

## **Hungarian Language Research in North America: Themes and Directions**

Andrew Kerek

The Hungarian language is popularly — and rightly — regarded by many of its speakers and supporters in North America as the main symbol of a cultural heritage that ought to be preserved and perpetuated within the encroaching English-speaking environment. Much less aware is the same public of another role that the language has played for several decades as the object of scattered yet extensive and fruitful scholarly research by linguists in the United States and Canada. Some of this work has been specifically concerned with social and cultural aspects of language survival — a notable example is J. A. Fishman's excellent sociolinguistic survey of the status of Hungarian in America (*Hungarian Language Maintenance in the United States*, 1966) — or else formed a part of, or aimed to facilitate the preparation of, effective language teaching materials, such as Hungarian textbook-grammars, English-Hungarian contrastive analyses, or studies in cross-language interference in language learning. On the other hand, many products of this nearly half a century of research have dealt more directly with problems of linguistic description, in part contributing to a better understanding of the Hungarian language itself, and in part making Hungarian language data available in published form to linguists for further analysis and interpretation.

My purpose here is to sum up very briefly the thrust of this work both by outlining the main thematic directions in which it has proceeded and by noting the individual contributions that have shaped its course. This summary is based on my "Bibliography of Hungarian Linguistic Research in the United States and Canada" (*Ural-altaische Jahrbücher* 49 [1977]), which provides a comprehensive alphabetical listing of some 250 pertinent publications, some trivial, some highly significant. By "pertinent" I mean any published material that bears upon some aspect of a scientific study of Hungarian. Given this limitation, the bibliography excludes several categories of publications or commercial

products that serve primarily as aids to language learning rather than resulting directly from research; such excluded materials may be word lists, dialogs, phrase books, readers, dictionaries, tapes, and records, as well as pedagogical textbooks, unless they supply explicit information on grammar and other aspects of language structure. The bibliography represents the works of American and some Canadian linguists regardless of places of publication or dissemination. For precise references, which will not be given here, the reader should consult the complete bibliography.

To begin with a statistical overview, the bibliographical entries reflect a wide array of "genres" that includes some 20 monographs and books (about half of them pedagogical grammars), 130 articles, 45 reviews, and about 25 miscellaneous items such as notes, films, obituaries, and contributions to encyclopedias. In addition, the bibliography identifies 11 master's theses (this figure may be incomplete), produced at Columbia (7) and Indiana (4), as well as 19 doctoral dissertations, divided among Columbia (4), Indiana (4), California at Berkeley (4), Princeton (2), McGill (2), Harvard (1), Louisiana State (1), and California at San Diego (1). These figures, incidentally, well reflect the significant role that Columbia and Indiana Universities in particular have played in stimulating academic and professional linguistic interest in Hungarian. Nearly 100 people have published on the language, with an average output of two and a half publications per author. But the average is misleading, because actually some have contributed one or two items, while a few have published extensively. The late Professor John Lotz of Columbia University, for example, authored or co-authored over 40 publications, and a further 70 pieces have been produced by just four other researchers. Finally, about 60 percent of the names listed in the bibliography suggest the authors' Hungarian ethnic background, but these have produced some 85 percent of all the books, articles, theses, and dissertations. It seems, then, that while some significant work has been done by linguists who may not have close ethnic ties to Hungarians, a sizeable majority of those with an active scholarly interest in the language have been of Hungarian descent.

In a paper presented at a conference of Hungarian linguists in Debrecen back in 1966, John Lotz cited three decisive factors to explain the American interest in the Hungarian language: the large number of Hungarians living in America, the rapid growth of American structural linguistics after World War II, and the National Defense Education Act of 1958. In retrospect, it seems that this summative review by Lotz more or less marked the end of one major phase of American Hungarian

language research and the beginning of a new one. In many ways the continuity of this tradition is of course obvious, and one can at best suggest a tenuous dichotomy. But the changing conditions in the mid-nineteen sixties did bring about something of a turning point. For one thing, to take Lotz's three points in reverse order, government support for the study of "critical" languages — including Hungarian — began to decline and was soon reduced to a trickle. The Uralic and Altaic Program of the American Council of Learned Societies, for example, terminated in 1965, after enjoying half a decade of generous funding from NDEA Title VI grants both for basic and applied research, and for the establishment of language institutes, such as at Columbia, Berkeley, Colorado, and Indiana, which included Hungarian in their programs.

Then at about the same time postwar structural linguistics was giving way to the transformational-generative school, a shift that changed the character of linguistic research in some fundamental ways and brought new questions, a new point of view, and new names into the study of Hungarian as well. And even the Hungarian immigrant community was ceasing to be the stimulating factor that Lotz justifiably claimed it to be, at least insofar as, by the latter part of the decade, the earlier active if sporadic interest in a systematic study of the community's speech patterns or "dialectal" characteristics apparently all but disappeared. In view of these facts it is not too far-fetched, then, to speak for convenience of an earlier period of research, roughly embracing the work Lotz reviewed in his 1966 paper and preoccupied with such pursuits as immigrant dialectology, phonetic experimentation, but above all structuralistic approaches to phonology and grammar, and on the other hand of a later period focusing more on phonology and grammar within the framework of transformational-generative theory, in addition to approaches to Hungarian from the viewpoint of newly emerging sub-disciplines such as computational linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and generative metrics. Some paths, of course, cut across these periods — most notably the work of John Lotz, which does not lend itself to such a division. Also, historical and comparative aspects of Hungarian, but especially contrastive studies of the linguistic systems of Hungarian and English, have been pursued throughout this history of research — the latter perhaps because of the importance of such studies in a close language-contact situation like ours in North America.

The earliest American interest in the Hungarian language was apparently limited to collecting lists of words and expressions from the dialect of Hungarian immigrants, and to some random remarks about its grammatical peculiarities, such as those included in books by G.

Hofmann (1911) and H. L. Mencken (1937). A more elaborate and systematic attempt to describe the "Eastern" variety of this dialect was made in a little-known dissertation of the postwar period by P. Szamek (Princeton, 1947), and in another dissertation, P. Nelson investigated the English speech of a small Hungarian community in Louisiana (Louisiana State, 1956). Plans for an extensive Hungarian dialect survey in the United States, publicized by E. Bakó through several forums in the early sixties, have apparently failed to materialize. Nor has, regrettably, the large corpus of taped dialect material collected more recently by L. Dégh and A. Vázsonyi in the Calumet (Indiana) region and among Hungarian settlers in Canada, as yet found its way into print. Recent papers dealing with the Hungarian language in North America are few indeed — the output by Americans barely matching, if at all, the attention given it by some linguists in Hungary (see, for example, B. Kálmán's detailed description in *Magyar Nyelvőr* [1970]); two brief studies of Hungarian place names in the U.S. by Z. Farkas (1971) and by I. Janda (1976), and a conference paper by V. Makkai comparing the forms of greeting and address among Hungarians in the U.S. and in Hungary, go a long way accounting for the American contributions. In 1966 Lotz pointed out that an all-encompassing synthesis dealing with the Hungarian-English "symbiosis" within the American "diaspora" — such as that worked out by Haugen for Norwegian, for example — was yet to appear. As of 1977, it is still nowhere in sight.

From the outset American linguists were more interested, in fact, in the standard variety of the language as it is recognized and used in Hungary. R. A. Hall's well-known *Hungarian Grammar* (1944), together with an earlier version of the same monograph (1938), was the first — and turned out to be the only — attempt to offer a detailed scientific description of Hungarian grammar using the methodology of American structural linguistics. Several early (1943) papers by T. A. Sebeok applied this approach to Hungarian phonology — papers on the vowel system, the problematic /h/ phoneme, and the vowel morphophonemics of suffixes, a topic also discussed by P. Garvin (1945). R. Austerlitz's M.A. thesis (Columbia, 1950) analyzed the Hungarian phonemic system in terms of several alternative structural approaches. John Lotz in particular, in a series of articles spanning three decades and focusing especially on questions of morphology and semantics, applied to Hungarian a different (European) concept of structuralism, one that, incidentally, also formed the theoretical basis for his significant but now almost inaccessible *Das ungarische Sprachsystem* (Stockholm, 1939).

Lotz's plans to rewrite this book from the point of view of American structuralism were stymied by his untimely death.

In his papers on Hungarian grammar, some collected in the unpublished ACLS Research Report *Hungarian Structural Sketch* (1965) and several of them written in or translated into Hungarian for publication in Hungary, Lotz dealt with a range of topics including the semantics of nominal bases (1949) and tenses (1962/1966), aspects of the verbal paradigm (1949), specifically the imperative (1960) and the implicative -LAK suffix (1962/1967, also discussed by K. Keresztes [1965]), inflectional questions of common and proper nouns (1966) and of the noun suffix -É (1968), as well as models (1967) and categories (1967, 1974) of Hungarian grammar. Additionally, Lotz was involved, directly or indirectly, in several phonetic experiments conducted in the early sixties under the auspices of "ACLS Research Projects." These projects included a tape-cutting experiment on the perception of English stop sounds by speakers of several languages including Hungarian (1960), X-ray films on Hungarian speech production (1965/1966, 1967), as well as some of the work reported by Nemser (1961).

Much like Lotz's publishing career, studies in contrastive linguistics form somewhat of a bridge between the earlier and the later phase of Hungarian language research. Lotz himself had a continuing interest in such studies, as shown by the several phonological papers he contributed (e.g., on obstruent clusters [1966/1972] and glides [1969]), but even more so by the crucial role he played in setting up the Hungarian-English Contrastive Linguistics Project, co-sponsored by the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, of which for several years Lotz was the Director, and the Linguistic Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. So far seven volumes of the Project's monograph-size *Working Papers* have appeared, under the joint editorship of L. Dezső (Hungary) and W. Nemser (U.S.). Contributions to this series from the American side include two papers by Lotz (Volume 1), a study on language typology co-authored by Nemser (in Volume 4), and most recently a lengthy study by K. Keresztes on *Hungarian Postpositions vs. English Prepositions* (Volume 7). Besides his other work in contrastive phonology (with F. Juhász, 1964) and in contrastive semantics (with E. Stephanides, 1974), Nemser's research in interference, reported most fully in *An Experimental Study of Phonological Interference in the English of Hungarians* (1971) (a revision of his Columbia dissertation of 1961), deserves notice. Other English-Hungarian contrastive studies include, besides short papers by A. Katona on grammatical difficulties of Hungarians learning English (1960) and A. Bálint on time indication

(1966), also Indiana M.A. theses by M. Reynard on English equivalents of Hungarian *már* (1968) and by L. Kazár on expressing the idea of "ability" (1972), as well as two doctoral dissertations: P. Madarász has dealt with pedagogical applications of contrastive analysis (Berkeley, 1968), and R. Orosz has analyzed the category of definiteness (Indiana, 1969). Various problems of definiteness in Hungarian, by the way, have been addressed by several others as well (S. Houston, 1968; R. Hetzron, 1970; A. Kerek, 1971).

Historical and comparative studies of Hungarian, like contrastive analyses, appear to span across the two phases of research. Such studies have been relatively immune to the theoretical upheavals in linguistics that so profoundly affected synchronic description, and consequently do not readily support the chronological division that I have suggested. Interestingly, a couple of early papers on historical topics — J. Prince's studies on Slavonic (1935) and Turkic (1936) loan material in Hungarian — appear to be the first American linguistic publications concerned with standard Hungarian. Along the same line, nearly three decades later N. Poppe wrote on Altaic loanwords (1960) and J. Lázár produced an M.A. thesis on Roumanian loanwords (Columbia, 1962). In two further Columbia theses, C. Szigeti analyzed Hungarian onomatopoeic words (1968), and G. Mészöly discussed the internal reconstruction of vowel rules (1976), elaborating elsewhere on the origins and effects of vowel epenthesis in Hungarian (1976).

Historical research of a comparative nature also reaches across the entire time spectrum. On the one hand, etymological notes range from Tihany's (1940) through contributions by T. Sebeok (1946), J. Lotz (1956), and D. Sinor (1961, 1962, 1973) to a recent paper by R. Austerlitz (1975). On the other hand, more importantly, several substantial studies spread out across the decades have dealt with Finno-Ugric affinities of Hungarian. T. A. Sebeok's dissertation (Princeton, 1945) compared the Finnish and Hungarian case systems using Roman Jakobson's descriptive approach. K. Keresztes's monograph, *Morphemic and Semantic Analysis of the Word Families: Finnish ETE- and Hungarian EL- 'fore'* (1964), was based on the author's M.A. thesis (Columbia, 1963); his doctoral dissertation on the derivation of Hungarian *-l* and *-z* verbs (Columbia, 1969) further contributed to research in historical morphology. C. Carlson's Indiana thesis (1967) explored Hungarian words of Ob-Ugric origin, and his dissertation gave a semantic analysis of Proto Finno-Ugric (1971). Essays by D. Sinor (1967, 1969, 1974) and by A. Raun (1967, 1974) have also dealt with — or touched on — historical-comparative aspects of Hungarian.

Before turning to the more recent stage of research, let us note in passing several representative examples of "textbook grammars" produced before the mid-sixties (none, to my knowledge, has been published since then). Although concerned primarily with language teaching rather than with novel linguistic analyses, such texts often discuss important points of grammar and pronunciation. A good example is C. Wojatsek's *Hungarian Textbook and Grammar*, now in its third revised edition (1962, 1964, 1974). Others include texts by L. Tihany (1942), I. Alszeghy et al. (1958), and I. Átányi (no date), as well as better known but in this context perhaps somewhat less relevant materials such as T. Sebeok's *Spoken Hungarian* (1945), A. Koski and I. Mihályfi's *Hungarian Basic Course* (1963-1964), and the volumes prepared at the Defense Language Institute at Monterey, California.

The late sixties marked the beginning of a highly productive period of research in basic Hungarian linguistics, *i.e.*, phonology and grammar, stimulated especially by the dramatic emergence of the transformational school in American linguistics. At no other time have so many contributions to the scientific study of Hungarian been generated at North American universities as the flood of dissertations, theses, and articles produced within the past decade. Phonological topics in particular have attracted much interest; though by no means are all products of this period generative in methodology, it seems that — for complex formal and technical reasons — certain interesting morphological characteristics of the language such as vowel harmony and alternations in noun and verb stems have lent themselves especially well to generative treatment. L. Rice's M.A. thesis (Indiana, 1965) discussed some rules of vocalization, and his dissertation (1967), later published as *Hungarian Morphological Irregularities* (1970), was apparently the first major study to apply to Hungarian the generative notion of distinctive features. Dissertations by M. Esztergar (San Diego, 1971) and R. Vago (Harvard, 1974) focused on the phonology of nouns and vowel harmony; theoretical questions of vowel harmony in particular, also approached from different non-generative points of view by J. Lotz (1972) and by V. Makkai (1972), have been further pursued in a number of significant papers by Vago (1973, 1976, 1977), who has also contributed on the topics of rule ordering (1974) and the hierarchy of boundaries (1977), and is writing a book on the sound pattern of Hungarian. J. Jensen's main interest, discussed at length in his dissertation (1972) and in several subsequent papers (some of them co-authored by M. S. Jensen), has been the issue of constraints on phonological theory, as well as of the abstractness of phonological representations. In a lengthy

article R. Hetzron discussed some special problems of Hungarian morphophonology (1972); some of the same questions were taken up by T. Arkwright, whose dissertation (McGill, 1974) presented a computer program for automatically generating phonetic (pronounced) forms from phonemic representations. In a joint paper with A. Kerek, Arkwright subsequently showed how his model can be used to convert Hungarian script to phonetic notation (1972), a process J. Lotz had also described in a less technical context. The consequences of speech style for phonological processes were explored by A. Kerek in a study of consonant elision in casual speech (1977). Research on the "prosodic" elements of Hungarian includes F. Juhasz's dissertation (Columbia, 1968), which, as his earlier M.A. thesis (1961), analyzed stress and intonation in a non-generative framework; these topics have been addressed also by R. Hetzron in a paper on accent (1962) and in brief remarks on the intonation of reclamatory sentences (1972). A. Kerek has approached secondary word stress both descriptively, applying the concept of transformational cycle (1968), and experimentally (with R. Gregorski, 1971).

Besides phonology, American transformational linguistics has also aroused new interest in the study of Hungarian syntax, a subject previously ignored (a rare exception: T. A. Sebeok's paper on equational sentences [1943]). The contributions of R. Hetzron to this line of research have been especially noteworthy. Hetzron has published on a wide variety of Hungarian syntactic topics, including the expletive adverb *ott* (1966), obligatory complements (1969), non-verbal sentences and degrees of definiteness (1970), presentative constructions (1971), conjoined structures (1972, 1973), rule ordering (1973), surfacing (1973), *-ik* verbs (1975), and the syntax of the causative verb (1976). M. Szamosi has been interested in complementation (1971), syntactic typology (1972), the problem of surface constraints (1971, 1976), as well as verb-object agreement in Hungarian (1974), an issue also discussed in a different context by S. Jones (1970). Finally, Sz. Szabó's dissertation (Berkeley, 1971) demonstrated the application of computational linguistics to the description of Hungarian syntax.

During this period, as American linguistics itself has branched out in numerous directions and as new sub-disciplines have emerged, research on Hungarian has been enriched by the investigation of new topics, or perhaps the investigation of old topics in a new light. For example, psycholinguistics has directed new attention to the acquisition of language by children. How Hungarian children learn to speak was the topic of B. MacWhinney's dissertation at Berkeley (1974); in several papers

grown out of this research (1975, 1976), he elaborated on the acquisition of morphology and syntax. In contrast, A. Kerek has discussed the phonological rules that characterize the speech patterns of young Hungarian children and the implications of these rules for Jakobson's concept of "sonority hierarchy" (1976), extending the topic to the study of baby talk as a source of nicknames (1977). Combining psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic interests, M. Hollos has contrasted the cognitive development (1974) as well as the logical and role-taking abilities (1975) of Norwegian and Hungarian children, and has investigated the social rules determining pronoun selection by Hungarian children (1975). S. Gal's dissertation (Berkeley, 1976) explored the sociolinguistic effects of language change on language maintenance in the German-Hungarian bilingual community of Oberwart (Felsőőr) in Austria. J. Fishman's monograph on Hungarian language maintenance in the United States has already been mentioned; a study by V. Fischer (1971) on the effects of childhood bilingualism on the educational achievement of urban Hungarian-American children fits into the same general context. Other researched topics include English-Hungarian and Hungarian-English lexicography (dictionary-making), critically reviewed by A. Balint in his Columbia dissertation (1968), as well as metrics, approached in a traditional way in a couple of short articles by Lotz (1952, 1972), and within the framework of generative metrics by Kerek in *Hungarian Metrics: Some Linguistic Aspects of Iambic Verse* (1971), based on an Indiana dissertation (1968), and in related articles (1972, 1974).

So far I have ignored book reviews, although they, too, can be regarded as products of linguistic interest; at any rate, they reflect the reviewers' desire to keep track of and call attention to relevant publications in North America and elsewhere, notably in Hungary. Furthermore, even if by publishing only reviews of books dealing with Hungarian, some linguists have at least to that extent shown their interest in the language. Here I shall merely enumerate by subject matter the authors (with dates) of the books reviewed by American or Canadian linguists, and name the respective reviewer(s): on grammars, Hall 1938 (Tihany, Szenczi, Bence), Hall 1944 (Bergsland), Tihany 1942 (Sebeok), Lotz 1939 (Sebeok), Sauvageot 1953 (Sebeok), Sauvageot 1971 (Hetzron, Moravcsik), Tompa 1972 (Vago); on semantics, Károly 1970 (Sebeok); on textbook grammars, Wojatsek 1962 (Murphy), Bánhidi et al. 1965 (Tikos, Kerek); on phonetics, Laziczius 1947 (Sebeok); on intonation, Elekfi 1962 (Juhasz), Magdics 1969 (Johnson & Hetzron, Lehiste), Fónagy & Magdics 1967 (Hetzron); on comparative linguis-

(Lotz); on onomastics, Ladó 1971 (Rudnyókyj, Kázmér & Végh 1970, Kálmán 1973, Hajdú 1974 (Kerek); on dialects of Hungary, Végh 1959 (Keresztes), Arany 1967 (Hetzron); and on the whole language, Benkő & Imre 1971 (Jensen, Hetzron). Although not strictly reviews, we shall mention in this context non-technical summary descriptions of the Hungarian language contributed to several encyclopedias by R. Austerlitz and T. Sebeok, both of whom, incidentally, have also written obituaries, including ones in memory of John Lotz.

It is nice to be able to open up an introductory linguistics text Monday morning and occasionally have a "Hungarian problem" stare one in the face. Or to hear the familiar — if often broken — ring of Hungarian examples thrown around in heated corridor-arguments at linguistics conferences. How much of — and in what ways — the research summed up here is significant enough to advance the understanding of the Hungarian language per se, the reader — and our colleagues in Hungary — are invited to assess. Perhaps limited in scope and modest in results if compared to the extensive work carried on in Budapest or Debrecen, this research can nevertheless boast of one accomplishment uniquely its own: it has placed the Hungarian language on the professional "map" of American linguistics. If research is self-generating, then perhaps in our Monday-morning introductory classes we are already harboring a new generation of American linguists who will some day find Hungarian an exciting and gratifying language to explore.