

69 Flórián, "Mire tanít," 8.

70 Endre Nánay, "Világhelyzet" [Global developments], *Californiai Magyarság*, January 9, 1981, 1, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/CaliforniaiMagyarsag_1981/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=12&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

as a kind of model minority who knew their duties and obligations toward their new home: expressing loyalty and accepting English as the (de facto) official language and the sole language of education.[71] Furthermore, Hungarians had made significant sacrifices for the American ideal of freedom (e.g., by rising up against the occupying Soviet forces in 1956) even before arriving in the United States. Yet, they were not clamoring for special linguistic accommodations.[72]

A few weeks later, György Márer also railed against the (predominantly Spanish-speaking) "so-called minorities" and "infiltrators" who were aggressively demanding that their children should be provided bilingual education, which was regarded with suspicion by the new Reagan government. Furthermore, as the author argued, it could frequently lead to harmful and counterproductive "bilingual illiteracy" (i.e., semilingualism).[73]

Indignant articles over the perceived preferential treatment of Hispanic minorities continued to appear in the forthcoming years. A 1982 editorial in *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* found it shocking to see a Spanish–English bilingual edition of the Sears Roebuck catalog published (alongside the Spanish-language editions of the *Chicago Sun Times* and the *Arizona Republic*), pointing out that "we [Hungarian-Americans] were not pampered" (*minket nem kényeztettek*) in this respect.[74] Shortly after that, Ferenc Ternovszky in *Új Világ* argued vehemently for stricter immigration restrictions.[75]

The *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* also published two interviews that apparently highlighted the pros[76] and cons[77] of bilingual education, but the interviewer clearly sided with the assimilationist views of former Senator S. I. Hayakawa, the chief legislative champion of Official English in the early 1980s, adding that Hungarian immigrants did not benefit from bilingual accommodations. Sometimes Vietnamese-Americans were also described as exemplary "model minorities" for working and studying hard, succeeding without

71 Nánay, "Világhelyzet," 1.

72 Ibid.

73 György Márer, "Széljegyzetek" [Side notes], *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, February 27, 1981, 10, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AmerikaiMagyarNepszava_1981_1/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=177&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

74 "Minket nem kényeztettek" [We were not pampered], *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* 1, January 1, 1982, 2, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AmerikaiMagyarNepszava_1982_1/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=1&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

75 Ferenc Ternovszky, "Új bevándorlási törvény szükséges!" [A new immigration law is needed], *Új Világ*, April 22, 1983, 10, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/UjVilag_1983/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=45&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

76 "Bevándorlás és kétnyelvűség" [Immigration and bilingualism], *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, December 23, 1983, 10, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AmerikaiMagyarNepszava_1983_2/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=609&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

77 "Bevándorlás és kétnyelvűség 2." [Immigration and bilingualism 2.], *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, December 30, 1983, 10, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AmerikaiMagyarNepszava_1983_2/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=637&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

bilingual programs, believing in self-reliance, and quickly internalizing the values of their new country.[78]

Meanwhile, a few articles announced the opening of Hungarian weekend and church schools as well as renovations to existing facilities, trying to persuade parents to enroll their children.[79]

The "language war" theme dominated the articles from the 1990s as well. In 1995, Éva Nádai reviewed the contemporary language policy battlefields in the U.S., arguing for the officialization of English and the discontinuation of "language-as-right" or access-related policies (including the possibility of taking the citizenship test in non-English languages).[80] The Nádai article also discussed bilingual education, which was seen as mostly detrimental, contributing to the emergence of "multicultural chaos" in the United States.[81] It is not surprising that California's Proposition 227, which eliminated the strong forms of bilingual education in the state in 1998 (and was followed by similar referenda in Arizona and Massachusetts), was praised by *Amerikai Magyar Népszava–Szabadság*.[82]

After the passage of the "No Child Left Behind" Act, which introduced strict accountability measures after 2002 that required schools to mainstream English learners as fast as possible, the newspapers of the Hungarian diaspora turned their attention to their communities' heritage language maintenance efforts once again. These included attempts to save the teaching of Hungarian at UCLA (which were successful—as of 2025, the Department of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Languages and Cultures offers elementary and advanced Hungarian courses)[83] and to found a Hungarian charter school,[84] which, apparently, did not materialize.

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78 "Vietnami szörnyűségek után osztályelső" [Becoming a top student after the horrors of Vietnam], *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, June 8, 1984, 3, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AmerikaiMagyarNepszava_1984_1/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=486&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

79 Margot Boda, "A magyar iskola" [The Hungarian school], *Californiai Magyarság*, August 28, 1987, 6, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/CaliforniaiMagyarsag_1987/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=389&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

80 Éva Nádai, "Nyelvháború" [Language war], *Amerikai Magyar Népszava–Szabadság*, September 29, 1995, 2, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AmerikaiMagyarNepszavaSzabadsag_1995/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=1&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

81 Nádai, "Nyelvháború," 2.

82 "Kalifornia a kétnyelvű iskolázás ellen szavaz" [California votes against bilingual education], *Amerikai Magyar Népszava–Szabadság*, June 19, 1998, 5, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AmerikaiMagyarNepszavaSzabadsag_1998_1/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=508&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

83 "Courses: Hungarian," Department of Slavic, East European and Eurasian Languages and Cultures, UCLA. Available at: https://slavic.ucla.edu/languages/hungarian/courses/; accessed 18 March, 2025.

84 Róbert Kovács, "Magyar 'charter' iskola?" [A Hungarian charter school?] *Amerikai Magyar Népszava–Szabadság*, May 1, 2009, 7, Available at: https://adt.arcanum.com/hu/view/AmerikaiMagyarNepszavaSzabadsag_2009_1/?query=k%C3%A9tnyelv%C5%B1+oktat%C3%A1s&pg=514&layout=s; accessed 8 March, 2025.

## Conclusion

The analysis of Hungarian-American newspapers reveals a complex and only partially evolving landscape of attitudes toward language maintenance and bilingual education. During the examined period, English was consistently regarded as the dominant and necessary language for assimilation and success, with many Hungarian-Americans supporting its officialization.

While Hungarian was overwhelmingly viewed as a cultural and familial resource, efforts to sustain its use have faced significant challenges, particularly due to quick assimilation and the concomitant decline in intergenerational transmission. The small size of Hungarian communities and the lack of their replenishment made it impossible to implement government-supported bilingual education programs. Consequently, the Hungarian-American diaspora has historically relied on community-driven language preservation efforts, such as church schools, cultural organizations, and the scout movement; yet, these initiatives have struggled against broader assimilationist pressures.

Attitudes toward other minority languages in the corpus, particularly Spanish and Vietnamese, reflected a contrast between perceptions of entitlement and self-reliance. Spanish, due to its widespread use and institutional support, was frequently portrayed as a divisive issue, with many Hungarian-Americans criticizing government-funded bilingual programs for Hispanic communities. This viewpoint (shaped by a mixture of apprehension, jealousy, and a sense of otherness verging on superiority, mostly based on the '56ers heroic fight for freedom) placed the Spanish language in the "language-as-problem" perspective. Thus, Spanish was often linked to concerns about ethnic separatism and reduced national cohesion, potentially contributing to the unstoppable decline of the United States.

Conversely, Vietnamese was sometimes framed positively, with Vietnamese immigrants depicted as hardworking individuals who quickly acquired English without demanding linguistic accommodations (and who also shared somewhat similar historical experiences with the Hungarians, as far as resistance against communism was concerned).

Hungarian language maintenance among the diaspora has faced considerable obstacles. The absence of large-scale replenishment through new immigration, the increasing dominance of English in public and private spheres, and the practical challenges of sustaining Hungarian-language education have all contributed to its decline. Community members have frequently cited difficulties, such as a lack of qualified teachers, limited instructional materials, and competing educational priorities. Additionally, mixed marriages and the pressure to prioritize English for socioeconomic mobility have further weakened the intergenerational transmission of Hungarian.

Ultimately, while Hungarian-Americans expressed a strong cultural attachment to their heritage language, practical realities have made its long-term maintenance increasingly difficult. The prevailing attitudes captured in the newspapers suggest that while language can be a valued resource, its preservation was often seen as a private responsibility rather than a collective right. This underscores the broader challenge of sustaining minority languages within an assimilationist linguistic environment, where institutional support is limited, and community-driven efforts must contend with significant external pressures.

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