

Output 1 Final report
Research summary with accomplished and
forthcoming publications

January 3, 2020



As stated in the grant proposal of the project “Language Skills of Deaf Students for EU Mobility” (LangSkills), the participants of the project in Austria, the Czech Republic, Great Britain and Hungary set themselves the objective to work together and combine their knowledge, experience and resources in order to improve the quality of foreign language education for Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing students in higher education thereby increasing those students’ chances to take part in international mobility programs. It has been found that because of the communication barriers and teachers’ lack of experience in teaching students with a hearing loss, these groups of people have limited access to learning foreign languages, and thus to participating in academic mobility programs and EU mobility in general. The development of language and communication skills, however, can enhance Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing people’s readiness for academic mobility to foreign countries, their competitiveness on the labor market, and inclusion in the European social life. To achieve the above aims, it was thought necessary to first get an insight into the foreign language needs and the foreign language learning experiences of the target groups through empirical research. This part of the project was undertaken by the Hungarian team with the support and participation of the Austrian and the Czech colleagues.

The key persons involved in this Output are members of the Department of English Applied Linguistics at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest, which has been involved in investigating the foreign language learning situation of Hungarian Deaf, deaf, and severely hard of hearing people since 2006. First, in a four year project, the foreign language learning experiences of Deaf and severely hard-of-hearing adults were investigated with the help of a nationwide survey and a series of individual interviews. The results of these investigations were published in a book in Hungarian, and in several journal articles both in Hungarian and in English (Kontra, 2017a, b; Kontráné Hegybíró 2010, 2013, 2014a). In a subsequent, three-year project, the foreign language learning situation at educational establishments for Deaf, deaf, and hard of hearing students in Hungary was researched by the same research team (Csizér, Kontra, & Piniel, 2015; Csizér, Piniel, & Kontra, 2015; Csizér, Piniel, & Kontráné Hegybíró, 2015; Kontra, forthcoming; Kontra, Csizér & Piniel, 2014, 2015; Kontra,

Piniel & Csizér, 2017; Kontráné Hegybíró, 2014b, 2015; Kontráné Hegybíró, Csizér & Piniel, 2013, 2015; Kontráné, Piniel & Csizér, 2014; Piniel, Kontra & Csizér, 2016; Piniel, Csizér & Kontráné Hegybíró, 2014). This series of investigations involved visits to each school for the hearing impaired in the country, a barrier-free survey with the students, which was followed by individual student and teacher interviews. The final report including suggestions for teaching methods and interactive white board materials for the school population was made available electronically at <http://tintakiado.hu/docs/hallasserult/> (Kontráné Hegybíró, Csizér & Piniel, 2015). This publication was presented at a 2-day international workshop organized at ELTE with guest speakers from the Czech Republic, Austria and Norway. The results of both research projects point to the importance of incorporating Hungarian Sign Language (HSL) in foreign language teaching, which runs against the prevailing auditory-verbal approach applied in the education of students with a hearing loss in the country. Another common finding of the two Hungarian investigations was the realization of the complete lack of methods and materials for teaching foreign languages to deaf and hard of hearing learners, the lack of signing foreign language teachers, the scarcity of international examples of good practice, and the so far completely unutilized possibilities for international networking.

Based on the Hungarian team's previous experience, the baseline research for the LangSkills project was designed as a mixed-methods investigation including a barrier free survey questionnaire and individual follow up interviews (Kontráné Hegybíró, 2018).

The quantitative phase

An online survey was conducted among Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing students in higher education in three participating countries where English is taught as a foreign language: Austria, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. The reach of the survey was limited by the low availability of potential participants. Due to the unfortunately small number of students with a hearing loss enrolled at universities, the original sampling criterion to include only students currently pursuing studies in tertiary education had to be broadened to include also those who had been pursuing studies at any one time during the 5 years preceding data collection and who had foreign language learning experience. Altogether 54 students could so be recruited: 12 from Austria, 27 from the Czech Republic, and 15 from Hungary. The average age of the

participants in each country was relatively high: in Austria 29, in the Czech Republic 31, and in Hungary 35 years.

The instrument was a Likert scale type of survey questionnaire which mainly included items that had been tried out and had worked well in previous investigations and some new items were also added due to the specific nature of our sample and the particular goals of the LangSkills project. Unfortunately, a number of previously well functioning items had to be eliminated owing to the lack of approval by one of the project partners. The final version of the survey used the following scales: motivation (24 items), sign language use (14 items), language learning strategies (9 items). Since the language of the entire LangSkills project is English, the questionnaire was first developed and validated in English. Then it was translated into the three local spoken languages as well as into the three respective sign languages: Austrian (ÖGS), Czech (CzSL), and Hungarian (HSL). The method of translation – back-translation was used in each step to ensure that the original items did not get distorted in the process. After the finalization of the translations a barrier free online version of each questionnaire was prepared with a video recording of the respective signed version of each item appearing in the corner.

Data collection took place electronically between June 2018 and October 2018. The three data files were merged in a single SPSS file and were analyzed for descriptive statistics and correlations, following which a cluster analysis was also performed. Descriptive statistics showed that most of our participants had a positive disposition towards learning English. The most important constructs affecting interest and determination in learning English turned out to be using the Internet, contact with speakers of English and teaching methods. The use of the Internet is affected by instrumentality, that is getting a degree or a better job. Contact with speakers of English is affected by the participants' milieu, namely, how much their friends and family encourage them to learn English and the appropriate teaching methods. Teaching method is affected by sign language use in life as well as affective learning strategies, i.e. a positive feeling towards learning English. For details, please see Csizér & Kontra (forthcoming), Csizér & Kontráné Hegybíró (forthcoming), and Kontráné Hegybíró & Csizér (2019).

The qualitative phase

In order to get a better and deeper understanding of the data from the participants' perspective, individual face-to-face follow-up interviews were conducted at the three participating institutions in Brno, Budapest, and Vienna with four students/former students at each location. The 12 interviews were made completely barrier free. In Hungary, the language used was spoken or written Hungarian and HSL. In Brno and Vienna, the interview questions were asked in Spoken English which was translated by professional interpreters into the local spoken and/or signed language. The respondents gave their answers in the language of their choice, which in Vienna was ÖGS except for one student who had a cochlear implant and was able to speak fluent, comprehensible English. In Brno, two respondents gave their answers in CzSL and two in spoken Czech which was translated into English.

The interviews had a semi-structured format and were based on an interview guide. This format ensured that each respondent was asked all the core questions which were salient for the purpose of the research but they also had a chance to bring in topics that they considered important or they could elaborate an issue at length if thought necessary. The brief interview guide included questions about the participants' language learning history, the method of teaching they experienced in primary, secondary, and tertiary education, their views about English, and their self efficacy beliefs. We were particularly interested in their opinions regarding language learning materials suitable for students with a hearing loss and useful learning strategies to enhance second language acquisition. The respondents were also asked about their opinion regarding the use of sign language(s) in the foreign language classroom either by the teachers themselves or by having interpreters.

The interviews lasted about 60 minutes each and were both audio and video recorded. The transcripts were prepared by the researchers and their accuracy was checked by the local sign language interpreters who matched the transcripts to the video recordings and made corrections or additions where necessary to make sure that no information was lost or distorted due to the multiple translations.

The transcripts were subjected to content analysis following the principles of qualitative research. The results showed that although the respondents had a chance to start learning English in primary school, the teaching was not effective and their achievement was minimal. Effective language learning could start in secondary education if the circumstances were adequate. Most of the respondents gave account of the fluctuation of language teachers at their respective schools. Some of them occasionally had teachers who were able to sign and

in Austria, most of the participants had some experience with teaching assistants who were able to sign and who gave them additional support. The overall teaching approach the respondents experienced at their respective schools was based on oralism with only occasional counterexamples mentioned. The only place where university students got organized support in foreign languages including regular courses taught one-to-one or in pairs and where the curriculum includes a compulsory foreign language requirement in a modern foreign language is the Czech Republic. The interviewed students found the courses provided by their university very effective and were more than satisfied with the online chat program developed by their teachers, which allowed them to not only learn about the language but to also experience using it for ‘real’ communication (Csizér & Kontra, forthcoming; Kontráné Hegybíró & Csizér, 2019; Sedláčková & Kontra, forthcoming). It also turned out that only a few participants were autonomous language learners who were active learning strategy users on their own. The rest of the respondents proved to be rather teacher dependent for whom it mattered a great deal whether the teachers had had appropriate training and were equipped with resources for dealing with Deaf, deaf and hard of hearing students.

Conclusion

In conclusion we can say that the investigation for Output 1 was successful. A great amount of information was gathered which can be used as justifications for the methods and materials used in the online course developed as Output 3 and the language teaching methodology course designed as Output 2. The results are being published in leading national and international journals and have been and will be presented at significant national and international conferences.

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