

# UPS AND DOWNS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION IN HUNGARY IN THE LAST HALF CENTURY<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This paper will NOT address the catastrophic effects of the government-imposed structural changes to Hungarian teacher education since 1990, nor will it concern itself with the low quality of life our teachers face, or how English linguistic and cultural imperialism is resisted or enhanced by our teacher training programs. Instead, I will demonstrate how our Humboldtian/neohumanist tradition of teacher education dating back to 1872 has dominated English language teacher training even in the last fifty years, and will give a criticism of the snobbery in our academic life which deems educational linguists' and language educators' work "unacademic" and looked down upon. The traditional teacher education model was significantly challenged when, in addition to the double major<sup>2</sup> 5-year teacher education programs, 3-year single major programs were started in 1990, with considerable help from the World Bank, the British Council, USIS and Peace Corps. These new programs focused on language pedagogy and practical teacher education, and provided considerably increased teaching practice. Similarly to the Netherlands in the 1970s, this was "an uphill fight against tradition, vested interests and mental inertia" (van Essen, 1996, p.21). The quality of the programs was internationally recognized and the Centers for English Teacher Training (CETTs) became a model for restructuring English teacher education in Central Europe. The 1990s saw the all-time peak of English teacher education in Hungary. After 1997 the CETTs were forcibly (re)merged with the traditional philology departments (aka Departments of English Studies), and a lot of their achievements were wasted. The quality of teacher education seems to be under serious threat again and the academic prestige of teacher educators continues to be minimal, despite the international fame of some Hungarian applied linguists and teacher educators, and the high-quality MA and PhD programs they direct. In conclusion, I will offer my ideas on what could be done in this situation, which is aggravated by chaotic educational language policy decisions from our governments and the curse of the age-old SCHOLARLY teacher vs. PRACTICE ORIENTED teacher controversy in our (English) teacher education.

**Keywords:** Humboldtian/neohumanist tradition of (English) teacher education in Hungary, changes in English language teacher education after 1990, post-1990 achievements wasted by 2000, chaotic educational language policy in Hungary

## 1 Introduction

Most people know me as a linguist, but I have also been a teacher educator for decades. I graduated from the University of Debrecen in English and Russian in 1974. I received a teacher's degree (teacher of English language and literature and Russian language

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<sup>2</sup> Double-major programs produce teachers qualified to teach two subjects, e.g., English and Hungarian or biology and chemistry. Teachers trained in single-major programs can only teach one subject.

and literature) after 5 years of studying English and Russian, the language and its literature, and very little that would prepare me for a teacher's career.

I can frankly say that most of what I knew about teaching English as a foreign language when I graduated in 1974 I learned during a 4-week teacher training course at International House London in the summer of 1973, where I was lucky enough to have been the third Hungarian in history to receive a certificate from ITTI, the International Teacher Training Institute.<sup>3</sup> A decade later International House was able to set up their first affiliated school beyond the Iron Curtain: International House Budapest (IHB), of which I was a founding member and where I taught EFL for a decade. IHB also ran teacher training courses, and, with many other colleagues, I got my second certificate as a teacher of EFL from ITTI in 1985.

I taught English language, descriptive grammar and applied linguistics courses in 1974–78 at the University of Szeged, did the same at the University of Debrecen between 1981 and 1984, and again at the University of Szeged since 1991. Between 1991 and 1997 I was head of the Center for English Teacher Training in Szeged, and after some reorganization I was head of the Department of English Language Teacher Education and Applied Linguistics through 2012.<sup>4</sup> In short, I have been involved in English Language Teacher Education for decades. More than that: for three years (2007–2009) I sat on the Linguistics Committee of the Hungarian Higher Education Accreditation Board, where it was our duty to accredit or not all the foreign language teacher education programs which universities and colleges wished to run.

There are three things I will *not* do in this paper. First, I will not discuss the catastrophic effects of the rapid structural changes in Hungarian teacher education after 1990: from double-major to single-major programs and back to double again, from 5-year programs to fast-track 3-year programs, then 3 + 2 years, then 5-year (+1) programs again. And, surely, nobody knows what will soon come next. One characteristic of all these changes remains constant: the various programs are discarded without any attempt to evaluate their success or failure (Lehmann, Lugossy, & Nikolov, 2011).

Secondly, I will not write about how becoming a teacher in Hungary foreshadows a low quality of life (Nikolov, 1996). This has been the case for teachers of English (the most celebrated foreign language in Hungary) almost as much as for teachers of any other subjects or languages.

Thirdly, I will not deal with English linguistic and cultural imperialism and Hungarian teacher education (Gray & Block, 2012; Kontra, 1997a; 1997b; 2016b; Kumaravadivelu,

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<sup>3</sup> International House London was established by John and Brita Haycraft in Covent Garden in 1959. They moved to 40 Shaftesbury Avenue in 1961, where I got my teacher's certificate in 1973. Their next headquarters was located at 106 Piccadilly from 1977 through 2007, and now it is in Covent Garden again. According to International House History (<http://ihworld.com/history>), the Haycrafts believed that quality language teaching stemmed from quality teacher training, and they "launched the first training course in how to teach languages interactively and without translation – in 1962. [...] From 1977 to 1988 their certificate was administered by the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and became widely known as the 'RSA'. In 1988 the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) took over responsibility [...] and it was renamed the Certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language to Adults (CTEFLA). In 1996 it was updated and renamed CELTA. The original IH Certificate, which is also updated, is run at International House schools around the world and is content-equivalent to its sister qualification, the CELTA." See also Medgyes (2011).

<sup>4</sup> Soon after I gave this lecture on 31 January 2015, I retired from the University of Szeged.

2016; and then – for how the current Hungarian version of neoconservative-neoliberal educational policy aims to destroy the humanities in higher education – see Fábri, 2013).

Instead, I will

- briefly characterize the English Language Teacher Education (ELT-Ed) in the 1970s and in the 1980s,
- demonstrate and criticize our Humboldtian/neohumanist tradition of ELT-Ed,
- criticize the Hungarian academic snobbery which goes with the Humboldtian tradition,
- review the rise of a highly innovative ELT-Ed program in the 1990s,
- show the fall of this program,
- introduce my understanding of where we have gotten today, and, finally,
- offer my ideas about what can be done in such a situation if one is concerned about the quality of ELT-Ed in Hungary.

## 2 Teacher education in the 1970s and in the 1980s

In addition to some general courses in education and psychology of rather dubious value, the pre-service teacher education of my generation comprised one methodology course on teaching English, some observation of classes taught by teachers of foreign languages and other subjects, and 15 hours of supervised teaching practice. In other words, all the teachers of English who graduated from the universities and teacher training colleges were so scarcely trained as, for instance, a driver who would get a license after a few hours of driving practice without running any red lights.

A good characterization of the English language teacher training my generation got in Debrecen in the 1970s is found in Bérczes (1982a; 1982b), which he published in the university's bi-weekly *Egyetemi Élet*.<sup>5</sup> At that time the author had been a high school teacher of English in Szolnok for six years. His main points of criticism were the following: (a) in the five years of teacher preparation he had no sense of what it may mean to become a teacher, (b) most of the students (at that time) were to become teachers but were not trained how to teach, (c) neither at the entrance exam, nor during the five years of university studies did it ever become clear to anyone that s/he was not suited to a teacher's job, (d) courses in the history of education and didactics were taught in a way that made them irrelevant to foreign language teachers, (e) the course on the methodology of teaching English had very small prestige, (f) there were plenty of courses in the curriculum on developing students' English<sup>6</sup>, but very few on how to teach English, (g) in addition to the courses on literature, linguistics and practical English, a fourth component in the curriculum should have been the teaching of English as a foreign language, (h) teacher training in the university was of minor importance and was looked down on, and finally (i) the authors of the then best and most difficult high

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<sup>5</sup> At the Conference in English Studies (Hungarian *Anglisztikai Napok*) in Debrecen in 1982, three papers in a row were delivered by Zsuzsa Boronkay & Edit Portörő, György Varga and László Bérczes. All three attacked heavily the university English curriculum from the point of view of practicing teachers. None of the three papers were deemed worthy of publishing in the conference proceedings, but Bérczes published his in the university's bi-weekly (Kontra, 1989). Varga's paper was titled "Can a person with a driving license drive a car?"

<sup>6</sup> In the 1970s practical English courses took up a good deal of the curriculum of English majors, but the requirements in the lectures and seminars on English and American literature were way beyond the Hungarian students' linguistic skills. Well do I remember Greg Nehler, an excellent American student of English and Hungarian literature who spent the academic year 1974/75 in Szeged, where he would also attend a course or two on English literature. He told me once that Hungarian students were expected to read and appreciate English texts that he as a native speaker found colossally difficult.

school textbook became university instructors but they did not teach pre-service trainees how to use their book.<sup>7</sup>

Although published 33 years ago, many of Bérczes' (1982a; 1982b) points of criticism are true, at least to a considerable extent, of ELT-Ed in Hungary, even in 2015. This is so because our age-old Humboldtian/neohumanist tradition of (English) language teacher education has been showing extreme persistence.

### 3 Our Humboldtian tradition

To simplify matters, I will start this section by quoting my colleague, Parrott (1996), who at the conference on quality in English Language Teacher Education held in Budapest in 1996, said the following when summarizing the discussions in a workshop (which they called a working party):

We were faced in our Working Party with two distinct models, two approaches, two traditions, two views of the world. On the one hand was a Prussian, intellectual and academic model of education deriving from the 'Bildungs' model of the early 19th century German scholar and statesman Wilhelm von Humboldt. On the other hand was an Anglo-Saxon, pragmatic model, more grounded in practice and, to some extent, utilitarian concerns. Brought down to an even more concrete and specific level, there was an opposition between the 5-year model of English philological studies and the 3-year model of English teacher training. (p.107)

The persistence of this teacher education ideology and practice in Hungary, generally but somewhat controversially termed Humboldtian, is easy to document. József Eötvös, minister of education in 1867–71, founded two teacher training institutes (in Hungarian: *tanárképző intézetek*) in his attempt to counter the university professors' position that universities must educate scholars and scientists, and such education should not be in any way subordinated to the practical business of teacher education (Schiller, 2012). In 1922, Ernő Fináczy, Professor of Education in Budapest criticized the universities because of their overemphasis on training scholars and scientists and their neglect of teacher education (Pukánszky, 2014). In the 1980s, one of the several arguments against practical teacher education, including the development of language skills, falsely maintained that the university curricula gave too much teaching time for language skills and reduced that for literary studies. A very clearly Humboldtian statement was voiced by Sarbu (1984): "a foreign language can be learned properly by studying literature and grammar in a deeply scholarly fashion" (p.65). In other words, this is a statement about the superiority of the scholarly teacher over the practice oriented teacher, or, an expression of the belief that good language teachers are born, not trained.<sup>8</sup> The tensions between research and teaching, theory and practice, university and the surrounding society at the University of Debrecen are amply documented by Bársony

<sup>7</sup> The reference is to Abádi and Virágos (1971). Professor Országh (1972) praised this textbook this way: "[this] is the work of two very able young schoolmasters, Abádi-Nagy and Virágos from Debrecen. [...] Theirs is far and away the most interesting – one may even venture say the most exciting – English text-book ever published in Hungary" (p.146).

<sup>8</sup> In describing the hostility which the new single major 3-year teacher training program met at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest in the early 1990s, Medgyes (2011) contrasts the traditional position that language teachers must have, first of all, an excellent education in the humanities with his position, shared by many teacher trainers today, that good language teachers are not born but trained.

(2014), who surveys the tug of war between advocates of training scholars (Hungarian *tudósképzés*) and training teachers (*tanárképzés*) in the four decades before 1997, when an infamous government decree regulating teacher education came into force (111/1997. Kormányrendelet). Such tensions were not unique to Debrecen, they also characterized the other two universities (in Budapest and Szeged), and, to a smaller extent, the more pedagogically-oriented teacher training colleges.

Several personal recollections also illustrate these tensions. For instance, Medgyes (2005) tells the story of what he saw when, after several years of training pre-service teacher trainees in the training school of his university, he became a university lecturer in the early 1980s:

I soon realized that the English Department was as liberal politically as it was conservative professionally. In the eyes of most of my colleagues, the phrase ‘teacher education’ was anathema. I shall never forget when a highly-respected literature professor came up to me after one of the staff meetings and said: “You’re right, Peter. There’s no point in teaching methodology in just one course.” As I beamed, he added: “So, I’d bring down the number of courses to zero” (p.55).

To me it seems to be almost entirely pointless to criticize this ancient Humboldtian/neohumanist approach to English Language Teacher Education because of what Parrott (1996) called “the trench warfare which has been going on in Hungarian English studies over the past five years” (p.107). He wrote this almost 20 years ago, and I haven’t seen much change since that time. I would mention one thing though, which has clearly shown the difference between traditional and innovative teacher training<sup>9</sup>: most graduates of the 3-year single major teacher training programs were so much better qualified teachers when they graduated than the graduates of the 5-year programs that the latter were hardly ever hired by public schools if they competed with the 3-year graduates. This was certainly true in Szeged<sup>10</sup> and most probably everywhere else where ELTSUP operated in the 1990s.

#### 4 Hungarian academic snobbery

When the 3-year single major programs began in 1990, some members of the council of the Faculty of Humanities of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest called the program *gyorstalpaló* ‘a crash course’ (Medgyes, 2011).

In a recent article Budai (2013) has exposed how the chasm between education and scholarship/science has grown in Hungary in the last several decades. He quotes a 2005 document whose author laments that pedagogy is not recognized as a “scientific<sup>11</sup> enough discipline” by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. People who write dissertations on educational matters are often accused of “going the easy way”: writing a thesis on methodology/education, rather than, say, linguistic science. Budai (2013, p.53) also quotes a rule in *Magyar Tudományos Művek Tára* (the most authoritative electronic registry of Hungarian science and scholarship), which clearly separates scholarly/scientific publications

<sup>9</sup> See Section 5 on the English Language Teacher Supply Program (ELTSUP) below.

<sup>10</sup> My statement is based on our informal surveys of CETT graduates’ first jobs in Szeged. In the 1990s Hungarian universities did not conduct reliable surveys of their graduates’ first jobs.

<sup>11</sup> The word *scientific* is my translation of Hungarian *tudományos* ‘scholarly/scientific’, used by Budai.

from pedagogical publications, e.g., a university textbook in biology is a pedagogical, not a scientific publication.

The Hungarian Academy of Sciences is not the only institution in Hungary that promulgates the value judgment that educational research and publications are inferior to scientific research and publications. Most if not all of our universities do the same. This is why the best PhD program in English language teaching/learning in this country is part of the Doctoral School in Education at Eötvös University, rather than the Doctoral School in English Linguistics. And the same sort of snobbery has been behind some of my colleagues in linguistics departments discouraging researchers in applied linguistics or methodology from submitting their dissertations in a linguistics program. The advice has been to try an education program. In the eyes of these colleagues of mine there is a very clear hierarchy:

## Linguistics > Applied Linguistics > Language Pedagogy

At this point I want to mention that such a hierarchy is rather Hungarian, and certainly not Anglo-American. Budai (2013) is right in saying that the UK and the USA have been very different for decades. Famous American linguists such as Charles Ferguson, John Lotz and others were directors of the Center for Applied Linguistics in the US. The distinguished American dialectologist Harold Allen was also the founding president of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). William Labov and his students John Baugh and John Rickford have also devoted considerable time to researching educational linguistic problems and have published extremely influential articles and books (Baugh, 1999; Labov, 1970; Rickford, 1996). So has a former president of the Linguistic Society of America, Walt Wolfram (Wolfram & Schilling-Estes, 2006), the distinguished sociolinguist Preston (1989), the British linguists Halliday, McIntosh and Stevens (Halliday, McIntosh, Stevens, 1964), then Hudson (Hudson & Walmsley, 2005), the Canadian Cummins (2000) or the Finnish-Swedish Skutnabb-Kangas (2000). Finally, here is what Lyons (2002) wrote in an autobiographic piece:

I was closely associated with the SLAAI project [an adult language acquisition project, M.K.] from the outset and, on behalf of the E[uropean]S[cience]F[oundation], served as Chairman of its Steering Committee from 1981 until 1985. Apart from me, all the other members of the Steering Committee were experts in the relevant branches of applied (or applicable) sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics. [...] Also, as an ivory-tower linguist and armchair researcher myself, I learned a lot about the problems of the particularly difficult empirical research – methodologically difficult and politically sensitive – in which those working on the SLAAI project were engaged (p.195).

In fairness to Hungarians, I acknowledge that we are not alone: the same age-old and harmful ideology and attitudes have been criticized in the Czech Republic (Pišová, 1996), Holland (van Essen, 1996), Finland (Kontra, 1989) and Poland (Komorowska, 1996). Here is a quote about the situation in Holland (van Essen, 1996):

Despite earlier attempts to set up proper professional training facilities, until the nineteen seventies the Netherlands had no secondary teacher education to speak of. All earlier attempts had failed because it was long thought that the kind of humanist education provided by the Universities and other secondary teacher training institutions was *eo ipso* sufficient to educate other people. Besides, it was thought, teachers were born, not bred. These views about teacher education essentially date

back to the early nineteenth century, when Prussia's educational system, laid down by the great humanist Wilhelm von Humboldt, was looked at as a kind of role model by other European nations. Because of this, *professional teacher education in the Netherlands has had an uphill fight against tradition, vested interests, and mental inertia* [my emphasis, M.K.]. And the fight is far from over. But now the battle is over money rather than humanist values (p. 21).

The point I am making is pretty simple: Ferguson, Lotz (an honorary member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), Allen, Labov, Baugh, Rickford, Wolfram, Preston, Halliday, Hudson, Cummins, Skutnabb-Kangas, Lyons and many other internationally acclaimed linguists would all be, at least for part of their work, looked down on in Hungarian universities. And many of their publications would be classified as non-scientific/scholarly by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. This is bad enough already. But as I am addressing the Hungarian Society for the Study of English now, I will emphasize that not only is this Hungarian tradition and practice very deplorable, it is also utterly un-English/American.

## 5 The rise of the best ever English Language Teacher Education program in Hungary

When the Iron Curtain collapsed in 1990, the World Bank, the British Council, USIS and Peace Corps provided considerable funds and manpower to develop the teaching of English and introduce an innovative teacher education program in Hungary. The British Council's flagship program was called ELTSUP: English Language Teacher Supply Program. With matching funds from the Government of Hungary, the major universities and some teacher training colleges started highly innovative 3-year single major teacher training programs in Centers for English Teacher Training (CETTs). Their structure and philosophy were quite different from the traditional philology-dominated 5-year programs. The differences between the two curriculums are shown in Figures 1 (Bárdos, 2009) and 2.

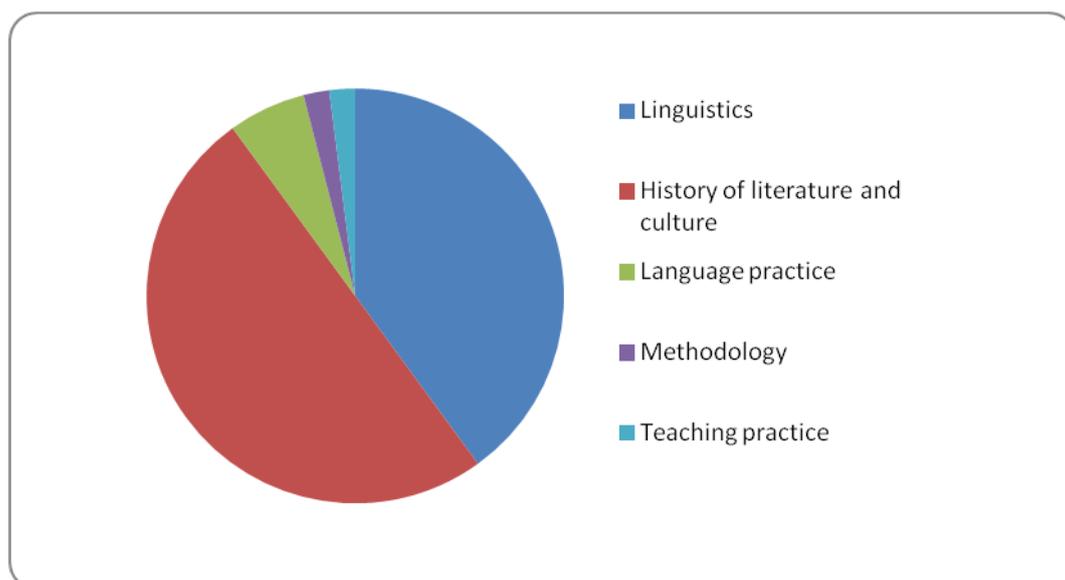


Figure 1: The proportion of various courses in the 5-year training programs of teachers and humanities students before 1990 (based on: Bárdos, 2009, p.37)

The CETT curriculum at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest had three strands as shown in Figure 2: methodology, language improvement and philology (Ryan, 1996, pp.14–15). By and large, our curriculum in Szeged, which we started teaching in 1991, was similar.

Year 1	Year 2	Year 2
Methodology (56 hours)	Methodology (336 hours)	Methodology (434 hours)
Language improvement (280 hours)		
Philology (168 hours)	Language improvement (112 hours)	Language improvement (28 hrs)
	Philology (168 hours)	
Other (56 hours)	Other (28 hours)	+ Thesis

Figure 2: The three strands of the CETT curriculum in Budapest (Based on: Ryan, 1996, pp.14–15)

Some of the major differences were an increased proportion of methodology and applied linguistics courses, increased practical language classes, and the supervised teaching practice was usually four times longer (60 lessons) than for trainees in the traditional programs (15 lessons). The content of the courses was different in the two programs even if they had the same name. For instance, if a phonology course in the 5-year program was about generative phonology, in our course we used the then current edition of *English Phonetics and Phonology* by Peter Roach since we agreed with Roach (2009) that “[...] from the purely practical classroom point of view, explaining English word stress in terms of generative phonology could well create confusion for learners” (p.81). If the study of grammar in our traditional program was too theoretical and too cursory to have any carry-over to the classroom (like in Holland, van Essen, 1996), our grammar courses were more practical and more pedagogical. As White (1996) correctly observed, while the 5-year program was concerned with the education of language scholars and priority was given to an academic knowledge of English language and literature, the 3-year program had “as its priority the education of English language teachers who will be able to develop language proficiency in their pupils through the use of pedagogical procedures which encourage active use rather than study of the language and literature” (p.53). He also made a point that would fall on deaf ears in Hungarian universities: the two programs have different aims, one is “not worse than the other unless judged in terms of the other” (White, 1996, p.53).

The two programs were different enough, and were funded differently enough, to cause what Medgyes (1996) politely referred to as “ill-feelings and grudges between the two departments” (p.62), that is CETT and the Department of English in Budapest. Such ill-feelings and grudges were typical where CETTs enjoyed the benefits of ELTSUP. Medgyes (1996) recalls that at a time of staff cuts, the question arose how many staff should each department lay off. “A proportionately equal number? ‘If we lose a single post, we’re dead,’ a colleague whined. ‘But you, Peter, you can afford to dispense with a few people, can’t you? After all, they’re just language teachers’” (Medgyes, 1996, p.62). I could report similar dialogues at the University of Szeged and I don’t reckon Debrecen or Pécs were much different.

The Center for English Teacher Training in Budapest trained more than 1000 teachers (Medgyes, 2011). Our CETT in Szeged, being a much smaller department, trained 140 teachers between 1991 and 1999. I have no data for the other CETTs in Hungary but it is clear that with the help of ELTSUP around 2000 good teachers were trained in a decade. As a result of ELTSUP, the CETT in Budapest became a model for other teacher trainers outside Hungary (Medgyes & Malderez, 1996).

Mainly as a result of ELTSUP, several Hungarian teacher trainers, applied linguists and methodologists “have entered the international stage” and become highly sought-after visiting professors or presenters at conferences, e.g., Zoltán Dörnyei, Judit Kormos, Marianne Nikolov, Péter Medgyes and others. (Dörnyei is now Professor of Psycholinguistics at the University of Nottingham and Kormos is Professor of Linguistics and English Language at Lancaster University.) At least partly as a result of ELTSUP, PhD programs in English language pedagogy and/or applied linguistics have come about. Some of the graduates of these doctoral programs have published books in Western Europe,<sup>12</sup> for example, Szabó (2008) and Bukta (2014) both of the University of Pécs and Kalocsai (2013) of the University of Szeged.

In a recent review article Medgyes and Nikolov (2014) have rightly stated that “applied linguistic and language education research, areas which used to be relegated to the lowest rung of the academic ladder, began to be recognized as legitimate fields of scientific inquiry, offering young researchers the opportunity to embark on an academic career. As a result, Hungarian authors are now regular contributors to distinguished journals, and researchers from Hungary are welcome speakers at international conferences” (p. 504).

All in all, the 1990s saw the all-time peak in the history of English Language Teacher Education in Hungary. Some of the achievements of that exceptional decade have survived to this day, others have evaporated.

## 6 The fall of ELTSUP

There is no Hungarian language policy today, and there has not been any for at least six decades, in the sense that Grin (2003) defines the term:

Language policy is a systematic, rational, theory-based effort at the societal level to

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, books published in Western Europe are not necessarily better quality than those published in Central Europe, but they certainly have greater visibility.

modify the linguistic environment with a view to increasing aggregate welfare. It is typically conducted by official bodies or their surrogates and aimed at part or all of the population living under their jurisdiction (p.30).

Consequently, we have no language policy and planning in education either. It is little surprise then that in the general chaos which has characterized educational policy from kindergarten to higher education since 1990<sup>13</sup>, no attempt was made by any official body to make the achievements of ELTSUP sustainable. When the transition to the Bologna system in higher education came, ELTSUP and the Centers for English Teacher Training were made redundant.<sup>14</sup> The CETT in Szeged was forcibly merged with the English Department in 1997, and its teachers soon became part of a new Department of English Language Teacher Education and Applied Linguistics, which was then to become one of three departments making up the Institute of English and American Studies. The CETTs across Hungary underwent similar mergers, the 3-year single major programs were stopped, and most of the curricular revolution in teacher education was lost in the teacher programs which followed. Eötvös University's CETT was the last to fall prey to the changes, with their last intake of freshmen in 2004 (Medgyes, 2011).

At the Ország Memorial Symposium in 1997 (Virágos, 1998), in my desperation over the forced merger of our CETT in Szeged, I praised what I then called the Debrecen tradition of English teacher education in the following words:

When he [Ország] was a university student, the most famous professors would observe trainee teachers' teaching practice. László Ország continued that practice to a remarkable extent when he became a famous professor. His own students, the leading professors of the Institute of English and American Studies at Kossuth Lajos University, have also taught their share in secondary schools and have written good textbooks. As a teacher trainer in a different university, where some literature professors – who have never taught high school and have no idea about the difference between, say, a placement test and a diagnostic test – have taken it upon themselves to shape the training of English teachers, I heartily applaud this Debrecen tradition, which is an integral part of Professor Ország's legacy (Virágos, 1998, p.394).

Don't misunderstand me. I am not trying to put the clock back. I am just reminding all of us that even in our country, where teacher education at the universities has always suffered from low prestige, about six decades ago famous professors would go and observe trainees' teaching practice in the training schools. In 1947/48 the following professors attended regularly the classes taught by pre-service teacher trainees in Debrecen: János Hankiss, Sándor Karácsony, László Kádár, Imre Kondor, Béla Márton, Ede Mészáros, László Ország, Béla Pukánszky and Ottó Varga (Brezsnyánszky, 2014). Twenty years ago, when our CETT in Szeged flourished, all of our faculty attended as many classes taught by trainees as we possibly could. At the same time the 50+ 5-year trainees had only one methodology instructor

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<sup>13</sup> See, for instance, Medgyes (2011): "When a new government came into power, everything was razed to the ground, each government took a U-turn. The National Curriculum could not escape its destiny either: we did not participate in uninterrupted programs spanning several governments, rather we were running around like disorientated fools." My translation of "Ahogy hatalomra került egy kormány, kő kövön nem maradt, egymást váltották a 180 fokos fordulatok. Ez lett a NAT sorsa is: nem folyamatos, kormányokon átívelő építkezésben vettünk részt, hanem vak egéreként futkároztunk összevissza" (p.83).

<sup>14</sup> Károly Manherz, who was Dean of Humanities at Eötvös University when its CETT was terminated, said in an interview, with some hindsight, that it was wrong to close down the CETTs, partly because they could have fitted into the new, Bologna-type teacher programs perfectly (Medgyes, 2011).

to attend their classes. One of the many deplorable consequences of the fall of CETTs is that we have returned from all teacher educators sitting in on trainees' classes to one or none doing so.

## 7 Where we have gotten today

The forced merger of our CETT with the traditional philology-dominated departments inevitably led to some professional and ethical clashes. Opinions differed drastically about whether we should test what we teach or teach something but test more than what we teach. Some people would encourage test-grading sessions to increase inter-rater reliability, others would maintain that it was unnecessary. And so on and so forth. Testing is obviously a major component of any good English Language Teacher Education program, but its importance, both from a professional and an ethical point of view, is much less recognized by our colleagues in English and American Studies who are not directly involved in teacher education.

In 2000 a resounding scandal hit members of our Institute of English and American Studies when a colleague came upon Jeremy Parrott's article (Parrott, 2000).<sup>15</sup> In the first two and a half pages of the paper Parrott criticized roundly the Literature and Culture Comprehensive Test (IEAS, 1998) introduced by the Department of English Literature in 1999. Students had to answer 100 multiple choice questions in 100 minutes. The pass mark was set at 70%. A lot of the questions, if not most, were multiply flawed, violating basic rules of test construction and containing pedagogical errors. When the exam was first administered in January 1999, only 6 out of 107 students scored 70% or more, but "in an unprecedented gesture of magnanimity, the pass mark was suddenly lowered to 50% in order to save face, and roughly half the students passed" (Parrott, 2000, p.36). Our colleagues in the literature departments loudly voiced their conviction that Parrott (2000) committed an act of disloyalty, falsely accused them of unprofessional and ethically questionable behavior et cetera. Meetings were called to discuss issues of testing, distractors, language, knowledge in the Information Age, goals of an English degree etc. Being head of our Department of English Language Teacher Education and Applied Linguistics, I also made efforts to clarify the issues and calm down sentiments. I failed pitifully: Jeremy was the bad guy, our colleagues in literature departments were innocent victims, and the professional and ethical issues raised were not that important after all. Well, the lessons to be learned were many. One thing I started doing after this incident was to put the following multiple choice question into my exam of applied linguistics:

*If you ask your university instructor whether s/he will give you a norm-referenced test or a criterion-referenced test and s/he cannot answer your question, you should know that*

- (a) you are likely to be tested in a fair way,*
- (b) you may well be tested in an unfair way,*
- (c) there is no relationship between the lack of answer and the fairness of the test.*

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<sup>15</sup> At the time Parrott had spent 20 years teaching English at the tertiary level, the last 15 of which as a teacher educator. He came to Szeged in 1991 as a British Council employee and was assistant director of CETT throughout its existence. In addition to being an excellent teacher educator, he holds a PhD in English literature and is a respected scholar of onomastics.

Such problems and tensions are also with us today and, possibly, not only in Szeged. In our Hungarian per capita financed universities the number of students who fail an exam can grow into an enormous conflict between teachers and administrators, or teachers and teachers. A few years ago some of my colleagues in Szeged told me that a language exam had to be repeated because too many students failed it. When I asked where the boundary between “too many” and “many” is, I got no response. Had I gotten one, my next question would have been “Why?” This professional and ethical conflict resulted in an un-heard-of practice of grading: members of one department compile, administer and score the tests, but the scores are translated into grades by a committee largely made up of members of other departments who have not even seen any of the exam papers that they “grade”<sup>16</sup>. We teacher trainers and the others who also teach courses in the teacher education program have gotten ourselves into an enormous mess!

Today, at some universities, English teacher’s degrees can be awarded to people who write their theses and portfolios not in English but Hungarian. Some of the mentors who supervise the pre-service trainees’ teaching practice have dubious qualifications.<sup>17</sup> Finally, in the latest model introduced, the so called undivided 5-year program (*osztatlan tanárképzés*, which has displaced the 3 year BA + 2 year teacher’s MA), some of our colleagues campaign for the freedom of would-be teachers to write their MA theses not on methodology or applied linguistics but literature/culture or theoretical linguistics. “I didn’t think we’d have returned to a point further back than square 1 by 2014,” said my friend and colleague Jeremy Parrot a few months ago (J. Parrot, personal communication, 27 August 2014).

## 8 What can be done?

So what can those of us do who care for English Language Teacher Education in this country? There seems to be little chance for less damaging educational policies than we’ve had to live with since 1990. Decisions will be made by politicians, not by teacher educators or teachers. What can we do when language pedagogy continues to fall between two stools: neither education, nor linguistics is ready to recognize it as a legitimate discipline. This unhappy diagnosis came from my excellent colleague, Petneki (2012), the noted educator of teachers of German in Szeged, who retired recently. “I will call it a day,” she said, “someone will hopefully start the fight again one day” (Petneki, 2012, p. 5).

Medgyes seems to be no less pessimistic. In his review of two decades of foreign language teaching and teacher education (2011), he says we are like the builders of High Déva Castle in the Hungarian folk ballad:<sup>18</sup>

“What they built by noontime, did collapse by evening –  
what they built by evening, did collapse by morning.”

(Makkai, 1996, p.10)

<sup>16</sup> No reasonable justification was offered before the introduction of this practice, but the number of students who failed the English language exam was drastically lowered.

<sup>17</sup> Marianne Nikolov, personal communication, 17 January 2015.

<sup>18</sup> In the ballad, twelve master masons gathered to build the High Castle of Déva (a town in Transylvania), but their efforts were wasted because everything they built soon collapsed. Then the masons swore to each other that “Whosoever’s wife should come hitherward firstly, / must be gently seized and burnt at the stake firmly... / Let us mix her ashes right in with the mortar / so the walls of Déva’s High Castle won’t falter...” The English translation quoted here is by A. Makkai.

My humble suggestion to those of you who care for English Language Teacher Education is that we should strive to improve the quality of English Language Teacher Education. One precondition for that, and the single most important one is that we should honestly say good bye to our Humboldtian traditions. First, because they are antiquated and harmful. Second, because it is impossible to put the clock back. Third, because they are absolutely un-English/American, and in this case Anglo-American pragmatic traditions are far superior. To quote van Essen (1996) again, this will be “an uphill fight against tradition, vested interests, and mental inertia” (p.21). If you are not a teacher trainer proper but a literature/culture scholar or a theoretical linguist, and if you teach a course to would-be teachers, ask yourself questions like “What relevance does this part of my course, or all of it, have for English language teachers?” Some theoretical linguist colleagues of ours may not agree with Gray and Block (2012), who say that “descriptions of language do not necessarily translate into prescriptions for teaching” (p. 141). But, if they disagree, that is if they maintain that descriptions do translate into prescriptions, the burden of proof is on them, not the teacher educators proper.

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