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**Author(s):** Laihonen, Petteri; Tódor, Erika-Mária

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**The changing schoolscape in a Szekler village in Romania: signs of diversity in rehungarization**

**Petteri Laihonen and Erika-Mária Tódor**

*Corresponding Author:* Petteri Laihonen, University of Jyväskylä, Centre for Applied

Language Studies and Department of Languages

P.O. Box 35, 40014 University of Jyväskylä, Finland

petteri.laihonen@jyu.fi, +358 408053838

Erika-Mária Tódor, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Faculty of Economy and Hungarian Sciences, Miercurea-Ciuc, Department of Human Sciences

Miercurea Ciuc, județul Harghita, Piața Libertății nr. 1., 530104, Romania

todor.erika@yahoo.com, +40 745276308

**Abstract:**

In this paper, we explore the connections between a linguistic landscape and language ideologies in an elementary school in a village within the Hungarian region of Szeklerland in Romania. This ‘schoolscape’ is analyzed as a display or materialization of the ‘hidden curriculum’ regarding the construction of linguistic and cultural identities. We draw on fieldwork carried out in 2012 and 2013 and examine two dimensions of change in progress: (1) changes in the use of Hungarian and Romanian as languages of teaching and learning and as languages of written administration; (2) changes in the display of these languages in the schoolscape. Since 1990, there has been a tendency towards rehungarization of the schoolscape and a conscious replacing of Romanian signs from the dictatorship period with Hungarian signs. Cultural symbols have a local Szekler connotation. New traditions and emblems on display show how the rehungarization process has had new momentum recently. With regards to language, the schoolscape is characterized by clear dominance of standard

Hungarian over Romanian, while the local Hungarian vernacular is hidden from the schoolscape. The scope of rehungarization in the schoolscape can be explained by the fact that the hegemony of the Hungarian language use was never challenged locally.

**Keywords:** language ideologies, minority education, linguistic landscape, qualitative research, Romania, Hungarian language

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### **Introduction**

According to Heller (2006, 16), minority language medium schools are ‘sites of struggle over state versus local control’. Local ideologies and practices are negotiated locally whereas national ones are often externally imposed on educational institutions (Langman 2012, 247). In contexts where formerly centralized structures of education and the imposition of a national language have been eased, the speakers of minority languages have often reclaimed symbolic, public educational spaces (Azurmendi, Larrañaga and Apalategi 2008). Our paper asks, to what extent is a rehungarization of educational space in Romania taking place? We also ask how political transition and the processes involved in national and local

identification have changed the ways in which languages are conceptualized and actually employed in a local ‘schoolscape’ (Brown 2012).

Through visual images, the schoolscape in this study indexes ‘trajectories’ (Heller 2006) of recent political, sociocultural and economic changes in the life of a village within the Szeklerland region in Romania. Since 1989, the most significant of these changes has been the transformation of Romania from a centralized dictatorship (1971–1989) towards a liberal economy and democratic culture where local initiatives can gain more space. Romania joined the EU in 2007, which further enhanced this process. Before 1989, various authoritarian symbolic displays were imposed from above and the Romanian language dominated the linguistic landscape. Since transition (1989), the ‘rehungarization’ of certain areas of the curriculum has been set as a goal by the local Hungarian elite in order to achieve the highest possible level of literacy in Hungarian, and to gain latitude for symbolic displays of Hungarian identity in Romania (Péntek 2011).

The school in Csíkszentdomokos (Romanian: Sândominic) was chosen, since Romanian has very little currency in spoken realms in the village. According to the latest Romanian census in 2011, 99% of the 6000 inhabitants in the village were Hungarian first-language speakers. We draw on fieldwork carried out in 2012 and 2013 and examine two dimensions of change in progress: (1) changes in the use of Hungarian and Romanian as languages of teaching and learning and as languages of written administration; (2) changes in the display of these languages and national and local symbols. That is, we aim to explore semiotic landscapes and how they reflect and reproduce language ideologies in a minority school.

In this paper, we first provide a contextualization of the research. We give details on the historical formation of Hungarian and Szekler identity and on education in the village as well. Secondly, we present our study and discuss relevant theory and method. Thirdly, we

analyze the signage that we consider particularly significant from the point of view of rehungarization. Finally, we discuss our findings and compare them to previous literature.

### **The social, political and historical context**

Figure 1.

According to the 2011 Romanian census, there are circa 1.3 million Hungarian speakers in Romania. Around 600 000 people claim Szekler identity, and they make up 80 % of the population in Szeklerland (figure 1; [www.ispmn.gov.ro/maps](http://www.ispmn.gov.ro/maps)). Szekler identity is rooted in the historical idea of being privileged ‘free men’ together with the nobility and with Saxons in Transylvania (Brubaker et al. 2006, 57). According to a recent history of the Szeklers (Hermann 2012, 41), *Szekler* was not an ethnic category, based on language or religion, but a legal one based on the privilege of equality acquired through military service. Enjoyment of privileges, lasting *de jure* until 1848, when serfdom was abolished in Transylvania, has produced a distinct culture and consciousness, too. The neighbors of the Szeklers to the south, the Saxons, were in the forefront of European economic and political development until the confiscation of German property and their deportation to forced labor in the USSR after WW2. Such histories contrast with that of the Romanians, who had no such status, rather they constituted the agrarian workforce controlled by the noble class, who governed Transylvania beyond the Szekler and Saxon self-ruled regions.

Towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, a policy was drawn up in the Hungarian Kingdom to commodify archaic Szeklerland as a rural touristic region by investing in its folk symbols and village architecture as something typically Hungarian (cf. Hobsbawm 1983). As a token of

this ideology, the Szekler National Museum was established in Szeklerland in 1875 to study and preserve the regional heritage of the Szeklers (see [www.sznm.ro](http://www.sznm.ro)). Even though Hungary lost Transylvania in 1920, the displays of traditional folk heritage and Hungarian heritage tourism to Szeklerland were given new impetus in the interwar era (Hermann 2012, 143–145). This image of Szeklerland and the Szeklers is still dominant among the Hungarians. According to Brubaker et al, ‘to characterize someone as Szekler is not only to convey that the person is Hungarian, but also to suggest that she is a particularly *Hungarian* Hungarian.’ (2006, 232, emphasis in original). Furthermore, Feischmidt describes Szekler villages as places where metropolitan Hungarians seek ‘ethnic’ authenticity. That is, they look for ‘real Hungarians’ (2008, 130) living in a mythical ‘old Hungarian world’.

During the Ceaușescu campaign to industrialize Romania (c. 1971–1989), a nearby mining town, Balan was built with block houses. Before 1989 the mine was a prestigious working place providing a sense of socio-economic security for the miners. Romanians moved in to work there and it became the only major Romanian majority town in the area (Péter 2006). The mine was an important workplace for the male population of Csíkszentdomokos, too. However, in our interviews, many research participants recalled the different serious diseases that the miners suffered. Since the transition (1989), the mine has been closed and most inhabitants of Balan have become unemployed. Almost half of the 1990 population of Balan had left the region by 2011. With the disappearance of the mine, there is no clear site for socio-economic advancement connected to the use of Romanian in the vicinity.

The village in our study had about six thousand inhabitants in 2011, it is self-sufficient in services, having shops, banks and a large market place. Some inhabitants leave the village for work on a daily basis, mainly to two small towns nearby. There are several small-scale enterprises in the village, which provide work for the villagers.

The villagers are primarily Roman Catholic. In Transylvania, religion and ethnicity are seen as interconnected. Roman Catholics are overwhelmingly Hungarian and Romanians are overwhelmingly Eastern Orthodox. In this way, religion constitutes a basic border between Hungarians and Romanians, which is still significant, since Romania is among the most religious European countries (Brubaker et al 2006, 277–281). In our fieldwork, we found that the Catholic Church was a prominent place for the display of Hungarian and Szekler ethnicity. Szekler and Hungarian hymns were sung at the conclusion of services. Catholicism was also highly visible in day to day cultural practices in the village.

With the new mobility brought about by the opening of the borders after 1989, there were many villagers who went to work in Hungary for different periods of time and some moved there permanently. The dwindling number of inhabitants in Csíkszentdomokos (from 6500 in 2001 to 6000 in 2011) is explained with reference to this outward migration to Hungary, which was the main means of socio-economic advancement in 2012.

Among the Szekler, living mainly in areas where they form the majority, Hungarian is clearly the first language. Their repertoires include Hungarian literacy, a vernacular variety of Hungarian as well as some informal and formal registers of Hungarian. Competence in the national, official language can be quite limited. In a Szeklerland survey carried out in 2004 (Bíró and Zsigmond 2005, 145), 6.2 % of Hungarians answered that they had no command of Romanian whatsoever and 15 % that they understood but could not speak Romanian. In Csíkszentdomokos the use of any language other than Hungarian in face to face interaction can rarely be witnessed.

The school is among the first places where pupils encounter Romanian. Comparing Romanian to additional languages, such as English, taught in the school, Tódor established that the pupils generally found Romanian easier and were more motivated to study it than English, due to the fact that they were more exposed to Romanian than English and would

need Romanian in their future lives. According to a questionnaire administered by Tódor, only 4 out of 66 pupils used Romanian in the family. Most (51/66) pupils stated that they would address strangers in Hungarian. Romanian was used mainly for travel (38/66) and shopping (23/66) outside the village. In group discussions, conducted by Tódor, the children told various stories about their failure to use Romanian in these situations.

### **History of education in the village**

Children in Csíkszentdomokos were taught by the Catholic Church until 1910 when the elementary school was taken over by the Hungarian state. In 1918 the elementary school was taken over by the Romanian state, and soon the language of instruction was changed to Romanian (Balázs 1999, 232). However, a Catholic elementary school, with Hungarian as the language of instruction, was soon re-established. In the interwar period, the Hungarian church schools in Transylvania served as vehicles of ethnic reproduction, whereas state schools aimed to assimilate Hungarians into the majority culture through Romanian medium education (Brubaker et al. 2006, 278).

Between 1941 and 1944, Szeklerland was returned to Hungary and Hungarian became the language of instruction in the state school as well. After WW2, the language of instruction remained Hungarian. In 1948, congregational schools were closed across Romania. In the communist period (c. 1950–1989), teachers could not attend church and a certain secularization ensued among the educators. From 1974 onwards, for the last three grades (5–8), an emphasis was put on vocational education, serving the needs of the nearby mine in Balan. In the 1970s and 1980s, Romanian became the medium of instruction for all vocational, technical and political subjects.

In the 1980s, the schoolscape was strictly controlled. It had to display the dominant position of the Romanian language, the Communist ideology and the personality cult of Ceaușescu. In an interview carried out by Tódor, a teacher responsible for the schoolscape before the 1989 revolution recalled that: ‘Every Friday I had to prepare the foyers for the next week according to exact instructions’. All educational spaces had to have a portrait of Ceaușescu and some citations from him. In the symbolic realm, measures of control went into extremes: ‘even the color of the clock in the classrooms was inspected’. The dominance of Romanian signage in minority schools such as this one served the function of affirming the status of Romanian language and culture as the primary political and cultural language. The use of Hungarian in institutional settings was to be transitory in Ceaușescu’s Romania (see Verdery 1991) and according to our interviews, it gradually diminished in the schoolscape towards the end of the 1980s (cf. Brubaker et al. 2006, 116–118).

In 1989, Ceaușescu’s dictatorship was overthrown during the Christmas period. According to an interview with a teacher active at the time of the revolution, the pictures and texts on the school walls were taken down, and for two months, there was nothing on the walls of the school corridors. That is, linguistic landscape items predominantly in Romanian and with ‘national communist’ (Verdery 1991) content, such as quotes from Ceaușescu, the communist wall calendars, pioneer flags and reports on participation in the communist ‘cultural revolution’ in Romania were removed and eventually replaced with the coat of arms of Romania, Hungarian texts, Szekler emblems and symbols of the Roman Catholic Church.

On 6<sup>th</sup> May 1990, the school was officially named after Áron Márton (1896–1980), the Hungarian Roman Catholic bishop of Transylvania and a prominent anti-Communist figure who had grown up and worked in Csíkszentdomokos. The renaming festivities became a general community-building event in Szeklerland, where the new Hungarian elite could present itself at the local level (see Oláh 2000). According to those who participated

(interviewed by Tódor), the guests at the event included the local leaders, regional Hungarian politicians and the current Catholic bishop. This event is documented with photographs and texts in the main entrance of the school today. It symbolized the swift reunion of the Catholic Church and the school. While this school is still officially a state school, each classroom has a crucifix. Across Romania as whole, the Orthodox Church reasserted its position as the *de facto* state religion in Romania after 1989 (Benő and Szilágyi 2005, 142). This new positioning of the Orthodox Church opened up some spaces for minority churches too, including displays of religious affiliation in public schools.

### **Theory, method and data**

Brown (2012) has proposed the term *schoolscape* to cover the school-based material environment where text, sound, images and artifacts “constitute, reproduce, and transform language ideologies” (282). The schoolscape often reveals covert or ‘hidden’ practices (Shohamy 2006) that contribute to the construction of language values or educational language policy.

Johnson (1980) emphasized the role of nation state symbols and discourses in public school decorations and artifacts as follows: ‘material culture is an index of the relative degree of symbolic integration between local school communities and national society and culture’ (173). In a similar manner, May (2012, Ch. 5) describes general, often ‘hidden’, practices whereby homogeneity in culture and language is imposed by a modernizing nation state through a core curriculum in schools. As an alternative, Brown (2012) has proposed a model of *place-based education*, which is ‘a deliberate curriculum that promotes learning rooted in the history, culture, and environment of the community’ (283). In her research on school

foyers and classroom spaces, she showed how a regional vernacular had ‘come out of hiding’ in Estonian schools.

In this article, we are contributing to the strand of studies within the broader field of linguistic landscapes (LL), which have analyzed schools as reflections of the image, symbolical value and relative status of different languages in local communities and schools and the processes of change in image, value and status. We follow the analytical practices of qualitative and interpretative LL studies. Our concept of visual communication goes beyond the traditional sign and includes all kinds of semiotic modes, such as maps and images of all kinds, with or without texts (cf. Aronin and Ó Laoire 2012). Following Blommaert (2013, 3), in order to provide a ‘diagnostic of social, cultural and political *structures* inscribed in the linguistic landscape’, qualitative distinctions related to the functions of signs in different languages are needed. In this particular study, we have chosen examples of linguistic and cultural symbols which illustrate the most significant discourses related to local Szekler and national Romanian identities across different time scales.

Our approach is ethnographic in that we take account of emic interpretations of the LL alongside our own etic interpretations. That is, we analyze the visual semiotics of the signs and the related metalinguistic discourses circulating in the research site. We draw on fieldwork carried out in the village and its school in 2012 and 2013. At the time of our fieldwork, the school had elementary classes (grades 1–4) with 259 pupils and a secondary school (grades 5–8) with 252 pupils. Laihonen, a Finnish researcher competent in Hungarian, carried out 2 weeks of fieldwork in the village in July 2012 interviewing 20 inhabitants, including the present and former school director, parents and previous pupils. During our visits to the school we photographed all the spaces we visited: Laihonen took 61 photographs inside and outside the school. His perspective was broadly that of an outsider. Tódor, herself living in the proximity of the village and competent both in Hungarian and Romanian, visited

the school 3 times in the autumn of 2012 and the spring of 2013, interviewing staff (13 interviews) and following Romanian classes along with history and geography classes. She took 205 photographs. In order to stimulate discussions with pupils, Tódor had prepared a questionnaire that was filled in by 66 pupils (girls and boys between the ages 11 and 15) on their language use practices. After filling the questionnaire, the themes were discussed together during a class organized by Tódor. She was thus able to record the young people's views about language use. In the presentation of data, care is taken not to reveal the identity of the persons interviewed. The photographs selected for analysis have been chosen so that no individual is identifiable.

### **Csikszentdomokos elementary school: signs in Hungarian**

Next we examine a selection of signs in the schoolscape of this local school which are indexical of the wider social, cultural and political changes detailed above. We begin with Hungarian signs, and then we move on to bilingual and Romanian signs. In the symbolic realm, Szekler and Hungarian symbols and texts only in Hungarian had a prominent place in the local schoolscape.

The positioning of the school, on different scales, is conveyed through the Szekler and Romanian flags on the entrance and the name sign above them (figure 2).

Figure 2.

The Romanian flag (figure 2) indexes the Romanian state, whereas the Szekler flag is iconic of the local Szekler identity. Romanian law requires the use of the national flag on all public buildings, whereas the Szekler flag is a new, 21<sup>st</sup>-century artifact that was created through a

local initiative. During our fieldwork in the village, the local elite explained its use in local events: they argued that it could give voice to Szekler claims for autonomy inside Romania and avoid claims of Hungarian revisionism, which would be indexed by the use of the Hungarian flag. However, amongst Hungarians in Hungary, like other Szekler symbols, the Szekler flag has come to be seen as even ‘more Hungarian’ than the flag of Hungary. During our first fieldwork in 2012, the only institution to have the Szekler flag was the school, which also underlines the importance of the school as a social space for the public display of local identity.

The name of the school at the main entrance (*Márton Áron Iskola*, ‘Áron Márton School’) is given only in Hungarian. The presentation of the name of the school, monolingually in Hungarian, in a salient place such as this entrance, can be interpreted as a political statement, aimed at taking a national institution symbolically into local hands. However, when we asked local community leaders about this, they argued that this name sign is no more than a feature of the building. In fact, most public buildings in the village governed locally had similar name signs. In other words, in local discourses, such signs were depicted as unofficial signs, which were claimed not to constitute a violation of regulations or a threat to the national order.

On another school wall, we found the old name of the school from the time when the village had been a part of the former Hungarian Kingdom (before 1920 and between 1941–44). This sign had been restored as: *Magyar Király Állami Elemi Népiskola* (‘Royal Hungarian State Elementary School’). In an interview, a retired local teacher expressed concern that the restoration of such a sign might cause trouble for the school in the future. That is, it can potentially be read as an example of Hungarian revisionism. However, this sign is clearly a historical relic, since the Hungarian Kingdom ceased to exist in 1946. Similarly, Hobsbawm (1983, 4) has argued, that artifacts that have lost their function only have

symbolic power. The restoration of such a sign can thus be interpreted as an attempt to re-establish continuity with suitable historical periods. Such moves are frequent in periods of change in the community when social patterns and their accompanying symbols have lost their meaning (Hobsbawm, 1983). This also happened in 1989 to Ceaușescu era's 'national communism' (Verdery 1991) and its symbols (e.g. the personality cult of Ceaușescu).

Some of the signs in prominent places were connected to the (re)construction of Szekler authenticity. The school gate (figure 3) was particularly emblematic.

Figure 3.

The gate was erected in 1999 and it is a *Szekler*-type wooden gate, with symbols of Szekler identity (e.g. the moon and the sun) carved on it. Szekler authenticity is often connected to artifacts made of wood, the Szekler gate being the most famous. Again, the text is only in Hungarian. This is a general pattern in the numerous wooden gates, crosses and statues in the village and it also makes them linguistically local. In contrast, the use of Romanian or bilingual signs would indicate a national Romanian context. Szekler gates were used for private homes in rural areas in the Ceaușescu period, however since 1989, there have been campaigns and support for the (re-)erection of Szekler gates for institutions as well as for private houses in Szeklerland. Like most Szekler symbols, the Szekler gate is also globally used to symbolize Hungarian-ness. For instance, to commemorate Hungarian immigrants to Canada there is a large 'Magyar Centennial Gateway' made of steel in Calgary, which is an imitation of a Szekler gate.

Moving towards the foyers and classrooms, we established that the texts on display were most often in Hungarian there, too. The corridors were adorned by images of local landscapes, folk customs and Szekler folk-art motives. The photographs displayed things that

can be seen as part of Szekler authenticity, with the exception of one photograph, which had the text: ‘the pollution of Balan’, pointing to the negative legacy of Ceaușescu’s industrialization experiment. Most of the other materials in the corridors had been produced by the teachers. However, in one of the foyers, children’s artwork, was put on display (figure 4).

Figure 4.

In this foyer, we could see how Szekler and Hungarian folk symbols (e.g. the tulip motif) had been reproduced by the children and put on display together with one of several images of Márton, the namesake of the school. Here we were able to witness how a visual semiotics of Szeklerness was being constructed, this time by the children. However, it was unclear how much the pupils had been guided by their teachers in producing these artifacts (cf. Gorter and Cenoz 2014, 166).

Next, we discuss a case where we can easily pinpoint changes in the semiotics of the schoolscape which indexed changes in the wider political economy of Romania. Even though most of the signs from the Ceaușescu era had been removed, there were still some bilingual graduation boards (i.e. boards showing photographs of classes finishing school) left on the school walls (figure 5). These were primarily close up photographs of people in formal urban dress. In later class reunion boards, with only Hungarian inscriptions, the people were wearing Szekler folk costumes (figure 6).

Figure 5. Figure 6.

In figure 5, we see visual representations of people during the Ceaușescu era. At the height of modernization, these were graduates of a vocational education course in Mechanics who were dressed in urban clothes. In figure 6, we see signs of the post-socialist era of de-urbanization and Szekler authenticity (people returning to their alma mater in Szekler dress and with wood carvings). Graduation tableaux such as the first one (figure 5) are typical in many former Eastern European countries, however among the Hungarians, tableaux with folk costumes (figure 6) can be found only in Szeklerland. The Szekler dress is commonly used for different festivities and folk performances and adults and children in most families have dresses at home. As the participants in our research explained in interviews, in the Ceaușescu era (1971–1989), the uniform ‘urban’ dress for representational purposes, such as graduation photography, was not a matter of free choice, but imposed from above (as part of a state-wide dress code for schools).

In the classrooms, a significant proportion of signs were connected to Hungarian history, literature and language. The pictures and names of canonic Hungarian writers were on display in several classrooms. Also the Hungarian national anthem and other examples of national poetry were on display together with historical figures. These signs displayed a distinctly Hungarian perspective on history and culture.

The Hungarian language itself was represented as a collection of grammar and spelling rules. Such tableaux are most often placed by teachers and this added to their authoritative nature. Similar authoritative discourses relating to Hungarian language and literature are reflected in the visual materials of classrooms in Hungary as well (Szabó 2015). What is of particular significance here is that they appear in a minority context in another nation state.

### **Bilingual signs**

Bilingual signage, even though rare, most often occurred in the official name signs of buildings. Official signs were bilingual in outer spaces since, in principle, national legislation imposes the compulsory use of the Romanian language for any case of public inscription, however, it also allows the co-presence of other languages spoken by linguistic minorities.

Figure 7.

In most official name signs, such as that in figure 7, the Romanian inscription was placed in what Scollon and Scollon (2003) called the preferred position. Following local regulations, it had to be either above or on the right of the Hungarian text. The name of the school was foregrounded in the sign in figure 7. ‘Márton Áron’ is only in Hungarian, which again indicates the symbolic importance of the naming of this institution. Here the use of a Hungarian name in larger size seems to achieve a partial rehungarization. In locally produced documents, Márton Áron’s name was spelled with appropriate Hungarian diacritics (‘Márton Áron’). In other documents, produced by state institutions the Hungarian diacritics were dropped (‘Marton Aron’), thus diminishing the Hungarian image of the name.

Inside the school, bilingual signage on the walls often indicated different parts of the school and the names of rooms, such as the library or the accounts department (Hungarian: *könyvelőség*, Romanian: *contabilitate*). According to teachers in our study, these signs had been put up as a means of orienting potential Romanian visitors. However, these signs were different from the signs produced by the Ministry of Education in that they had Hungarian in preferred position, above the Romanian text. Such signs served two purposes: that of giving status to Hungarian, and that of helping children to learn the Romanian expressions with the help of a translation.

With regards to the classrooms, history and geography had the most bilingual inscriptions. Until 2011, history and geography were officially taught in Romanian. In practice, the teaching of these subjects actually took place in both Romanian and Hungarian. In fact, during earlier fieldwork, Tódor (2005) noticed that the language of teaching was mostly Hungarian, with some Romanian terminology, and certain passages were learnt by heart in Romanian for tests. There was no evidence that these classes actually had a significant impact on knowledge of Romanian among the Szekler children enrolled in them. Rather, as a study carried out by Kiss (2010) has shown, the challenges involved in being assessed in these subjects through the medium of Romanian added to a negative attitude amongst the Szekler towards both these subjects and the Romanian language. In the new curriculum (2011), the language of instruction is mostly Hungarian. The Hungarian representatives in the Romanian government did not get the permission to produce a separate history textbook for Hungarian medium schools, but they got to choose which book to translate from the approved textbooks in Romanian. The materials for teaching history and geography were still largely in Romanian when we carried out our study. For instance, most maps still had only Romanian place names. However, the teachers had prepared bilingual lists of geographical terms for the geography of Romania (figure 8).

Figure 8.

In figure 8 we can see that the preferred language of the list of geography terms was Hungarian, and the headings were only in Hungarian. Hungarian place names had been ‘translated’ into Romanian. This rehungarization practice also puzzled some of the teachers. In the interviews they expressed doubts, as to whether there still is a need to teach the geography of all Romanian regions in Hungarian, since the Hungarian place names for the

Transcarpathian territories of Romania are seldom in use beyond Hungary. For instance, one history teacher said: ‘The Battle of *Vaslui* cannot be said in Hungarian’. The Hungarian place name for *Vaslui* in Moldavia is *Vászló*. It has a foreign connotation even for Hungarian educators in Transylvania. In this manner, some rehungarized place names did not fit ‘linguistic reality’ (Gorter and Cenoz 2014: 167) among the villagers, and educators saw little need to change such practices when a Romanian term had become part of local Hungarian use.

### **Signs in Romanian**

The teaching of Romanian language and literature begins from class one in all schools in Romania. In the school in our study, the schoolscape elements associated with the teaching of Romanian were far less prominent than those for the teaching of Hungarian. The signs in Romanian were often administrative signs and documents referring to places and issues outside the school. These included, for instance, notices by the School Inspectorate or Ministry of Education. Such materials had been sent from central state offices and they were at times explained by the teachers to the children, at least in cases when they were relevant to the daily life of the school. For example, in the case of acceptance to secondary education – most often to Hungarian medium high-schools – the official applications and letters of acceptance posted on school noticeboards were only in Romanian, the language of educational administration.

As mentioned earlier, most of the classroom materials, maps and portraits pertaining to the history and geography of Romania were still in Romanian. In the past, as various teachers argued in our study, the Romanian language predominated, along with a Romanian perspective, in historical materials. In order to construct unity and solidarity, the teaching of

national history in a normative, uniform way in all schools is, of course, commonplace (cf. Gordon 2005). However, according to the adults interviewed by Laihonen, there were several problems in teaching the history of Romania from a Romanian perspective in Hungarian medium schools. These adults recalled rejecting the Romanian historical narrative because of the exclusionary or negative way in which it represented Hungarians. The privileged story of Szekler identity was foregrounded instead as the preferred ethno-historical narrative. For the children, who were interviewed by Tódor, the language of instruction was the most immediate concern. These children stressed that they could at last understand what was being taught, when the subject was being presented in Hungarian. There has now been official acknowledgement of the fact that there are two accounts of the history of the region. Hungarian schools now have the right to teach the history and traditions of the Hungarian minority in sixth and seventh grades.

New teaching aids for history have also been produced in Hungarian in Romania by different Hungarian associations. They incorporate a Hungarian perspective. This contrasts with the Romanian historical narrative in a number of ways. For instance, the historical teaching aids in Romanian focus on events that took place to the east of Transylvania, whereas the new teaching aids in Hungarian deal with events related to the Hungarian Kingdom which included Szeklerland until 1918. Thus, at the point when we began the research, some teaching materials linked to the dominant historical narrative about the nation-state of Romania had been transformed into Szekler or Hungarian ones and, at the same time, the schoolscape displayed Hungarian dominance too. However, the teaching of history was, in principle, still primarily oriented to a Romanian perspective.

## **Discussion**

The importance of the schoolscape of a state school was clearly recognized by the Ceaușescu regime, which used it to impose a secular, ‘national communist’ (Verdery 1991) Romanian identity on Hungarian youth. History took an unexpected turn in 1989, and the change manifested itself right away in the schoolscape of the local school in this study. As Blommaert has noted (2013, 16), a local linguistic landscape enables us to provide a particularly detailed diagnosis of ‘change and transformations’. The schoolscape we have described here displayed the changing aspirations of the local community, while the official curriculum was changing much more slowly. Gordon (2005) has rightly argued that an analysis of curriculum or textbooks might tell little about what is actually taught and learned, especially in the case of ideologies. In contrast, as R. Cohen (2007) has pointed out, a schoolscape is a key means of transmitting cultural orientations and national narratives, typically in ways that do not invite critical interpretation. If we consider schoolscales from a socialization perspective, they contribute in significant ways to what Y. Cohen (1971, 19) has described as ‘systematic and consistent experiences to which the individual is exposed in the course of growing up’. In the school in our study, the schoolscape was clearly shaping children’s conceptions of what it means to be a Szekler, a Hungarian speaker and, at the same time, a citizen of Romania. Significant changes in schoolscales, such as those described in this paper – changes that we have characterized as rehungarization, are not uncommon. For instance, in the Basque region, a similar ‘rebasquization’ of education began after the fall of the Franco dictatorship in Spain (Azurmendi, Larrañaga and Apalategi 2008). Heller also refers to ‘refrancization’ in Canada in the 1980s, in the wake of the struggle over the status of Quebec. She writes of ‘attempts to make French again ... something that had initially been French, but had ... lost that characteristic’ (2006, 80).

According to a recent ‘history of the Szeklers’ (Hermann 2012, 167), ‘Szeklerland has gradually restored its self-confidence since the 1990s.’ Part of this restoration has involved

taking the schools into local Hungarian hands again. The rehungarization of the schoolscape in our study meant replacing the centrally imposed symbols of Ceaușescu's dictatorship with signs displaying local Szekler traditions and authenticity as well as the symbols of the Catholic Church. Some of the new signs, such as the Szekler gate, had already been created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to represent Szekler authenticity. Since Romania's accession to the EU in 2007 Hungarian schools have gained even more latitude in their matters. However, we found no significant references to EU membership in the schoolscape (e.g. the EU flag was not on display). There was also no indication that the relevant regulations been changed since accession: people simply noted in interviews that local institutions had put considerable effort into using more Hungarian in written communication and into displaying Szekler symbols since accession.

The texts on display in the school seldom display any local characteristics, rather they are standard Hungarian texts. The Szekler dialects index both local and national Hungarian prestige, but in actual language use, some features are stigmatized, especially in interactions with speakers of metropolitan standard Hungarian (Benő and Szilágyi 2005, 146). This perhaps explains the relative absence of Szekler dialects in the schoolscape. As indicated above, the construction of local Szekler identity in the schoolscape involved in the use of emblems, such as the flag, folk traditions and artifacts made of wood as well as on the folk motifs on display. However, as Anderson (2006, 133) has emphasized, such cultural signage is different from promotion of a common language, which has unique potential for the building of particular solidarities, and 'imagined communities'. The schoolscape described in this study displayed what Gal (2007, 154–155) has called a normative Hungarian *language community*.

In general, Hungarians in Romania have strived for symmetry of representation in the construction of the official linguistic landscape in Hungarian-speaking regions (Benő and

Szilágyi 2005, 144). In villages where Hungarians are in majority – even if bilingualism is not contested – evidence of attempts to promote Hungarian occurs even in state-imposed signs. Rehungarization in local linguistic landscapes in Szeklerland villages is at times stronger than similar processes of linguistic and cultural change among other minorities. For instance, with regards to the renaming of the school and Hungarian monolingual name signs (see Figure 2). As Pietikäinen et al. (2011, 295) remind us, in Western Europe, the role of the national language is prominent ‘in the core institutions of modern nation states: in the names of the schools, either alone or together with a minority language [...] always hierarchically before the minority language.’

The scope and depth of linguistic rehungarization in the schoolscape in this study can perhaps be explained by the fact that widespread Hungarian language use was never challenged in the village, and that all the pupils are still Hungarian first language speakers. Hungarian was the local majority language and even during the years of the Ceaușescu dictatorship, bilingualism in Romanian and Hungarian hardly entered the private lives of the villagers. This is why there are no explicit visual expressions of linguistic activism in the schoolscape. Such displays of explicit metalanguage are often found in Western European minority settings where the concern is with linguistic revitalization or with consolidation of language revitalization achievements. For instance, Gorter and Cenoz (2014, 161) document the existence of schoolscape texts such as ‘we use Basque, why don’t you?’

In this paper, our focus has been on the schoolscape in Csíkszentdomokos. We also need to ask, if life in this Szekler village is indeed a case of a unified Szeklerness and whether it constitutes a particularly Hungarian social space? We partly agree with Feischmidt (2008) that such a world exists primarily in the imagination of Hungarian metropolitan intellectuals. Feischmidt has also noted, with reference to the ‘authentic’ Transylvanian village of Sic (Hungarian: Szék) where she did her research, that ‘a majority of young

villagers in Sic go to discos' (2008, 127) rather than attending local folk dance houses. And indeed, in the school in our study, a disco is also organized as would be the case in similar schools in Western Europe. However, there is no trace of this disco in this schoolscape or of the other forms of global popular culture (e.g. music or social media) with which the young villagers were engaging. The same young people still attend clubs and organizations run by the Catholic Church and they participate in large-scale folk-festivities organized for Hungarian youth in Szeklerland. A complex array of cultural and ideological products and practices, of a localized and globalized nature, traverse daily life in this village in Romania. Most of the globalized products are consumed by local youth. However, it is primarily local products and practices that are put on display at the school.

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Captions:



Figure 1. Area historically associated as Szeklerland (courtesy of the Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities).



Figure 2. Szekler and Romanian flags, name of the school in Hungarian.



Figure 3. School gate with text in Hungarian above: ‘The roots of education are bitter, but the fruit is sweet’.



Figure 4. Children's artwork and a relief of Áron Márton.



Figure 5. Bilingual graduation board of a vocational class from 1976.



Figure 6. A class reunion in 2003.



Figure 7. Official bilingual sign.

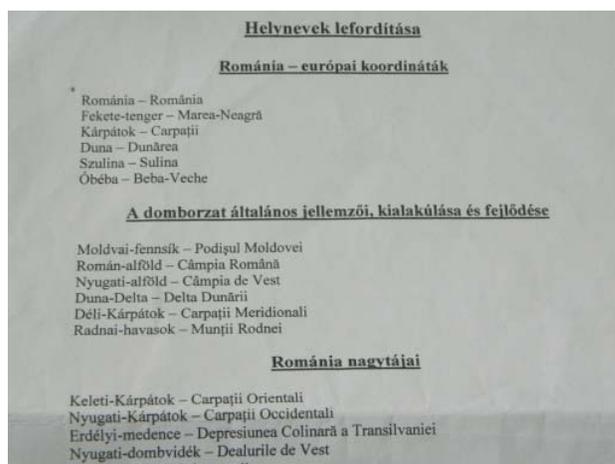


Figure 8. Bilingual list of geography terms ('translating place names').