



## EXPERIENCES OF MEANING AND THE MULTILINGUAL EXISTENCE

Erika Mária Tódor

**Abstract.** The aim of the article is to analyse the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the skills of reading and text-understanding, focusing on the comparative analysis of experiences of meaning in native language, Romanian and English in the case of Hungarian pupils. We attempted to present the qualitative indexes and factors of the process of reading texts written in native, secondary and foreign language with the help of questionnaires, the students' data and tests measuring the performances of reading. The collection of data was realized in the spring of 2009. Through the collected data we attempted to answer the following questions: What kind of skills of understanding text do the pupils in the last year of primary school (i.e. 8<sup>th</sup> grade) possess? Which are the determining socio-cultural background factors? Can we differentiate between the common and specific features of reading and meaning-construction done in different languages? Can we speak about similar difficulties of reading and about the phenomenon of transfer in the case of meaning-discovery in different languages? The present study offers the possibility of creating training programs and teaching strategies based on local specificities, as well as of drafting curricula based on the pupils' knowledge of language, desires and interests.

**Key words:** bi- and multilingual existence, reading, text-understanding

The study of reading and that of the understanding of texts is a complex endeavour, given the facts that the system of letters is transformed into a text through its relation with the reader and the reader obtains its status of reader through its relation with the text, while the concretisation of reading as a process belongs to the individual consciousness and to the realm of culture simultaneously. The spelling of words, the investigation of the meanings in the case of words and speech contributes to the comprehension of the general relationship between people and the world. Revealing successfully the meanings of texts read implies a phenomenon labelled by Gadamer as 'forgetting of the language' (1984. 18-34.). The present paper wishes to present some aspects of this phenomenon based on the analysis of the understanding skills and linguistic socialization of Hungarian pupils in their last year of primary school.

### 1. Introduction

Studying the process of reading in the case of bi- and multilingualism implies serious challenges partly due to the discrepancies in the interpretation of both socio-linguistic and psycho-linguistic notions and partly to the need for the elaboration of specific methodological instruments. The particularities of self-expression, reading, spelling, speaking and understanding differ qualitatively in the case of the native language and that of the second language or foreign language. It is a challenge as well, to define to what extent efficiency in the case of a given language is determined by the variation of cognitive capabilities, by the linguistic socialization, the characteristics of the educational process, the motivations for learning a language, the prospects in terms of languages, and by the differences of linguistic systems.

The following chapters of this paper present the conceptual framework of the study as well as a number of methodological considerations that enabled the setting and analysis of the study's most important parameters.

## 2. Theoretical Considerations

Following Gadamer's conceptual framework it can be stated that similarly to conversations, the understanding and interpretation of texts are also based on the dialectics of question-answer, both occasions (i.e. conversations and texts) offering the opportunity of comprehending the meaning-system of a possible world. Therefore, reading can be regarded a "knowledge-based, concept-centred process" (Bárdos, 2000. 130.) in which the verbatim understanding is followed by the understanding "within", and thus the interpretation of the text, the cognition of the Other become a prerequisite of our self-definition. The read text speaks through the interpretation and requires interaction, dialogue from the part of the reader, while during the processes of meaning-discovery and meaning-creation the expectations of the reader are being monitored and its previous knowledge is used in a novel way.

Plato considered (in Gadamer, 1984. 45.) that in comparison with a conversation the written text was more inert given the fact that it could not be assisted by anybody when it was misinterpreted, misread.

The living word interprets itself by the means of the speech's style, its circumstances, tempo, and linguistic register. The written text presupposes the personal and particular identification of the Other's meaning. In this process the existence of a productive reader is not the only determining factor, but also the interpretability of the written text's linguistic framework. The experience of self-definition functions differently in the labyrinths of native and non-native languages, and thus the expected shared experience of meaning is also structured differently.

Hereafter the paper will operate with the notion of *written text* in the Gadamerian sense, according to which the speech alienated by writing is charged through reading with a new meaning.

In this context *understanding* is considered as a discovery of meaning which is identical in its range in the case of different languages, but the specificities of those languages determine the most efficiently applicable strategy of understanding. The pedagogical literature clearly underlines the fact that a non-native reader approaches the written text in a different manner than the native one – nonetheless, the quality of reading is imposed by the extent of the knowledge of language and by the skills of understanding, processing and interpreting a text (Nagy, 2001. 42.).

When employing the concept of *bi-(multi)lingualism* the study does not invoke it as segmented, double monolingualism (Bloomfield, 1933) but adopts the holistic interpretation of the phenomenon (Grosjean, 1982). While the approach of Bloomfield refers to the knowledge of languages on a similar scale, the holistic view reads exactly this maximalist conception in a novel manner. In this context the functional definition of bilingualism is of primary relevance, according to which a bilingual is not the sum of two monolinguals but a "speaker-listener" (Navracscics 2007, Grosjean 1998) who "during its everyday intercourses uses two or more languages according to its communicative and socio-cultural needs". (Bartha 1999. 18.) Thus, we can speak of a particular linguistic existence, in which the functions exercised in the different languages define the specificities of the command of language, primarily the wealth and profoundness of the vocabulary as well as the acquirement quality of the act of speech. In the analysis of the bilingual existence we could evoke the analogy of bi(multi)culturalism because biculturalism does not imply a person summarizing the values of two distinct culture. Instead it implies a person who assimilates the characteristics of two cultures in such a manner that through the process of internalization they are enriched with the person's own values.

The present study analyses the text understanding capabilities of individuals whose mother tongue is Hungarian, second language is Romanian (the official language of the country), and who learnt English as a foreign language.

## 3. The presentation of the study

### 3.1. On the characteristics of the sample

In accordance with the objective of the study we have examined pupils in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade (i.e. in the last year of the primary school) who live in a community with Hungarian language and their education is based on Hungarian. Schools from Harghita and Covasna county participated in the research. Based on cluster random sampling 19 schools joined the research (9 from Covasna county and 10 from Harghita

county) out of which 11 belonged to rural areas while 8 to urban areas (5 from municipalities). A major criteria in the selection of educational institutions was to have English in the curricula of the schools, given the fact that only those individuals could participate in the research, who have learnt English for at least four years. The sample consists of 459 individuals out of which the data regarding 421 pupils are complete, that is they did fill in all the information asked from them. Therefore the summarized data enables us to analyse various correlations and connexions. From the point of view of gender distribution the sample contains 215 males and 244 females.

### 3.2. Methods used for the collection of data

The collection of data was based on questionnaires and tests measuring the performances in the understanding of texts. The questionnaire consisted of 5 questions related to general information and of 23 questions related to the research topic. This later section was grouped based on four main issues, namely: the knowledge of the language and the family environment (4 questions), the knowledge of the language, linguistic socialization and the path of language acquisition (7 questions), habits related to language usage (3 questions), habits and strategies of reading (9 questions).

In order to measure the performances of the understanding of texts we have created three tests, one in Hungarian, one in Romanian and one in English. The common element of these tests were the measurement criteria: they contained questions that measured the competences of word-recognition and understanding, the understanding of expressions and special collocations as well as the competences of identifying global meaning nexuses. The chosen texts were narratives written in casual style and were followed by four groups of questions.

In the elaboration of these three instruments we followed the structure of the already existent text-understanding tests (Cs. Czachesz, 1996) or we adapted some of their parts (e.g. Wallace, 1993). Due to the lack of such test in Romanian, we have developed the Romanian test following the logic of the research and the existing tests in Hungarian and English.

The collection of data was accomplished in the second semester of the 2008-2009 school year. As a first step the questionnaires were filled in. This was followed by the evaluation of text-understanding capabilities in the three languages by the means of the three tests. The whole process of data collection required about 100-120 minutes.

### 4. Premises and objectives

In the study of reading and text-understanding the prevalent perspective is the monolingual one, thus a large amount of data and observations are available regarding the reading and understanding of text in native and foreign languages. However the holistic approaches to this process are very rare partly due to the fact that in this case the language-specific factors constitute an important systematizing element. The following paragraphs present those findings that refer primarily to the reading of text in native language and played an important role in substantiating our research perspective.

The conclusions of Gass and Selinker (2001) and Lackó (2008b) confirm that the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the learning to read is determined mainly by the efficiency of the linguistic procedures that create speech and by the phonological structure of the respective language. The processes of speech perception and those of understanding are decisive for the accurate acquisition of learning (Gósy 2005). Mann (2003) differentiates five levels of linguistic competences that are essential for learning to read: phonetic perception, mental vocabulary, short-term phonetic memory, syntax, and semantics. Several studies demonstrate (Lackó 2007, Erdélyi 2007) that the cognitive improvement accompanying the progress of age is barely reflected in the competences of text understanding, even high school students having deficiencies in the comprehension of texts. The most frequent dimensions of this kind of deficiencies (Cs. Czachesz 1996, Lackó 2008a) are the difficulties of understanding the relationships of cause-effect, the problems of formulating conclusions, and the influence exercised by the type and structure of a text on the understanding. The difficulties in understanding a text are frequently caused by the large discrepancies between the levels of text-understanding mechanisms and those of text-perception mechanisms. However other reasons might also stand in the background of these problematic cases, such as the weak performance of visual

memory and visual perception, the low capability to understand the text heard or the poorness of the vocabulary that can be activated (Simon, 2001, Erdélyi 2006).

According to Gósy Mária (2005), it is not practical to elaborate solutions of improvement merely on the basis of conclusions resulting from test of text-understanding, but it is more important to analyse the functioning of partial skills and their concealed effects.

Gyarmathy-Smythe (2000) approaches similarly the reading handicaps of the multilingual child pointing out that these particular situations presume new procedures which take into consideration the differences between languages and the factors arising from the multilingual existence.

The presentation of the bi(multi)lingualism emerging in the cases of Hungarian pupils who are acquiring the official language of the state and foreign languages is almost completely missing from the discourses of linguistic pedagogy.

The aim of the present paper is to present the manifestations of the conscious reading and the experiences of meaning in the light of reading and linguistic habits of 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils as well as in the light of their performances of reading texts written in native, secondary and foreign language. Thus the research raises several questions: Which are the dominant habits of reading and language usage in the case of the pupils represented in the research sample? Which are the special characteristics of linguistic socialization and the turning-points in language acquisition? What kind of self-concept do these pupils have concerning their command of language(s)? What kind of reading preferences do they mention and what kind of status has this activity in their everyday lives? What kind of text-understanding skills do these Hungarian individuals possess in the case of different languages? Can we separate the common and the unique features of reading and meaning-exploration in different languages?

The following chapters will present the consequences based on the partial results of the research.

## 5. Family background and linguistic self-concept

In accordance with our previous studies (Tódor 2009) when charting the family backgrounds of the command of languages we can speak of the quantitative dominance of the father's command of Romanian language. In what concerns the foreign languages we cannot observe any significant qualitative difference between the two parents; the basic and the intermediate levels are prevailing. At the same time a youth-centred model of foreign language acquisition is emerging in the analysed families, in other words the younger generations possess a broader knowledge of foreign languages and their interest in English is more powerful than in the case of older generations. These features are obvious effects of the tendencies in societal change and are in concordance with the intention of language learning predominant among Hungarian youngsters from Romania (according of the Gallup survey of 2004 more than two-thirds of the Romanian youth commands at least on beginner level a foreign language).

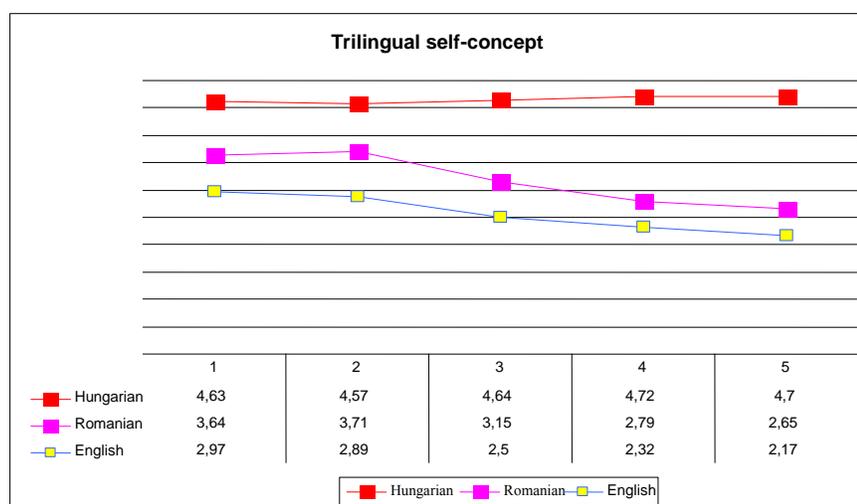
**Table 1.** *Command of languages in the case of the family members*

Family Level	Fa- ther HU	Fa- ther RO	Fa- ther EN	Fa- ther DE	Mo- ther HU	Mo- ther RO	Mo- ther EN	Mo- ther DE	Pupil HU	Pupil RO	Pupil EN	Pupil DE
<b>Native language</b>	94,5%	4,9%	0 %	0,2%	95,2%	4,9%	0,0%	0,2%	95%	2,0%	0,3%	0 %
<b>Advanced</b>	1,3%	57,7%	3,5%	1,9%	2,0%	51,4%	4,4%	2,1%	0,8%	23,2%	16,8%	3,9%
<b>Intermediate</b>	0,9%	29,1%	10,9%	6,6%	0,4%	28,1%	10,4%	5,8%	0,8%	32,9%	27,2%	14,2%
<b>Beginner</b>	1,3%	5,4%	30,5%	22,5%	0,2%	12,5%	28,6%	22,2%	1,1%	34,0%	32,8%	30,5%
<b>None</b>	2,0%	2,9%	55,1%	68,9%	2,2%	3,1%	56,6%	69,6%	2,2%	7,9%	22,9%	51,4%
<b>Average</b>	<b>4,69</b>	<b>3,46</b>	<b>1,61</b>	<b>1,41</b>	<b>4,73</b>	<b>3,30</b>	<b>1,59</b>	<b>1,40</b>	<b>4,70</b>	<b>2,70</b>	<b>2,34</b>	<b>1,68</b>
<b>Dispersion</b>	<i>0,68</i>	<i>0,81</i>	<i>0,82</i>	<i>0,73</i>	<i>0,58</i>	<i>0,89</i>	<i>0,84</i>	<i>0,73</i>	<i>0,69</i>	<i>0,96</i>	<i>1,03</i>	<i>0,86</i>

Figure 1 summarizes the self-evaluation of the students related to their linguistic skills (in native language, secondary language and foreign language), namely reading (1<sup>st</sup> category in the figure), writing (2<sup>nd</sup> category), understanding (3<sup>rd</sup> category), speaking (4<sup>th</sup> category) and conversation (5<sup>th</sup> category). We made a distinction between speaking and conversation because the case of the cognition of Hungarian-Romanian languages is an example of asymmetric bilingualism (in the studied sample the average value of self-evaluation for Hungarian was 4.65, for Romanian 3.19 and for English 2.57) and because the preliminary testing of the questionnaire showed that the pupils primarily refer to speaking skill as an experience of in-class discussions, while they define the conversational skill in the context of social relations.

The data summarized in Figure 1. reflect “introverted” secondary and foreign language cognition, the average value of speaking and conversational skills in the secondary language are similar to those in foreign language. It can be supposed that the pupils mentioned have more positive experiences in solving individual exercises of assignments related to school, than they have in situations of speaking. The experiences of language acquirement result in various attitudes, thus the feeling of pressure, the requirements of language acquisition determine to a large extent the linguistic behaviour of a student.

When examining the correlations among the family background of the knowledge of language, the pupils’ performance in school and the linguistic self-conceptions, it is worth underlining that the fathers’ command of Romanian language has a more powerful influence on the children’s language acquisition than that of the mothers’, and this influence is stronger in the case of speech-perception and speech-production skills (the coefficients of correlation: 0.46 and 0.45)



**Figure 1.** *Trilingual self-concept*

Theoretically the trilingual existence implies the capability of using all the three languages in the everyday relations in accordance with the speaker’s “communicative, socio-cultural pretensions” (Bartha 1999. 40.).

The analysis of the turning-points and characteristics of language acquisition aimed the identification of the dominant phases of the learning of language. Except in the case of 4% of the sample (originating from mixed families), we can speak firstly about socialization in native language. This is coupled with the institutional acquirement of Romanian language (for 30% in the nursery-school and for 60% in primary school) while the learning of a third language usually is started at 7-9 years old.

In the case of 14% of the pupils ask we can speak of early learning of English (at 3-6 years). 56% of the answers speak of institutionalized learning of Romanian, 22% mention assistance by the family (i.e. with the help of father, mother or siblings), 4% was aided by the television and also 4% by the favourable environment (e.g. training, neighbourhood, Romanian cities, friends, market, etc.). They

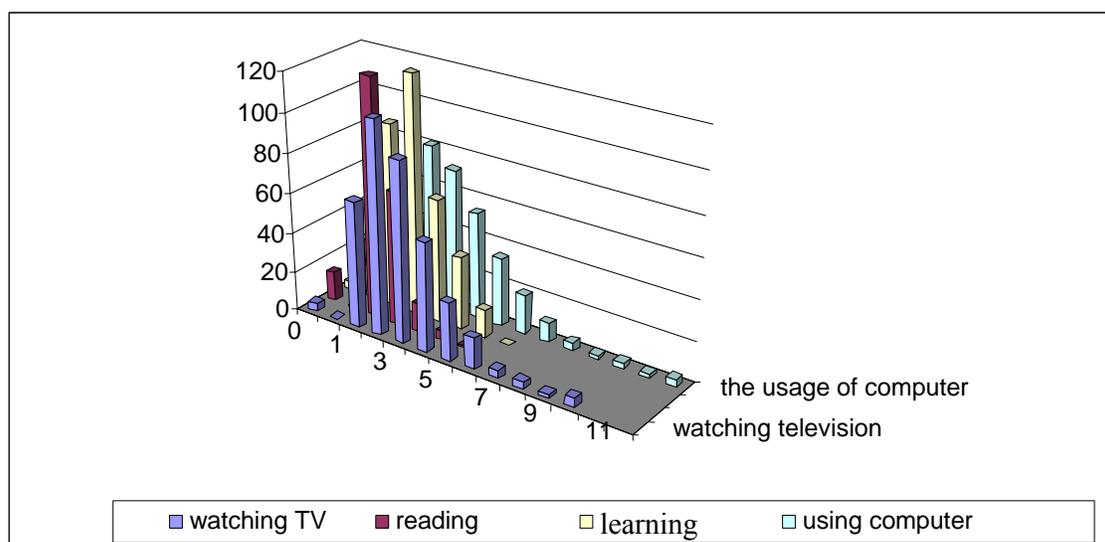
learn English in school and other institutional frameworks (84%), 5% mention the use of internet and television, while 2% invoke the help given by siblings or parents.

The quantitative indexes of the answers emphasize the organized and institutionalized character of secondary and foreign language acquisition, while the influence of spontaneous learning situations is very small. Therefore in the creation and maintenance of motivated learning attitude the experiences of school constitute the basic structuring factor, conferring a great responsibility to the planning of how the learning process should be lead.

## 6. The usage of language and reading

In the formation value-orientation of habits of reading a special role is played by the models of behaviour offered by the family background.

The figure below presents the average time spent by the pupils from the sample on learning, watching television, reading and working on computer. The values in the figure clearly show that the principal activities are media-consumption and using the computer while in the case of reading we can witness the largest proportion of refusal or lack of interest. The individuals interviewed spend more time on watching television or using computer than on reading and studying. The indexes related to the former two activities correspond to the main attitudes of the Transylvanian youth (Kiss–Barna–Sólyom, 2008.). In the context of the pursuit to organize the process of teaching it is essential to handle the increasing tendencies of media-consumption and computer usage as well as to utilize properly in the context of teaching the motivating factors offered by these mediums.



**Figure 2.** *How much time do you spend daily on watching television?  
How much time do you spend daily on reading?  
How much time do you spend daily on learning?  
How much time do you spend daily on using computer?*

Regarding the habits of reading in a family our data shows that according to the evaluation of the research subjects the mothers read the most (35.6%), they are followed by the answering pupils themselves (17.5%), the siblings (14.5%) and the fathers (13.3%). 1.6% of the pupils interviewed claim that in their families nobody reads. Examining the frequency of reading our sample displays the following modes of attitude: 14.80% read daily, 15.70% regularly, 55.40% periodically, and 14.10% do not read at all.

The information analysed so far outline two subcategories of children after graduating primary school, namely pupils without experience of reading and pupils with diversified experiences of reading. The efficient handling of these two types of attitudes poses a great challenge and raises new questions. It would be important to learn what kind of background configuration differentiates the group lacking experiences of reading from the other one, and what are its implication in the field of linguistic pedagogy and organization of education.

## 7. Habits of language usage and reading

The conclusions of the previous subchapters have already pointed out that in the case of the analysed sample there are two principal domains of meaning-creation, namely the modern mediums and the reading, books. That is why it is of importance to investigate which are the habits of language-usage implied by these situations. The results were listed in Table2.

**Table 2.** *Modern communication and habits of language-usage*

Mediums and languages	Internet	E-mail	Chat	Messenger, Skype	SMS
Hungarian	50,8%	77,1%	61,5%	68,4%	79,8%
Romanian	0,7%	0,9%	1,4%	0,4%	0,9%
English	4,2%	0,4%	0,9%	0,2%	0
German	0	0,2%	0	0	0
Hungarian-Romanian	5,9%	3,3%	7,8%	12,5%	15,6%
Hungarian-English	17,8%	6,6%	4,7%	4,7%	2,6%
Hungarian-German	0,2%	0,4%	0,2%	0,2%	0,2%

Based on these data we can speak of a modern communication dominated by the use of the native language. The usage of Hungarian and English is typical for browsing on Internet. Besides the mother tongue a more emphasized role is played by English in the activities of browsing making direct contacts, but in more informal communicational domains the Romanian appears with a higher rate. The different mediums, forms of reading call forth different linguistic attitudes. Table 3 summarizes those linguistic habits which characterize the reading of literary and casual texts.

**Table 3.** *The reading of texts and habits of language usage*

In which language do you read...?	Novels	Smaller literary works	Poems	Bibliography	Youth magazines	Sport newspapers	Gazettes
Always L1	77,40%	60,00%	54,70%	37,33%	76,65%	70,44%	77,10%
mostly L1, sometimes L2	16,46%	28,15%	32,43%	4,15%	14,47%	18,51%	5,78%
L1 and L2 in the same proportion	1,97%	6,67%	8,91%	51,61%	3,81%	4,42%	3,82%
Mostly L2, sometimes L1	0,49%	0,49%	0,74%	2,30%	0,76%	0,83%	0,76%
always L2	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,00%	0,25%	1,38%	0,25%
mostly L1, sometimes L3	0,00%	0,25%	0,00%	0,00%	0,51%	0,28%	0,00%
L1, L2, L3 in the same proportion	2,46%	2,96%	1,98%	1,38%	2,03%	1,66%	1,02%
No answer	1,23%	1,48%	1,24%	3,23%	1,52%	2,49%	1,27%

In the cases of both literary and casual texts the Hungarian proves to be the primary language, the different styles do not alter significantly this trend. When the usage of two languages appears, this fact refers mainly to Hungarian and the secondary language. The rates of dual language usage when reading poems and prose point to the possibility that in the case of longer texts (e.g. novels) the pupils tend to choose the Hungarian version of a text originally written in the secondary language.

The comparative analysis of linguistic habits shows that the largest grade of openness towards bi- or multilingual reading emerges in the case of youth magazines and newspapers with topics of sport. These two mediums are followed by some particular dimensions of modern communication. Henceforth, the linguistic analysis of this latter medium will constitute a major organizing principle, being a platform for further planning in the education of the secondary and foreign languages.

## 8. Experiences of meaning and the trilingual existence?

The repetition of the study's title in this subchapter is justified from several perspectives. The question arises whether we can speak of linguistic existence when the knowledge of the non-native language is mainly of beginner or intermediate level. Disposing of such linguistic experiences, can we speak about experiences of meaning or would it be more advantageous to discuss about the "spelling" of meanings? To what extent can the experiences of meaning in the case of texts in different languages be compared, if the depth, profoundness of the commands of languages is so different?

Based on the results of the research the following paragraphs present those characteristics that are specific to 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils belonging to a Hungarian environment and trilingual institutional setting.

The comparative analysis of the tests measuring the text-understanding skills compel us to formulate more nuanced conclusions, and to take into consideration at least two factors that could distort our findings: the possible distorting effect arising from the thematic differences of the three texts, and that arising from the sequence in which the test were filled in and from the possibility of the influence of tiredness.

Figure 3 illustrates the four partial skills belonging to reading. The first such partial skill refers to the *recall of words*, which contains the recognition of words, the discovery of synonymic relations and the specificities of the vocabulary. The second element refers to the skill of understanding texts in the context of which we have examined the comprehension of the meanings from the texts based on true-or-false questions. The third skill is the cognition of the *profoundness of words*, that is the recognition and explanation of figurative sense along with the identification of the units of phraseology and their meanings. In the fourth subcategory we traced the ability of comprehending the global meanings of the texts.

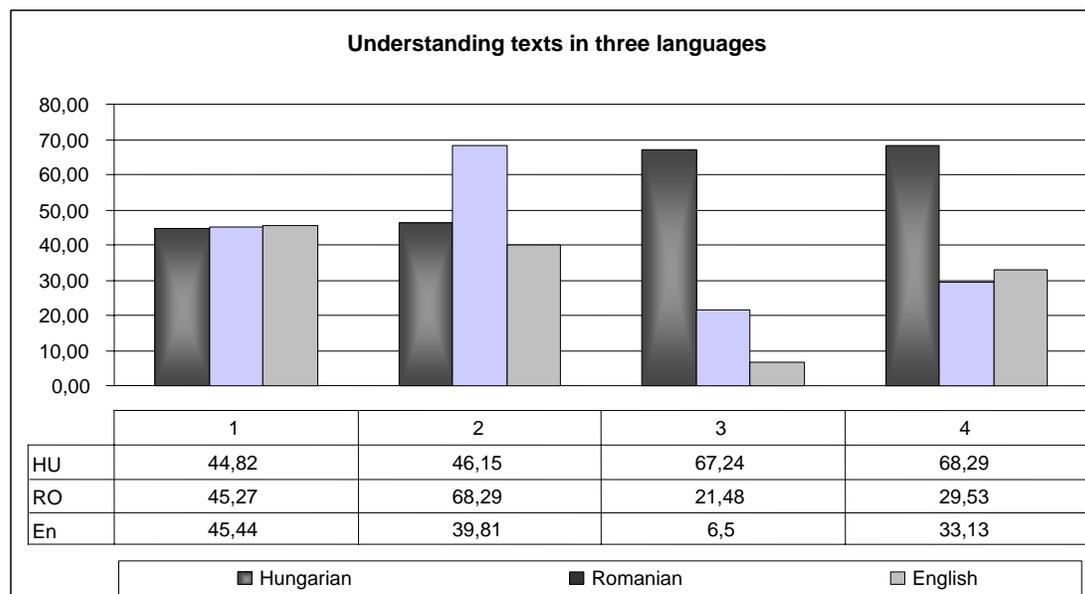
The confrontation of these partial skills and the particularities of the command of language clearly show that the primary determining factors of the meaning-experiences are the level and the quality of the command of language.

In our case we can speak about a creation of meanings based on and dominated by the native language, the partial skills being the most developed in this language.

The average indexes in the case of the native language do not justify optimism, either, especially in what concerns the first to partial skills. In the part examining the richness of the vocabulary the capability of understanding neologisms or foreign-like words seemed uncertain. This obviously implies handicaps of understanding, though the expectation to formulate the meanings might have caused problems as well. For instance only few knew correctly or could describe approximately the meaning of the word "provocative". In the case of the word "notorious" only 64 pupils could demonstrate that knew it.

The measurement of understanding in native language was based on a journalistic text. The special feature of these types of text is that they use more powerful expressions, exaggerations and are meant for effect. This feature might mislead the readers who do not conceive them critically. This later capability was missing from the vast majority of pupils. In the same way, the performances in the case of questions related to the time-coordinates of the text were very weak. Though this is not essential

from the perspective of understanding a text, still the small number of correct answers showed that this exercise proved to be difficult.



**Figure 3.** *Understanding texts in three languages*

In the case of the texts in Romanian, the understanding of some parts of the basic text is proved by the feedbacks on the level of word and smaller sentences. The capability of summarizing the text and formulating its message has a much lower efficiency. The most fruitfully resolved exercise was the separation of true-false propositions, probably because these kinds of exercises were already met in the school. In the same time, this type of exercises can be resolved with a mere superficial understanding of the texts. The most frequently missing answers are in the case of the interpretation of special expressions, elements of phraseology, but it is very common (60%) the complete refusal of the exercise when the requirement is the short synthesis of the text's meaning.

In the English test the exercises measuring the profoundness of words and asking the searching of synonyms from the text proved to be the most complicated. Basically, many pupils had difficulties even in the understanding of the exercise, thus the weak performance is not surprising.

Summing up the observations regarding the path of meaning-discovery in the three languages, we can state that the cases of the three languages imply a three-level meaning-exploration: a comprehension in the native language, a literal understanding in the secondary language and a selective literal understanding in foreign language. The profound correlation of the indexes reflects the quality of the primary education's result, the efficiency of this process, and the effectiveness of the conduct of learning.

The qualitative checking of the data presented above denote that the reading of texts written in particular languages can be characterized by specific techniques of understanding and work. There are, however, such established forms of reading (e.g. browsing or selective reading) and attitude (e.g. the interest in a certain type of text) that can be applied regardless of language.

## 9. Conclusions

The results of the research point to an "introverted" trilingual existence in the case of 15-16-year old Hungarian pupils, as their native language-based process of knowledge acquirement is supplemented by a receptive opening in secondary and foreign languages. The reading of modern mediums, literary and journalistic texts is based on the native language, which in several occasions (mostly in the cases

of literary works) plays an mediator role facilitating the comprehension as a text in non-native language is read in native language. The patronizing presence of the mother tongue in the exploration of meanings assists the understanding of the Other and in the same time set it back, because through “translation” the common experience of meaning is lost. Using the idea of Wittgenstein, in order to understand the Other we have to become the Other, thus, the reading presupposes not only understanding but also cognition as well as self-knowledge.

The findings of our research exemplify diversity of the habits of reading, and reveal the subgroup of “those without experiences of meaning” as well as the important role of the media and the computer. In this sense, we think that the experience of reading in the context of school might be the only determining, structuring and value-shaping medium, consequently this situation implies learning and guidance of reading with quality.

The reading and exploration of meaning in languages of different status have certain specificities which can be interpreted primarily along the profoundness of the command of language. We also think that only certain dimension of the performances of text-understanding in different languages can be compared (exactly because of the linguistic specificities): for instance the state of development of the different partial skill. However there are aspects (like the *profoundness of word*) in case of which a comparative analysis would not provide relevant conclusions.

Our research results clearly show that we can speak about a phenomenon of transfer in the case of the partial skills of reading. The quality of the recall of these depends highly on the command of language. In this manner, the institutionalized education in native language plays a major role in the conscious developing of these reading skills and in the establishment of reading strategies. Especially in the case of the studied bi(tri)lingual pupils, it can also constitute the basis for further linguistic improvement and intercultural openness.

In the understanding of the Other the reference to the native language is primordial, i.e. the reference to cultural knowledge and experiences obtained through the mother tongue. When reading in secondary or foreign language we can speak about a special process of meaning-exploration. The accentuated moment of this process are the literal/ verbatim understanding, then understanding the Non-Ego with native language mediation, cognition and self-awareness (i.e. the emergence of the Other as Alter Ego) and the recognition of the Ego as a Non-Ego for the Other.

## Literature

- [1] Bárdos, Jenő (2000). *Az idegen nyelvek tanításának elméleti alapjai és gyakorlata*. Budapest, Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó.
- [2] Bartha, Csilla (1999). *A kétnyelvűség alapkérdései*. Budapest, Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó.
- [3] Bloomfield, Leonard (1933). *Language*. New York, Holt Rinehart and Winston.
- [4] Cs. Czachesz, Erzsébet és Vidákovich, Tibor (1996) A családi-kulturális tényezők hatása az olvasás elsajátítására. *Magyar Pedagógia* 1996-1, 34-44.
- [5] Erdélyi, Árpád (2006). Anyanyelvi és idegen nyelvi olvasásmegértés. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, no. 7-8.
- [6] Erdélyi, Árpád (2007). Az idegen nyelvi szövegértés az olvasási és nyelvhasználati szokások tükrében Vizsgálat a magyar-német kisebbségi oktatást folytató gimnáziumokban. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 2007-10, 51-67.
- [7] Gadamer, Hans-Georg (1984). *Igazság és módszer*. Budapest, Gondolat.
- [8] Gass, S. M; Selinker, L. (2001). *Second language acquisition. An introductory course*, (2nd ed), Hillsdale, Lawrence Erlbaum.
- [9] Gósy, Mária (2005). *Pszicholingvisztika*. Budapest, Osiris.

- [10] Grosjean, Francois (1982). *Life with Two Languages. An Introduction to Bilingualism*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- [11] Grosjean, Francois (1998). Studying bilinguals: Methodological and conceptual issues. In: *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 131-149 p.
- [12] Gyarmarhy, Éva-Smythe, Ian (2000). Többsnyelvűség és az olvasási zavarok. *Erdélyi Pszichológiai Szemle*, Kolozsvár, 2000/4., 63-77.
- [13] Kiss, Tamás-Barna Gergő- Sólyom, Zsuzsa (2008). *Erdélyi magyar fiatalok 2008. Közvélemény-kutatás az erdélyi magyar fiatalok társadalmi helyzetéről és elvárásairól*. Összehasonlító gyorsjelentés, Műhelytanulmányok 2008-12, Kolozsvár, Nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet.
- [14] Laczkó, Mária (2007). A szóelőhívási folyamatban és a szóértési nehézségekben mutatkozó nyelvi hátrány, *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 2007-12, 53-66.
- [15] Laczkó, Mária (2008a). A szövegértési nehézségek háttérben meghúzódó részkészségekről egy vizsgálat tükrében. *Alkalmazott nyelvtudomány*, VIII./ 1-2., 102-120.
- [16] Laczkó, Mária (2008b). Anyanyelvi szövegértés és grammatikai tudás, *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 2008-1, 12-22.
- [17] Mann, A. V. (2003). Word reading and reading-related skills in adolescents with Williams Syndrome. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 2003-44, 576-587.
- [18] Nagy, Attila (2001). Olvasásfejlesztés, könyvtárhasználat- kritikus gondolkodás. Budapest, Osiris.
- [19] Navracscics, Judit (2007). *A kétnyelvű mentális lexikon*. Budapest, Balassi.
- [20] Pamfil, Alina (2003). *Limba și literatura română în gimnaziu. Structuri didactice deschise*. Kolozsvár, Paralela 45.
- [21] Pléh, Csaba (1998). *A mondatmegértés a magyar nyelvben*. Budapest, Osiris.
- [22] Simon, Orsolya (2001). Ötödik és hatodik osztályosok szövegértési mutatói. *Iskolakultúra*, 11. sz. 92–100 p.
- [23] Tódor, Erika Mária (2009). Többsnyelvű lét, tanulási motivációk, tudás alapú társadalom. *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 2009/4 , 72-83.
- [24] Torgensen, J.K. (eds) (2004). *Psychological and Educational Perspectives on Learning Disabilities*. New York, Academic Press.
- [25] Wallace, Catherine (1993). *Reading*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

### Author

**Erika Mária Tódor**, Sapientia University, Faculty of Business and Humanities, Miercurea-Ciuc, Romania, e-mail: [todor.erika@yahoo.com](mailto:todor.erika@yahoo.com)

