

Attitudes of speakers of non-dominant varieties of Hungarian towards their own variety and the dominant one

Abstract

In this paper we investigate the attitudes that speakers of NDVs of Hungarian exhibit towards their own variety and the DV of their mother tongue, i.e. Hungary Hungarian. Attitudes of Hungarians from Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, and Serbia are analyzed based on two large-scale studies, one of which provides an answer to two questions: (1) how beautiful speakers find the given varieties, and (2) how useful they think it is to speak them. The other study sheds light on speakers' attitudes to these varieties as shown by their evaluation of speech samples with respect to (1) solidarity traits and (2) status traits. Based on these, we determine speakers' loyalty to their own NDVs and to the DV, as well as the status of these varieties as perceived by the speakers. Since these attitudes play an essential role in forming the status of the given (non-dominant) variety, their analysis enables us to draw conclusions about this issue as well.

1. Introduction

The main reason for studying language attitudes is that the way people think about speakers of different languages or linguistic varieties also carries an expression of social and linguistic evaluations (Fasold 1984). Studying language attitudes can provide insight into the current situation of a language or language variety as well as establish possible outlooks for them since language attitudes can have an influence on the success or failure of status planning, especially in the case of non-dominant varieties of a language. The present paper focuses on attitudes towards different varieties of Hungarian as a pluricentric language.

Muhr (2012) presents five criteria by which pluricentric languages are defined. According to this definition a pluricentric language has to occur in at least two nations, the varieties must have distinguishing characteristics, the language must have some sort of official status in at least two countries, the communities must accept the pluricentricity of the language, and the national varieties must have their own codified norms. By these definitions Hungarian could not be considered pluricentric, since it has an official status only in one country, yet its

pluricentricity is unquestioned. Although its varieties lack the appropriate formal status (they only have the status of a minority language), due to the demographic size of the varieties outside of Hungary (see Map1.) Hungarian qualifies for the status of a pluricentric language. Muhr (2012:33) defines Hungarian as *pluricentric but lacking the appropriate status*.

Regarding the legal status of languages Kloss (1966) proposed a status scale stating that a variety can have the status of (1) an official language of a country, (2) an official language of a major regional unit, (3) a quasi-regional language promoted by the authorities, (4) a tolerated language in the private sphere, or (5) a prohibited language. Out of these categories, it is the third one that Hungarian belongs to in the countries neighbouring Hungary, since its use is often promoted regionally in various domains, but it lacks official recognition of any kind. For further considerations about Hungarian as a pluricentric language see Molnár and Huber (2013).



Map 1. Ethnic Hungarian majorities living in Hungary's neighbouring countries.

The present paper presents and contrasts two large-scale studies (SHOH¹ on the one hand, presented in Csernicskó 1998, Göncz 1999, Lanstyák 2000, and

¹ The abbreviation SHOH stands for the Sociolinguistics of Hungarian Outside Hungary project, which (launched in the mid-1990's) aimed at the sociolinguistic description of Hungarian linguistic minorities and their language use both within and outside of the Carpathian Basin. For a detailed description and contextualization of the project see Kontra (2005).

Benő and Szilágyi N. 2005; and Fenyvesi 2012 on the other hand) focusing on the attitude of Hungarians outside of Hungary towards their own non-dominant varieties and the dominant variety of Hungary Hungarian. The non-dominant varieties discussed are Hungarian in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine. Table 1 presents some details about these varieties regarding basic demographics and status.²

Hungarian in...	...Romania (Transylvania)	...Slovakia (Southern Slovakia)	...Serbia (Vojvodina)	...Ukraine (Subcarpathia)
Number of speakers (as of 2001/2002)	1,434,000	520,000	290,000	151,000
(Regional) percentage of speakers	6.6% (19.6%)	10% (18.6%)	3.91% (14.3%)	0.3% (12.1%)
Status in Kloss' (1966) system	quasi-regional lg. (grade 3)	quasi-regional lg. (grade 3)	quasi-regional lg. (grade 3)	quasi-regional lg. (grade 3)

Table 1. Demographic and status characteristics of non-dominant varieties of Hungarian in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia and Ukraine

As can be seen, a large number of Hungarians live in the countries neighbouring Hungary, the largest community being that in Transylvania. The first number given in the row of (regional) percentage of speakers refers to their percentage in the given country, while the second number (in brackets) represents their percentage in the region where they live within the given country, namely Transylvania, Southern Slovakia, Vojvodina and Subcarpathia, respectively. In all of these regions Hungarian has the status of a quasi-regional language, and efforts are being made for the Transylvanian variety to gain the status of an official regional language, with political discussions on the topic currently going on also at an EU-level.

Before presenting the results of the SHOH study and Fenyvesi (2012), we need to point out that the two do not present entirely comparable data for the following reasons. First, the two studies were carried out applying different

² Source: Gyurgyík and Sebők (2003)

methods, with the SHOH study using a direct method (questionnaire items focusing on loyalty towards and the perceived status of the different varieties of Hungarian), while Fenyvesi (2012) used the verbal-guise technique (evaluating solidarity and status traits of speakers of the dominant and non-dominant varieties of Hungarian). Second, the subjects of the two studies belong to different age groups and come from different backgrounds: the subjects of Fenyvesi (2012) are primary and secondary school students while the SHOH subjects are adults. Furthermore, the SHOH study covered data from more countries than Fenyvesi (2012), the latter focusing on only three countries out of the six that SHOH covered. Finally, it is also worthy of mentioning that Fenyvesi (2012) is concerned with attitudes towards different varieties of English as well, which, however, we do not include in the present discussion.

In spite of these differences, we believe that comparing the results of the aforementioned studies is not unreasonable, since the loyalty and perceived status traits investigated in the SHOH questionnaire are related to the solidarity and status traits discussed by Fenyvesi (2012), respectively. Comparing and contrasting these studies raises the issue whether different methodologies lead to different results or not. Furthermore, due to the time span between the studies we can also reflect on possible changes or the stability of language attitudes in the region. Finally, the comparison of the studies can provide insights for future research on the topic of language attitudes in these regions.

2. The findings of the SHOH-project

As has been mentioned in the introduction, this project was carried out using a general sociolinguistic questionnaire, only certain parts of which were concerned with language attitudes. The data was collected in the mid-1990's, but the results were published somewhat later): the volumes on Ukraine and Serbia (Csernicskó 1998 and Göncz 1999) at the end of the 90's, the one on Slovakia (Lanstyák 2000) and some of the data from Romania (Benő and Szilágyi N. 2005) in the following decade, whereas a joint volume on the Slovenian and Austrian findings (Kontra 2012) only came out in 2012. Fenyvesi (2005) is an edited volume on the different varieties of Hungarian outside of Hungary, containing papers in English language about the SHOH-results from each region.

Answers to three questions of the SHOH-questionnaire are analyzed in the present paper, the first two of which are about how beautiful the speakers find the given varieties and how attached they are to the areas where they are spoken.

These questions definitely represent the speakers' loyalty to the given varieties, whereas the third question, which is about how useful speakers think it is to speak these varieties, can be connected to the status that these varieties seem to have – as perceived by their speakers.

2.1 Finding the varieties beautiful

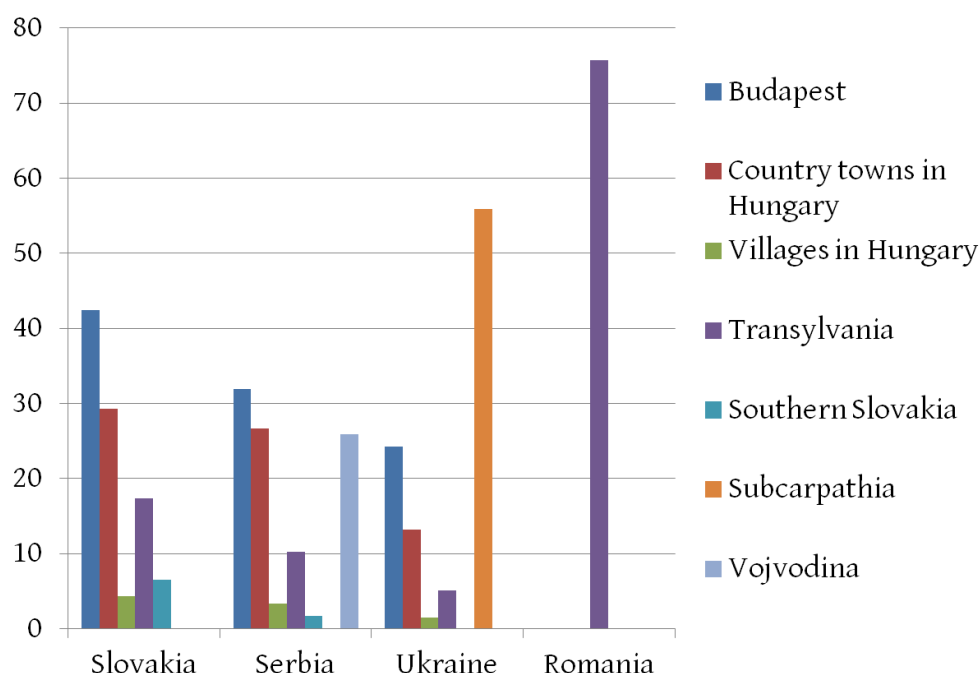


Figure 1. Where do you think the “most beautiful Hungarian” is spoken? (answers in %)³

Figure 1 shows the proportion of respondents who claimed that they found the given variety of Hungarian the most beautiful, thus expressing their loyalty to that variety. The dominance of the Budapest-variety (i.e. the DV), which can be seen in Figure 1, corresponds to the traditional norm-centeredness of Hungarian speakers, showing that speakers definitely find the DV beautiful and are loyal to it everywhere, which is probably because this variety is the most influential and the one used the most widely in formal settings and elevated domains even if the NDVs are present in these domains as well.

If we take a look at the differences between the individual regions, it is interesting to see how their own NDVs are rated in each case. With the exception of Slovakia, the NDVs always receive high ratings in the countries where they are

³ In the case of this question, the data from Romania have unfortunately only been published with respect to the Transylvanian variety.

spoken. What is more, they are rated the most positively of all varieties in Ukraine and Romania, which reflects that in all the regions other than Southern Slovakia, speakers are loyal to their own NDVs as well (in addition to their loyalty to the DV).

Romania (or, more specifically, Transylvania) Hungarian is present as an answer in all of the countries. The reason for this extraordinary “popularity” of the Transylvanian variety (i.e. Romania Hungarian) is probably – at least in part – a myth which is rather widespread across the Hungarian-speaking language area, namely that the variety of Hungarian spoken in Transylvania (and especially what is called the Szekler dialect) is the purest of all Hungarian varieties and having a uniquely characteristic taste (c.f. Benő and Szilágyi N. 2005: 146).

Conversely, the relatively low percentage of the NDV of Southern Slovakia is probably due to a similar but negative myth about this variety (and especially what is called the Palóc dialect) being one of the ugliest varieties of Hungarian, which has a lot of negative attitudes attached to it (c.f. Lanstyák 2000: 148). This shows that myths (be they negative or positive) play a key role in the construction of speakers’ attitudes to the various (non-dominant) varieties of a language, and should thus be taken into consideration when it comes to the status planning concerning the given variety, with positive myths sometimes possibly even making the job of status planners easier and should thus perhaps even be promoted. This is especially important in the case of Hungarian, all NDVs of which are spoken in minority settings.

2.2 Attachment

Figure 2 (see below) shows the percentage of those respondents who claimed to be extremely attached to the given region where a specific NDV of Hungarian is spoken. Similarly to the previous question about finding the varieties beautiful, these data about this kind of emotional attachment certainly also represent the speakers’ loyalty to the given varieties. (The reason why percentages add up to more than a hundred is that respondents were allowed to give multiple answers.)

On the whole, what can be concluded based on the figure below is that speakers seem to be the most attached to the regions where their own NDVs are spoken, which is shown by the fact that the categories “the place where you live” and “the region where you live” dominate the figure in the case of all the four countries. As the respondents seem to be much less attached to Hungary than to the place and region where they live, it seems plausible that their loyalty to the DV is much less powerful than to their NDV, at least as far as this emotional kind of loyalty, bond, or attachment is concerned. In contrast, the loyalty to the DV, which we saw in the case of the previous question, seems to be due to a status influence, with the status of the DV being more powerful than that of the NDVs.

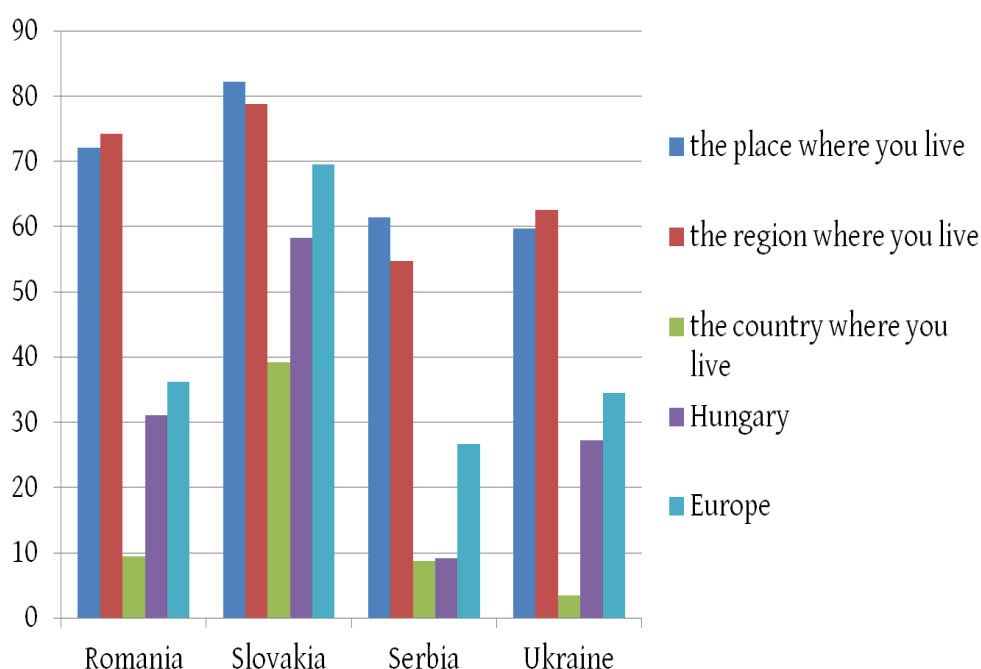


Figure 2. How attached are you to...? (answers in %)

It is also worthy of mention that the respondents seem to be rather attached to Europe as a whole too, which might be seen as a sign of a European identity that goes beyond the borders of individual countries. This claim is further strengthened by the fact that attachment to Europe is more powerful than attachment to Hungary and to the country where the respondents live in each of the cases. Attachment (and thus loyalty) to the country where they live is always the lowest, which can be interpreted as a sign of resistance to assimilation.

On the basis of the results, it can be concluded from what has been stated about the speakers' emotional attachment and loyalty to the DV and the NDVs so far that their regional attachment (and thus their loyalty to their own NDVs), coupled with a European identity, seems to be much more powerful than their

attachment (and thus loyalty) to the DV and to the country where they live. What this means is that they wish to distinguish themselves both from the majority population of the country that they live in and from Hungary Hungarians (and the dominant variety of the shared language that is spoken by the latter). This corresponds rather neatly to the basic idea of Hungarian being a pluricentric language, and these regions functioning as autonomous centers of it.

2.3 The assumed usefulness of the varieties

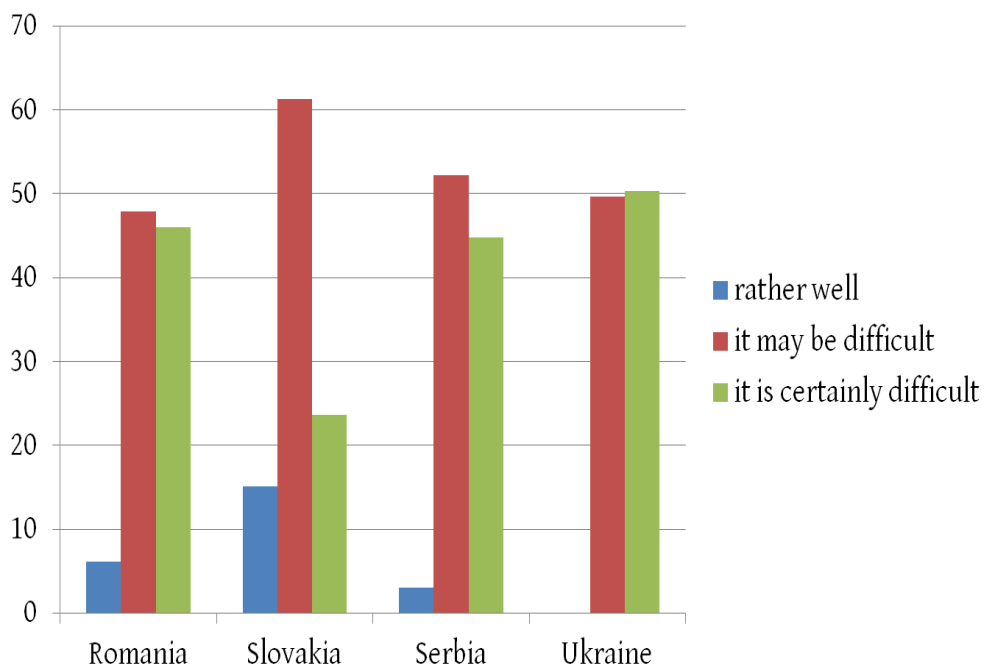


Figure 3. How well do you think a person who speaks only Hungarian can get on in life in the region where you live? (answers in %)

While the previous two questions were concerned with attitudes reflecting people's loyalty and emotional attachment to the different varieties, this is about the assumed status of the NDVs – as perceived by their speakers. As can be seen in Figure 3, only a very low proportion of the respondents in all the four countries think that one can get on in life rather well if one only speaks Hungarian in the region where they live, whereas the overwhelming majority thinks that it may be or certainly is difficult.

Since the variety of Hungarian spoken in these regions is usually the NDV of the given region, it is specifically the assumed usefulness of these NDVs that these results shed light on – and it seems to be rather low, which reflects the relatively low status that these NDVs have as compared to the DV.

All in all, the SHOH-findings about speakers' attitudes to the DV and the different NDVs of Hungarian can be characterized by a certain degree of duality. The attitudes reflecting the speakers' loyalty are much more positive towards the NDVs than towards the DV, whereas the ones that reflect the status of the given variety seem to be much more positive in the case of the DV than in the case of the NDVs. As far as a regional comparison is concerned, the only differences that are worthy of mentioning manifest themselves in the case of the first question, which is about how beautiful respondents find the given varieties. Here, Romania Hungarian seems to be rated a lot more positively than the other NDVs, whereas Slovakia Hungarian receives much lower ratings than all the others, which is – at least to a certain extent – due to the widespread myths (positive in the case of Romania Hungarian and negative in the case of Slovakia Hungarian) that surround these varieties, demonstrating the importance of these myths in the construction of speakers' attitudes towards the given varieties, and thus also in their status planning.

3. The findings of Fenyvesi (2012)

The results of a more recent large-scale study are reported in Fenyvesi (2012). This piece of research focuses on language attitudes of Hungarians living in Romania, Serbia and Slovakia. Even though it discusses minority Hungarians' attitudes towards various languages (the speakers' regional Hungarian varieties, standard Hungarian, the majority language of the country they live in, as well as different varieties of English), we will only focus on their attitudes towards the non-dominant and dominant varieties of Hungarian. The study, carried out with the verbal-guise technique, focuses on attitudes concerning solidarity traits (honest, reliable, likeable, nice, generous, interesting) and attitudes concerning status traits (educated, successful, rich, ambitious, prominent, confident). After listening to recordings of spontaneous speech samples describing a route from point A to point B, the subjects rated the speakers based on six solidarity and six status traits, which were then turned into a 7-point Likert scale, where the lowest number represented the most positive evaluation.

3.1 Status traits

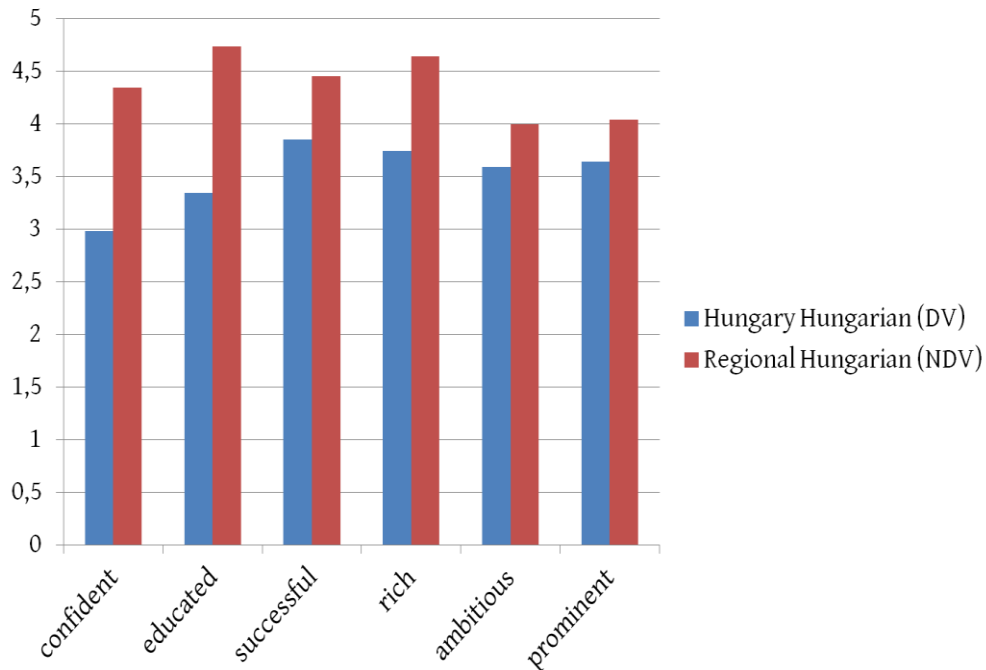


Figure 4. *Fenyvesi (2012)'s results on status traits*

Figure 4 shows the overall results for Hungarians from Romania, Serbia and Slovakia together. As can be seen, the results show a more positive attitude towards the dominant variety, that is Hungary Hungarian. Hungarians in all three countries rated the speaker of the dominant variety as more confident, more educated, more successful, richer, more ambitious and more prominent than the speaker of their regional, non-dominant variety. This indicates that, not surprisingly, the dominant variety carries a higher prestige among all subjects. Unfortunately no detailed results for the three regions are available, however, no considerable difference was reported between these countries concerning the evaluations of the DV and the NDV speaker.

These results echo the results reported in the SHOH study, suggesting that speakers associate the dominant variety with a more influential and powerful status than the non-dominant varieties.

3.2 Solidarity traits

Figure 5 below presents the overall results of the three regions together regarding solidarity traits. Solidarity traits shed light on the social acceptance of a speaker and ultimately of the language or variety he or she speaks. As we can see, these results show a more balanced picture than the ones about status traits. The speaker of the dominant variety is rated higher than the speaker of the non-dominant variety only in the case of honesty, generosity and reliability. On the other hand, the speaker of the non-dominant variety is rated as more likeable and more interesting than the speaker of the dominant variety, and, finally, both speakers are deemed to be more or less equally nice.

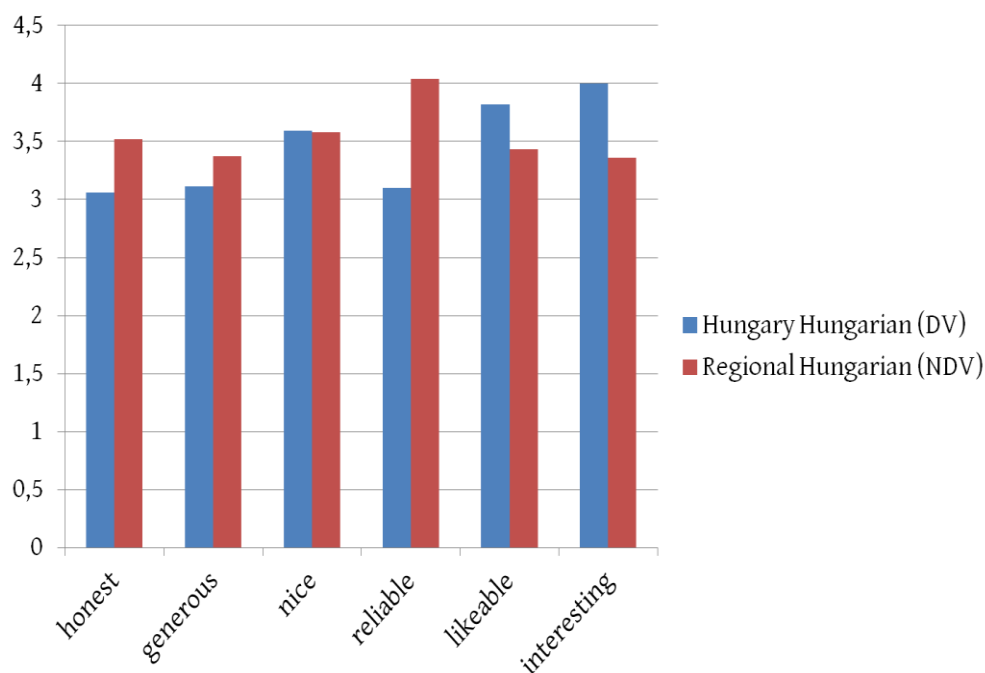


Figure 5. Fenyvesi (2012)'s overall results on solidarity traits

In comparison with the results of the SHOH studies, no sharp contrast between the status and solidarity traits can be noticed here. However, it is clearly visible that the speaker of the non-dominant variety is rated higher with respect to solidarity traits than status traits.

While no considerable difference was reported regarding the evaluation of status traits in the three countries, results from Romania seem to stand out concerning the solidarity traits. The results of evaluations by subjects from Romania are presented in Figure 6 below.

While in the case of the overall results a balanced evaluation of the dominant and non-dominant variety can be observed, subjects from Romania rated the speaker of their local non-dominant variety more positively than the speaker of the dominant variety except for one trait. The speaker of Transylvanian Hungarian was rated as more generous, nicer, more likeable, more interesting and slightly more honest than the speaker of Hungary Hungarian, while the latter was rated as being more reliable.

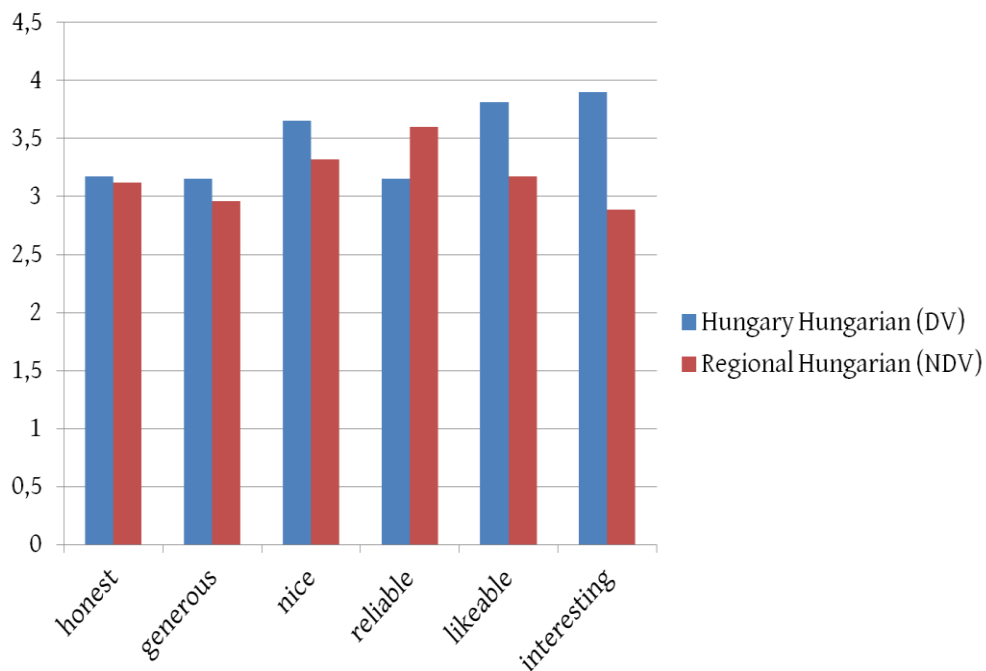


Figure 6. *Fenyvesi (2012)'s Transylvania results on solidarity traits*

Possible reasons for the higher ratings of solidarity traits by subjects from Romania include the geographical distance from the dominant center of Hungarian and the sociohistorical background of Transylvanians. While the majority of Hungarians in Serbia and Slovakia live relatively close to the Hungarian border, a considerable proportion of Hungarians in Romania live in the center of the country, further away from the Hungarian border. Also, throughout history Transylvania has at times enjoyed sovereignty and independence, which possibly lead to a stronger self-definition than in other regions. It might not be a coincidence that Hungarians in Romania propagate a regional official status of Hungarian in Romania so eagerly, which demonstrates that speakers' more positive attitudes towards a non-dominant variety can play a key role in the success of its status planning.

4. Conclusion

The investigations in this paper are based on two studies: the SHOH-study from the mid-90's and Fenyvesi (2012). Despite the difference in time, as well as the various other differences that have already been highlighted, the two studies present rather similar findings. While speakers of the NDVs are rated more positively on solidarity traits than on status traits in Fenyvesi (2012)'s results, emotional loyalty to the NDVs is more powerful than their perceived status in the SHOH-findings.

Although this duality is much more obvious in the case of the SHOH-data, it can certainly also be detected in the case of Fenyvesi (2012). This shows that attitudes to these NDVs seem to be rather stable in time, and the fact that two studies applying totally different methods came to very similar conclusions strengthens the validity of these findings too.

As far as a comparison of the various regions (i.e. Transylvania, Southern Slovakia, Vojvodina and Subcarpathia) is concerned, it can be maintained that Transylvania definitely constitutes a special case, where attitudes to the speakers' own NDVs are much more positive than elsewhere. As it is specially the case in Romania that the Hungarian NDV is the closest to gaining the status of a regional language (and thus shifting from grade 3 to grade 4 in Kloss 1966's system), this is a rather convincing piece of evidence of speakers' more positive attitudes towards the NDV playing a key role in the status planning of it.

Another important suggestion that has been made in this paper is that the positive evaluation of the speakers' own NDV in Romania, as well as its negative evaluation in Slovakia, is to a great extent due to wide-spread myths about these varieties being especially beautiful or ugly, etc. This – as has been suggested in section 2.3 above – shows the importance of these myths in the construction of attitudes to these NDVs, and thus also in the development of their status planning strategies, shedding light on the fact that they might also play a positive role in this process (as in the case of Romania Hungarian).

In the future, it would be a reasonable step to take to combine the methods of the two studies introduced in the present paper, using the verbal guise technique applied by Fenyvesi (2012) but complementing it with some of the SHOH-questions. Thus, as for the tendency in time, the assumed stability of the findings could be checked as well.

In order for this to happen, international cooperation will be necessary in order to carry out a large-scale study comparable to the previous two ones.

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