

Hungary – an overview of provision

Éva Gyarmathy

e-mail: gyarme@mtapi.hu

Hungary and Hungarian language

Hungary, officially called Republic of Hungary, is located in Central Europe, in the Carpathian Basin surrounded by the Carpathians, the Alps and the Dinari Mountains. The territory of the country is 93,030 square kilometers, covering about 1 per cent of Europe. The population is about 10 million persons. Hungary is a member of the EU. The Hungarian capital is Budapest where about 15 % of the population of the country lives.

The Hungarian [language](#) is usually classified as [Finno-Ugric](#). There are various alternative theories about the origins of Hungarian, but these are dismissed by most linguists owing to a lack of evidence.

Hungarian is spoken in [Hungary](#) and in certain areas of [Romania](#), [Slovakia](#), the [Ukraine](#), [Serbia](#), [Croatia](#), [Austria](#), [Slovenia](#), all of which territories used to belong to Hungary. There are all together about 14 million speakers of Hungarian. The Hungarian name for the language is *Magyar*.

Hungarian pronunciation can mostly be predicted from the written language. (Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hungarian_language)

Hungarian language is basically agglutinative, i.e. grammatical relations are expressed by means of affixes. "This means that endings are attached to words in a neat and prescribed order, and words can grow to stunning lengths. There are no prepositions, and very few auxiliary verbs. For example, *hajthatatlanságunktól* means "from our inflexibility", and is structured *hajt-hat-atlan-ság-unk-tól*, each element in turn expressing the verb, the possibility, the negativity, the possession, the preposition ("bend-can-not-ness-our-from"). And all this happens very regularly, indeed mechanically." (Ádám Nádasy, <http://www.filolog.com/languageStrangeCake.html>)

Children with specific learning difficulties

An estimated 10 % of students suffer from specific learning difficulties (dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia) in Hungary, but the number of these students is gradually increasing. Due to lack of standardized procedures for identifying these children, more precise data are not available.

There are special classes and schools for children with specific learning difficulties. In more serious cases, special need teachers or speech therapists do identification and therapy individually or in small groups to treat dyslexia and other types of specific learning difficulties.

More and more specialists agree that dyslexia is not a disease, not an illness that can be cured. Dyslexia is a specific way of thinking, which is disadvantageous in acquiring some

abilities and skills, especially ones that are essential in the academical achievements. Thus the school years for dyslexic children can be a nightmare. Despite their average or even above average intelligence, dyslexic children cannot read, write, count and study like others. They need special help.

One could assume that after the dyslexic person is over the hard years of schooling, later, at least after finishing education, their life gets easier. However, this is not the case.

Adult dyslexics

In Hungary, most of the dyslexic adults, especially those above forty do not know what cause lies behind their difficulties. The syndrome now called dyslexia or specific learning difficulties is rather new. Some decades ago, children, who were not able to learn to read, write or count were considered mentally disabled or perhaps, at best, lazy, good-for-nothing children.

Either diagnosed or not, a dyslexic adult with much anxiety and low self-esteem will grow up from a dyslexic child. Undiagnosed dyslexics struggle with their difficulties without knowing what is wrong with them. Bright dyslexics can compensate well for their weaknesses, but often find that various easy tasks, like filling in a form is ludicrously difficult for them, while others solve it easily. Identified dyslexics are stigmatized. Dyslexia is still believed to be a mental problem, and most of the dyslexics and their relatives feel shame about it. Diagnosed or not, dyslexic adults have hardly any professional support.

Dyslexics are often in trouble in finding a proper job. As Hungarian is a rather rare language, for most of the higher level jobs command of a foreign language is a requirement. In Hungary, foreign language teaching is very academical, thus hardly accessible for dyslexics. According to the law, identified dyslexics are exempt from learning foreign languages. Consequently, those who need a foreign language exam later, have to learn it as an adult at great expense.

At the university

As the rate of dyslexics is higher in the highly intelligent population, many dyslexic people can get to university despite their severe learning difficulties. Fortunately, at the university level, their specific abilities can be advantageous, too, therefore, they can be very successful. However, written exams, long essays to write and bulky books to read are a serious challenge for dyslexic students.

Dyslexic students receive no official support at any Hungarian universities. There are no services for them to provide practical help for their studies.

The main problem dyslexic university students face is the foreign language exams. In Hungary, a university degree can only be given to those who achieve an at least intermediate language exam. Sometimes it is an insurmountable obstacle, and after years of hard work at the university, the student cannot get the degree for many years or forever.

Assessment and provision

In Hungary, there is no standard test for identifying dyslexia in childhood. There are more and more methods that are used in different institutions, but neither of them is accepted in a wider specialist circle or officially used to identify dyslexia. Thus it is no surprise that there is no measure for adult dyslexia. Most of the specialists for dyslexia are convinced that dyslexia cannot be diagnosed after age twelve.

At the Research Institute for Psychology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences we started a program for adult dyslexics. A self-assessment questionnaire was developed and published for use on the internet (www.diszlexia.hu and www.lelekbenotthon.hu). On these sites, adult dyslexics may obtain information and counseling, as well.

We launched courses for teachers on understanding dyslexia, and we have special courses for teachers teaching English as a foreign language. Teachers can learn methods how to teach a foreign language to dyslexics. We plan to run such courses on different languages after we find appropriate material. Next year, a language school will open for dyslexic adults.

Legislation

As adult dyslexia in essence hardly exists either on the lay or even on the official level, very few laws deal with it. Legislators concentrated only on the education of dyslexics.

Dyslexic persons who are identified officially as dyslexics get extra time for written exams on the final exam finishing secondary education and their spelling is not assessed. Similarly, dyslexics receive dispensation from written exams in foreign languages, and in serious cases are totally exempt from them.

Another problem is to get a university degree. As mentioned above, in Hungary, one can only get a degree if one holds both oral and written exams from at least one foreign language. However, the law allows for dyslexics to having to pass either only the written or the oral exam.

Dyslexia is usually diagnosed in the childhood. There are official insitutions where speech therapists, special need educators and psychologists assess dyslexia. If somebody wishes to get a dispensation after age 18, a medical expert has to decide in their case.

Associations

Since dyslexia is considered as a problem belonging to the school years, even specialists finish dealing with dyslexics after the obligatory school years. There are two dyslexia associations and several foundations for dyslexics in Hungary. However, they concentrate on dyslexic children and their parents, and do not follow the problem in the adulthood. Adults have practically no organized support for their difficulties caused by dyslexia.

More and more results of research studies show that, compared to the average population, there are at least twice as many dyslexics among those suffering from mental disorders (especially mood, anxiety and somato form disorders). We are going to organize self-

support groups for adult dyslexics, and, hopefully, it is going to form the basis of an effective association for dyslexic adults.