

Chapter 1

The Socio-Educational and Sociolinguistic Context of the Examination Reform

NIKOLOV MARIANNE

1 Introduction

This chapter describes the general socio-educational context, focusing on recent changes in the educational system, the traditional role of exams and problems related to the three-level Examination Reform. Historical changes in the status of foreign language knowledge and attitudes towards learning foreign languages will be analysed in a separate section to widen the sociolinguistic scope of our enquiry. Language policy will be considered from the point of view of the requirements of European integration: how the Ministry of Culture and Education intends to prepare Hungarian citizens for joining the European Community and what steps are to be taken to improve the level of foreign language knowledge.

2 Socio-educational context

In this section a short introduction is given to the social background in which the Examination Reform is to be implemented. This is followed by a detailed description of the Hungarian educational system, including the historical background of the new Basic Exam and the traditional school-leaving exam to be merged in an innovative three-level examination. Finally, problems related to the Basic and the School-leaving Exam will be outlined with implications for the Exam Reform Project.

2.1 The social context of the Examination Reform

The year of 1989 represented a turning point in recent Hungarian history. Not only were political and economic changes initiated and implemented but reforms in education also figured highly on the agenda. Since then new parties and governments have come to power, up-to-date laws have been passed by the newly elected democratic parliament, and the country has undergone crucial changes in all walks of life.

However, towards the end of the century two trends have emerged: One is represented by those who hanker for the past when everyone was equal, all sharing the same limited opportunities, without the separation into rich and poor, where unemployment and inflation were unheard of, and the layperson felt safe and taken care of by the state. The other major trend is represented by the experts: they want further changes and hope for integration into the European Community and NATO. They consider recent painful processes to be a natural transition and ask for further tolerance. Both trends are further coloured by all the features of other democracies not experienced by Hungarians for decades (Halász & Lannert, 1998, pp. 55-61).

As a result of these recent changes, the majority of the population have lost their feeling of security and feel threatened in the present situation. Old values have become doubtful and suspicion characterises attitudes towards innovations, new enterprises, and the newly rich and powerful. The traditionally pessimistic Hungarian perception of the world has now gained new

grounds. There are plenty of obvious reasons for being depressed: beggars and the homeless have become everyday sight in the streets, neighbours and family members have become redundant, old age pensioners starve, youngsters roam the streets and are reluctant to attend school, while the Mafia seem to have taken an important role in business. Black economy blossoms, whereas income tax—for people who cannot avoid paying it—is 42%. According to Gázsó (1997, p. 40), one third of the population lives below the poverty line, while another third hovers on or about that line.

2.2 The educational system: from input control to output-based control

Education has lost a lot of its traditional prestige recently, and even in maths and sciences, where Hungarian students used to outsmart their peers in international comparative studies, their results have significantly decreased over the last years. Most probably these facts are not caused by a dramatic decline of Hungarian state education, but a shift of emphasis in international tests also plays an important role. Hungarian students used to perform well on tests requiring factual knowledge, whereas they have been outscored by other nationalities in the application of their knowledge. Therefore, the major challenge is related to how students can use and apply what they learn at school over the years (Csapó, 1998).

The structure of the educational system has become more varied in form and is now guided by economic principles unheard of in the past. Unemployment among teachers has become common (Halász & Lannert, 1998, p. 255), and operating surpluses is of major importance for all educational institutions. Schools need to compete for government support and have to attract parents and students to their programmes as they are subsidised per capita. Parallel with the decrease of GDP, the budget for education has also decreased. Gázsó (1997, p. 20) claims that between 1990 and 1995 the real value of financing secondary schools decreased by 33%, and tertiary education by 41%.

The traditional, uniform structure of education has been replaced by a variety of innovative types of schools. Primary schools used to teach children between the ages of 6 and 14, and secondary schools those between 14 and 18, according to the prescribed curricula of the 8+4 system. Now, the grammar schools, secondary vocational and comprehensive schools may start skimming off the population at the ages of 10 (4+8), 12 (6+6) or 14 (8+4), and it seems that the earlier their new school programmes begin, the better chances they have for attracting the most able students. As a result of this process, in some 8-year primary schools now only the “remaining children” study up to the age of 14; the best opt for secondary schools at the end of their 4th or 6th year of study (Halász & Lannert, 1998, p. 381).

In the previous uniform structure, the same curriculum was used by all schools throughout the country, including “specialised classes” for mostly the privileged children of professional middle class parents, while some children from less favourable family backgrounds were also given chances for upwards mobility. During the last seven years the liberalisation of the structure has strengthened the need to accept a National Core Curriculum (NCC). This document was redrafted seven times between 1989 and December 1996 when it was passed by Parliament. The rationale underlying the NCC is to control educational requirements and standards not through input in the traditional uniform structure, but by criteria described in the NCC all liberalised institutions are expected to develop their local curricula and educational programmes, thus shifting responsibilities and decentralising the system at the same time.

2.3 The National Core Curriculum and the Basic Examination

The NCC covers ten different knowledge areas and distinguishes between minimal requirements and requirements beyond this level. It prescribes what children should be able to do at the end of every two-year stage during the first ten years of their education, thus trying to control output

instead of input. Therefore, unlike in the past when all children learnt all subjects from the same course books, teaching materials can be chosen freely, syllabuses are designed locally, but achievements are to be tested centrally according to the requirements of the NCC. The NCC covers compulsory education, and all school-leavers at the age of 16 will be expected to take a new Basic Exam (*alapképzési vizsga*) at the end of their tenth year of education.

2.4 Years 11 and 12

In contrast with the first ten years, Years 11 and 12 are not controlled by any prescribed curriculum, but students need to take a school-leaving exam (*érettségi*) at the end of the 12th year of their studies. The standards of these two years will be determined by the detailed requirements of the school-leaving examination, but these documents are still in preparation (*Az érettségi vizsga részletes követelményei*). As can be seen, although no Hungarian school is structured according to the 10 + 2 pattern, output control is based on it. Even this pattern, which is alien to both the traditional and the innovative school structures, is not unified, as it combines a national curriculum for the first ten years and an examination for the last two years to determine what happens in schools.

Historically, the school-leaving examination used to be prestigious, as it allowed students to carry on with their studies in tertiary education. However, it has lost its value as results were neither comparable nor reliable: for the last decade no college or university has accepted these results, and recently only fee-paying programmes of low prestige prescribe such exams. Therefore, most tertiary institutions have developed their entrance exams to take care of quality control themselves. In spite of this fact, all students and teachers put a lot of effort into preparing for the school-leaving exam. It must be taken by all students in Maths, Hungarian Language and Literature, History and a Foreign Language. Thus, two exams have existed in the Hungarian educational system: the school-leaving exam, administered centrally and externally but evaluated internally, and the entrance exam, administered and evaluated externally.

2.5 Joint school-leaving and entrance examinations

One of the recent innovative steps has involved the written exams in some subjects, among them foreign languages: English, French and German (*Felsőoktatási felvételi tájékoztató*, 1997, p. 21) functioning as joint school-leaving and entrance exams. Two identical copies of the paper are marked both internally and externally in this hybrid exam format. The written papers of those students who take the school-leaving exam as an entrance exam are assessed in two different ways: secondary-school and university teachers mark the papers independently, according to central marking scales, and the final grades may be, and typically are, different, although no statistical analysis is available on the divergences.

2.6 School-leaving Exam Reform

A central decision was made in 1996 (*1993. Évi LXXIX. Törvény, az 1996. Évi LXII. Törvénnyel módosított közoktatási törvény 9 par.*) to re-establish the prestige of the school-leaving exam; from 2004, it will test school-leavers on two levels. An intermediate-level exam will test everyone graduating from secondary education, and an advanced-level exam will test students who wish to enter universities or colleges. Thus, a three-level exam system is emerging in Hungary: the Basic Exam for year 10, and the Intermediate and Advanced Exams for year 12 (Vámos, 1996).

The basic principles of the School-leaving Examination Reform were outlined in 1995 (*Az érettségi vizsga reformjának koncepciója 1995*). The conceptual framework included three

principles: the same exam should be available in all types of secondary schools; it should be available on two levels; and it should be standardised. During the legislation process it turned out that slightly more than 50% of the stakeholders supported the idea of introducing an Intermediate and Advanced Level Exam (Vámos, 1996; Balogh, 1997).

The 1996 Law of State Education prescribes the following (sometimes vague, unfinished) principles for the school-leaving exam:

- The exam should be organised by the school if no other instructions are involved in the exam Specifications.
- In the year when applicants take the school-leaving exam, tertiary institutions are not allowed to prescribe a written entrance exam if the candidate has taken the Advanced Level Exam in a subject.

In 1997 work started on the development of the Detailed Requirements of various subject areas, and the General Requirements were to be compiled parallel with them. By the year 2000, test specifications are to be developed and piloting is to be started. Various institutions have been involved in these processes: Országos Közoktatási Intézet Értékelési és Érettségi Vizsgaközpontja (OKI, ÉK) is responsible for the development of the new school-leaving exam. Exams are now developed and administered by Országos Közoktatási Szolgáltató Iroda (OKSZI) for secondary grammar schools, some comprehensive schools and bilingual schools. The Nemzeti Szakképzési Intézet (NSZI) develops exams for some specific vocational schools, and finally, the joint school-leaving and entrance exam papers are written by Országos Felsőoktatási Felvételi Iroda (OFFI). The co-ordination of these institutions is traditionally problematic; they have been working independently of one another. Exam results are not comparable. As for the future roles of these institutions, it is not clarified which of them is going to take care of the administration of the new exams and what roles, if any, the other ones will be assigned.

In 1997 the Exam Specifications of the school-leaving exam (*Kormányrendelet*, 1997) were accepted, which include the following most important principles:

- School-leaving exams may be organised as State Foreign Language Exams. The implications of this point are not clear. In such cases another paragraph requires the involvement of the Accreditation Committee in the development of all documents and papers.
- In years 11 and 12, besides the first foreign language, a second foreign language must also be made available.
- In secondary vocational schools the second foreign language is not compulsory for those who study a professional subject.
- Members of the exam board are required to possess relevant degrees and to have been trained.
- The minister may order the central marking of the papers in the year of the exam. In other words, central marking is not a prescribed requirement but may become later; therefore, this decision has been postponed.
- The oral exam is based on a list of topics compiled by the local teacher. This fact indicates that the oral paper is not centrally administered.
- In the oral exam candidates are allowed 30 minutes for preparation.
- The Intermediate Exam lasts 10 minutes, the Advanced Exam lasts 20 minutes, and in case the exam is organised as a State Foreign Language Exam (SFLE), it may not last longer than 30.
- A table indicates the percentages and the final grades associated with them. The pass rate is 41%.

- A separate paragraph prescribes how SFLE results correspond with school-leaving exam results.

To sum up, in the exam document constant but confusing references are made to the SFLE, an independent, external foreign language exam available for a fee. Also, the Accreditation Committee of SFLEB, which is not part of free state education, is involved in the development of documents and tests. Whether the school-leaving exam will be externally assessed is not decided by the Specifications. Times allocated to the oral exam are problematic, as the Basic Exam lasts 15 minutes and the Intermediate Exam only 10. Whether it is possible to change the above general guidelines remains to be seen. In this section no analysis was made of the content and task types of the school-leaving exam. As for the relevance of task types, Noijons and Nagy (1996) express doubts about translation as a testing technique of foreign language proficiency, whereas Kontra (1997) puts forward a totally different view in favour of bilingual components of proficiency exams.

2.7 Problems related to the Basic Exam

Various problems have emerged at the Basic Level and more can be foreseen based on the documents, interviews and informal discussions with decision makers, teachers, students and parents.

- Although the NCC defines ten integrated knowledge areas, exams will be offered in 16 different subjects, among them brand new ones: media studies, visual culture, computer science and library studies, drama and dance. The reasons for going back to traditional subjects instead of integrated areas are manifold, but most importantly there are no experts to develop exams for integrated knowledge areas defined in the NCC. Therefore, science, for example, is now split into traditional subjects like physics, chemistry, biology, and new ones, like health education and anthropology. So far, no teacher education programmes have existed in some of these areas, and consequently there are no staff members in schools to teach some of these new subjects or integrated ones.
- No official decision has been made public concerning who will take the Basic Exam: only students leaving compulsory education or also the ones carrying on with their studies for two more years. It is to be seen whether students going on to years 11 and 12 will opt for the Basic Exam. If only school-leavers take it, the levels are expected to be very low, and the prestige problematic.
- No official decision has become public whether students going on to years 11 and 12 may choose from among the subjects, or whether they may volunteer only for the whole of the Basic Exam. If the first option becomes reality, more students may want to use the Basic Exam as a yardstick; therefore, levels can be expected to range from very low to relatively high.
- Levels may turn out to be problematic for both examinations for two reasons. Firstly, there is a lot of pressure to maintain the standards of education; secondly, it is necessary to bear in mind that most of the students are expected to be able to pass.
- There is no organised collaboration or negotiation between specialists developing the exams in the specific content areas for the Year 10 and Year 12 Exams, except for English. Most experts do not know colleagues working on the other levels of the subject, thus levels may not be properly tuned to each other.
- Also, there is a lack of collaboration across subjects; consequently, integration of content areas is neglected in spite of the wishful thinking reflected in the NCC.

- No official decision has been made public on how and to what extent the Basic Exam will be externally assessed.
- Finally, negative attitudes have developed towards the Basic Exam among teachers and administrators, and a lot of ill feelings and misunderstandings have emerged. An illustration of the tip of the iceberg features of the underlying tensions could be followed through the 3-day Budapest Conference on the Basic Exam organised by Történelemtanárok Egyesülete in March 1997. Secondary-school teachers blame their colleagues in the 8-year primary schools for students' lacking knowledge and skills, and they claim that two years will not be enough to teach all that is necessary in the Basic Exam. Primary schools demand that students be tested after year 8 to prove that they are well on their way to fulfilling the requirements of the NCC.

2.8 Problems related to the school-leaving exam

After analysing the documents, interviews and studies related to school-leaving exams, the following issues need to be raised concerning the school-leaving exam.

- Since the last two years of secondary education are not regulated by a national curriculum, it seems that the Detailed Requirements and Specifications documents will automatically have to take care not only of the examination but also the curricula, which is a new and unclear task for both teachers and students.
- There is no guarantee that now with their recently won autonomy universities will accept Advanced Level Exam results in various subject areas. If they have too many applicants, they may set their own oral entrance filter exams; for example, for someone with an Advanced Exam in English to major in English Language and Literature.
- Universities now also have the right to say what they honour by bonus points (see chapter on status of State Foreign Language Exams): it is to be seen if they will require Intermediate or Advanced Exam results in foreign languages for students who wish to major in other subjects.
- The status of external assessment is also problematic. Although school-leaving exams traditionally require an external assessor (the chairperson of the exam board) this examiner is an expert on only one or two subject areas. The role is to formally take care of assessment and legislation: to check subject teachers' marking of written exams according to central instructions and to supervise their applying assessment criteria adequately in oral exams.
- Classroom teachers assess the performance of their own students under the formal supervision of an external examiner. Thus, subject teachers evaluate not only their students but also the efficiency of their own work.
- In contrast with school-leaving examinations, entrance exams and State Language Exams are taken anonymously; written exams are coded and examinees are unknown to both interlocutors and assessors in oral exams. Candidates pay for these examinations. Two systems exist side by side: internally evaluated school-leaving exams as part of free state education, and externally evaluated ones, for which students have to pay.
- The exam situation is further complicated by the role and status of external foreign-language exams in state education, thus illustrating '...a peculiar combination of state and private education...' (Dörnyei, 1992, p. 52). These examinations, often called 'Rigó utca' referring to the location of the headquarters in Budapest, can be taken for a fee in all modern languages after the age of 14. If students pass both the oral and written component of the Intermediate or Advanced Level Exam, they gain exemption from attending language classes, and they automatically get the top exam grade at the school-leaving exam. Therefore, an external exam overtakes the role of what should be available to all students free of charge in

state education. (For details on how many secondary students take and pass State Language Exams in what foreign languages see Chapter Four.)

- Since the 1997 Law of Education does not clarify the situation and contains various options, it is impossible to tell what principles to adopt.
- Some state-owned workplaces honour 'Rigó utca' language certificates and provide owners with top-ups, but school-leaving exams are not accepted in the same way.(For further details see Chapter Six on research into stakeholders' views.)
- There is a strong socio-educational need for prestigious external foreign language certificates but school-leaving exams are not fulfilling this role. (See details in section on State Foreign Language Exams.)
- Therefore, the vast majority (80%) of 'Rigó utca' examinees come from the secondary-school age group, thus maintaining the existence of an external language examination body.

3 Foreign language knowledge and attitudes towards foreign languages

An overview of the Hungarian population's language knowledge gives insights into the status of Hungarian as the official language and that of other second and foreign languages. Recent trends will be outlined based on the data of two surveys: the 1990 National Census and a more recent representative study. Both enquiries based their data on participants' self-reports. Further on a smaller-scale study will be considered on how Hungarian school leavers' proficiency levels compared to their Dutch peers. Attitudes will be looked at through two representative studies, one surveying the Hungarian population in general, the other considering 14-year-olds.

3.1 The 1990 National Census

According to the statistical analysis of the National Census in 1990 (Trócsányi, 1994; 1995), Hungarian was spoken by 97.7% of the total population as first or second language, and over 20 thousand Hungarian citizens claimed that they did not speak the official language.

Looking at language knowledge from a historical perspective, Trócsányi (1994, p. 6) compared 23 languages included in the National Census of 1941 and 1990. He analysed minority and foreign languages separately, except for German, which historically has had a double status in Hungary. Ethnic Germans still represent one of the largest groups in the country due to the long historical link with the Habsburg Monarchy. Also, German has been the most useful foreign language in everyday life and economy. Thus, it has been the most popular language, although because of historical and ethnic changes the biggest loser: while in 1941, 60.57% of the population declared knowledge of German, by 1990 the percentage had dropped to 35.1%, still indicating the highest rate. The other loser was Slovak, while the number of speakers of Gypsy tripled in 50 years.

The number of people who claimed to know French (4.2% and 4.12%) and Italian (1.27% and 1.27%) has remained stable over 50 years, while the rate for Russian increased from 0.85% to 12.19% and for English from 2.98% to 17.76%. In 1990 half as many citizens claimed to know English as German (Trócsányi, 1994).

3.2 The 1994-95 representative enquiry

A more recent study investigated further aspects of foreign language knowledge in Hungary (Terestyéni, 1996). In 1994-95 a representative sample of 2,000 of the population over 14 years of age was surveyed replicating a previous enquiry conducted between 1979 and 1982. Similarly to the National Census, participants were asked to self-report on various questions anonymously. When asked 'Do you speak any other language besides Hungarian?' 32% of the participants said they had some knowledge of one language, 11% of two and 3% of three or more languages. The comparison of various languages in this study (see Table 1) indicates lower percentages than the previous large-scale enquiry of 1990 (see details in Table 2).

Table 1: The percentage of participants claiming language knowledge (Terestyéni, 1996, p. 4)

German	17.3
English	11.5
Russian	8.8

French	2.1
Slovak	2.1
Italian	1.2
Yugoslav	0.8
Rumanian	0.7
Other	2.3

When participants were asked to evaluate their own language proficiency, half of them rated it as Level 1 or 2 on a 1 to 5 scale, meaning that it was practically non-existent.

In the next stage of the analysis minority languages were excluded and only those participants' responses were further analysed who rated their knowledge as Level 3 or higher. Here 11.8% of the sample said they knew one foreign language, 3.6% claimed to know two, and 0.8% three. As for gender differences across the sample, 12.5% of the male population and 11.2 % of the female population rated themselves as knowing a language. In relation to participants' educational background, 7% of the sample with only primary education, 10% of secondary school graduates and 41% of college or university graduates claimed to belong to the group of knowers of a foreign language. To paraphrase the results, 90% of the respondents with secondary education backgrounds and 59% of college or university graduates claimed that they could not manage in any foreign language.

The general findings of the 1979-82 survey were found to be still relevant in 1994-95: the younger, the more educated and urbanised the respondents were, the more likely it was that they knew a foreign language.

When comparing the results of the two surveys (Table 2), it is obvious that the percentage indicated in the 1990 National Census was significantly higher for German, English, Russian and French. The greatest difference was found in the number of speakers of German and French, whereas Italian was on the same level in both studies. Further enquiries are needed to find the reasons for these differences. Most probably in the National Census all data were included irrespective of proficiency levels, whereas in the representative survey very low-level speakers were excluded.

Table 2: Results in % of the National Census (Trócsányi, 1994, p. 6) and of the representative survey of Terestyéni (1996, p. 4) on foreign language knowledge in Hungary

	1990	1994-95
German	35.1	17.3
English	17.76	11.5
Russian	12.19	8.8
French	4.12	2.1
Italian	1.27	1.2

Another finding is related to the relationship of education, age and residence: better educated, young urban participants tend to know English, while a higher number of less educated older respondents from smaller settlements know German. French is spoken by twice as many women as men, otherwise no significant differences were found across languages (Terestyéni, 1996).

Terestyéni's (1996) study looked at five different uses of foreign languages to find out to what extent and for what purposes foreign languages were used. German and Italian are very often used in tourism, and German is most frequently exploited for interpersonal communication with friends and relatives. English is mostly used for professional, occupational purposes and other intellectual activities, like reading or watching television programmes.

3.3 Comparative studies on language proficiency

Two studies compared Hungarian school-leavers' language proficiency, both of them in English. Ten countries were involved in the IEA survey (Kádárné, 1979), in which 1,063 Hungarian students (aged between 17 and 18) were tested, but only half of the sample were tested on writing and altogether 150 on their speaking skills. According to the final evaluation of the testing project in Dörnyei's (1992, p. 51) view, "the English proficiency of the Hungarian secondary pupils who have compulsory English classes can be ranked at the bottom part of the European scale, lagging behind the top-scoring countries by 40 percent."

Another study (Noijons & Nagy, 1995) investigated the language performance of Hungarian students: it aimed at finding ways of standardising the Hungarian examinations system as part of a joint Hungarian-Dutch Project in 1993-95. Noijons and Nagy tested a representative sample of the Hungarian school-leaving population: 1,200 students from 38 schools in various parts of the country. As a result of this project, Hungarian students' levels of proficiency in English were compared to Dutch students' levels in two skills: reading and listening. The level required for the Hungarian school-leaving exam both for reading and listening was comparable to the C-level of the Dutch exam. This level reflected 16-year-old Dutch students' performances, and a representative sample of 18-year-old Hungarians performed on this level. Thus, the proficiency level of Hungarian students was found to be on a lower level in this comparative study. This is not surprising, as the conditions of foreign language teaching and the status of English, as well as the testing techniques have had a different historical tradition in the two countries. Also, only the passive skills were measured; Hungarian students did not practise listening, but were trained to take grammar-based tests and translation. Data were not available on such tests for either group.

To sum up what is known about the foreign language knowledge of Hungarian citizens, few Hungarians have a good level of proficiency and this seems to be typical of the younger generation as well. Although most people spend long years in state education studying foreign languages, the effectiveness of language teaching seems to be way below the desirable level. As will be seen in the next section, attitudes towards foreign language study are surprisingly favourable, therefore reasons for the relative lack of success must be further investigated.

3.4 Attitudes towards foreign languages

Attitudes towards studying foreign languages were also explored by the study conducted by Terestyéni. A total of 84% of the participants said they wanted to study foreign languages, and the vast majority voted for German and English at a similar rate. Most of the more educated respondents chose English.

Comparing the data from 1972/82 and 1990, it is obvious that the attitudes towards German have remained very similar (43.1%; 45.5%), while many more participants voted for English in the second study (29.8%; 46.1%).

When asked about their motives, participants typically pointed out the usefulness of English in international communication, while besides this motive emotional and family reasons were also mentioned in relation to German. Mostly intrinsic motivation characterised users of French and Italian: these languages are studied for the cultural heritage and beauty of the target language.

Another study investigated the attitudes and motivation of 14-year-olds during the 1993-94 school year. Dörnyei, Nyilasi and Clément (1996a; 1996b) enquired into the attitudes and motivation of 4,765 eighth-grade primary school pupils studying various foreign languages in 212 classes of 77 schools in 63 places across Hungary. First, children were asked to rank order the first three languages of their choice. When a language was chosen as first it was given 3 points, as second 2, and as third 1. Table 3 shows the first ten languages after adding up all the points.

Table 3: Order of language preferences of Hungarian eighth graders (Dörnyei, Nyilasi & Clément, 1996b)

Language	Score	Mean
English	11352	2.38
German	8466	1.78
French	3921	0.82
Italian	2485	0.52
Russian	684	0.14
Spanish	369	
Latin	229	
Japanese	94	
Chinese	40	
Portuguese	21	

The study also found a strong preference of American English to British English among young students. This is not surprising, given that U.S. popular culture has had a strong influence in Hungary, although most of the teaching materials used in Hungarian schools are British publications. (See more details on teaching materials in Chapter 8.)

Comparing these data to the findings of the previous study, a strong preference for English can be observed among 13-14-year olds, indicating that the trends for the younger generation were correctly forecast by Terestyéni (1996). The children's choices bore little relation to their parents' language proficiency: relatively high proficiency was identified in German and Russian.

When children were asked how confident they felt about their abilities for achieving good foreign language levels, the average on a 1 to 5 scale was quite high, 3.729, and school children's average agreement with the statement that studying a foreign language was a hard task scored 3.361 (Dörnyei, Nyilasi & Clément, 1996a; 1996b). These data indicate that children have positive attitudes towards language studies, most of them expecting to be successful in the long run, although they know they need to make serious efforts to achieve good results.

3.5 The role of private tutoring in foreign language studies

An unexpected but very important finding of the Dörnyei, Nyilasi and Clément (1996a) survey unveiled some of the mystery related to where 13-14-year olds study foreign languages and how parents and pupils evaluate free state language education. When children were asked if they studied any language outside school, 1837 (40%) indicated that they attended private classes. No wonder Hungary was claimed to have the highest number of private language schools in Eastern Europe (Bonifert, 1997), though it can be suspected that most of these children get private tutoring, thus counterbalancing the low income of teachers as well as the inefficiency of foreign language teaching in schools. Gázsó (1997, pp. 24-25) quotes data from Harcsa's (1996) survey on private tutoring: almost 60% of the children between the ages of 6 and 14, and slightly less than 40% of the secondary school students attend private classes. How foreign-language classes compare to other subject areas is not indicated, but the numbers are astonishingly high. Such parental efforts are intended to counterbalance differences in opportunities available to learners from different social backgrounds. Parents seem to believe that children's language knowledge will contribute to better opportunities on the job market in the long run.

To sum up levels of foreign language knowledge and attitudes of Hungarian citizens towards foreign languages, the following can be stated:

- Few Hungarians know foreign languages, and the population seems to be aware of this fact.
- The most widely known foreign languages are English and German, but they are used and studied for different purposes.
- English seems to be gaining ground over German with the younger population; American English and U.S. culture are more popular than British with young people.

- Attitudes towards knowing and studying foreign languages are favourable.
- Private tutoring plays an important role in foreign language studies, according to statistical data from a variety of sources.
- The high rate of private tutoring may reflect parents' and students' low opinion of free language education in state schools and a mismatch between achievable and expected levels of proficiency.

4 Language policy

As one of the last major projects of the Ministry of Culture and Education of the government, a proposal was put forward in March 1998 (*Világ-nyelv*, 1998), but at the time of writing the *Baseline Study* it is not clear what the status of this list of proposals is and how the proposals will be implemented. This document aims to develop a new language policy, to identify critical areas in foreign-language education and to promote long-term projects. The target groups involve students and teachers at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of state education. The document clarifies that in order to ensure equal opportunities for all students, conditions must be provided that students learn languages well at state schools instead of private schools and through private tutoring.

According to the introduction, the rationale of the programme includes the needs of Hungarian citizens to participate in the international business, scientific and cultural community effectively. The document claims that its framework took into consideration the model of the European citizen outlined in the suggestions of the European Union and the Council of Europe. Therefore, all secondary schools are expected to make three languages available to their students: the mother tongue and two modern languages. The programme aims to provide all Hungarian school-leavers at the age of 18 with the knowledge of a modern language on the intermediate, and of another language on the basic level. The proposal does not favour any language choice but points out that no traditionally taught foreign language can be excluded from state education.

The Ministry foreign language teaching programme elaborates on the following seven major areas:

1. Suggestions related to the NCC: The number of class hours in the NCC allocated to foreign language studies must be reconsidered and new norms are to be established. Classes are to be divided for foreign languages. Special language clubs or afternoon classes should get sponsored. Schools undertaking the teaching of a FL other than English or German for 4-8 years in groups of maximum 15 may apply for special funds. Allocation of financial resources is vague.
2. Bilingual programmes need further support. Dual-language schools should expand to the primary level, and support should be similar to that of secondary dual-language schools. The sum of 10 million HUF is allocated to writing new course materials. European Studies should be introduced in years 11 and 12.
3. A Central Foundation of 500 million HUF is to be set up to support travel grants for students and teachers. Special incentives should be paid to non-language teachers for passing proficiency exams. Foreign language teaching programmes of double majors are to be expanded, the 3-year programmes are to be maintained. More translators and interpreters are needed to meet the requirements of integration into the EU. For these aims SOCRATES and LINGUA programmes are to be exploited. Twin schools are to be established, exchange programmes should get support.
4. The role of the media in FLT: the development of the general requirements and exam specifications of the Basic and School-leaving Exams is a major task, level setting is important and continuity is to be ensured in the educational system. The role of the Internet

is to be emphasised in teacher-education programmes, and language teaching software is needed for Sulinet. FLT courses should be launched and undubbed films should be broadcast on TV.

5. As for materials, the Ministry will advertise a call for proposal for the publication of dictionaries of 'small languages' and specialist journals.
6. The new decree of the government supposedly abolished the monopoly of State Foreign Language Exam Centre.
7. Two further areas are pinpointed: more and more precise statistical data on FLT should be made available, and the length of teaching practice in pre-service teacher education programmes must be reconsidered in the 111/1997 decree.

5 Conclusion

Hungarian society, and within it education, has been going through a transition during the last decade. Not only have old value systems and institutions fallen apart, but high expectations have also lowered. The Exam Reform has to proceed along the options supported by students, parents and other stakeholders, trying to benefit from innovative ideas but keeping up some of the traditions.

As has been seen, Hungarian citizens are lagging behind in the area of foreign language proficiency, but attitudes towards studying languages are generally positive. Many parents make efforts to improve their children's language knowledge with private tutoring and many are willing to pay for language exam certificates. School results vary in the country, and it is not clear how much state education contributes to students' language proficiency. It seems that a lot of extracurricular activities are necessary to achieve the intermediate level by the age of 16 or 18.