

**Language variability and contact variants
in the Hungarian and international literature**

G. Lőrincz

*J. Selye University,
Komárno, Slovakia,
lorinczg@ujs.sk*

J. Lőrincz

*J. Selye University,
Komárno, Slovakia,
jel2@gmail.com*

T. Török

*J. Selye University,
Komárno, Slovakia,
torokt@ujs.sk*

ABSTRACT

Introduction: since most linguistic research involving variants focuses on the lexeme level, the most accurate definition in the literature with respect to variants in this linguistic plane can be found. Lexical variants are language units that are similar in form (they show only partial, phonetic differences in form that do not constitute a morpheme-level deviation), and have completely identical referential (denotative) lexical and grammatical meanings, but their pragmatic meanings are different.

Objective: in the present study the issue of language variability and the topic of contact variants are addressed.

Research materials: published monographs, articles and dictionaries in Hungarian, Russian and German languages with particular regard to the 2nd, revised edition of The Concise Dictionary of Hungarian Language and the Dictionary of Foreign Words of Osiris Publisher.

Results and novelty of the research: the terminology and the types of variability based on the international – mainly Hungarian, Russian and German – literature are examined. Based on the contrastive approach, the Russian and German types are also compared to Hungarian examples. The novelty of the research is the systematization and the typology of so-called contact variants (formal loanwords, variants of direct loanwords, hypercorrect forms, back-borrowed lexemes), which arose in the correlation of two languages (Slovak-Hungarian, Romanian-Hungarian).

Key words: variability, variability, language variants, the tipology of variants, contact variants, formal loanwords, variants of direct loanwords, hypercorrect forms, back-borrowed lexemes.

For citation: Lőrincz G., Lőrincz J., Török T. Language variability and contact variants in the Hungarian and international literature // Vestnik ugrovedenia = Bulletin of Ugric Studies. 2021; 11 (2): 292–300.

**Языковая вариативность и контактные варианты
в венгерской и международной литературе**

Г. Лоринц

*Университет им. Я. Шейе,
Комарно, Словакия,
lorinczg@ujs.sk*

Ю. Лоринц

*Университет им. Я. Шейе,
Комарно, Словакия,
jel2@gmail.com*

Т. Торок

*Университет им. Я. Шейе,
Комарно, Словакия,
torokt@ujv.sk*

АННОТАЦИЯ

Введение. Поскольку большинство лингвистических исследований по теме вариантов фокусируется на уровне лексемы, в литературе найдено наиболее точное определение вариантов на этом языковом уровне. Лексические варианты представляют собой языковые единицы, которые похожи по форме (в них осуществляются лишь частичные, фонетические различия в форме, и не имеются различия на уровне морфем). Лексические варианты имеют тождественные денотативные лексические и грамматические значения, но их прагматические значения различны.

Цель: указать на основные типы языковых вариантов в сопоставлении двух языковых пар.

Материалы исследования: опубликованные монографии, статьи и словари на венгерском, русском и немецком языках, в первую очередь 2-ое, переработанное издание «Краткого толкового словаря венгерского языка» и «Словарь иностранных слов» издательства Озирис.

Результаты и научная новизна. В статье рассматривается терминология и типология вариативности, на основе международной: в основном венгерской, русской и немецкой литературе. Русские и немецкие типы вариантов сравниваются и с венгерскими примерами, при их анализе используется контрастивный метод. Новизной исследования является систематизация и типология так называемых контактных вариантов (формальные заимствования, варианты прямых заимствований, гиперкорректные формы, обратно заимствованные лексемы в анализируемых языках), возникших в соотношении двух языков (словацкий-венгерский, румынский-венгерский).

Ключевые слова: вариантность, вариативность, языковые варианты, типология вариантов, контактные варианты, формальные заимствования, варианты прямых заимствований, гиперкорректные формы, обратно заимствованные лексемы.

Для цитирования: Лоринц Г., Лоринц Ю., Торок Т. Языковая вариативность и контактные варианты в венгерской и международной литературе // Вестник угроведения. 2021. Т. 11. № 2. С. 292–300.

Introduction

Although Gak [4] examines the issues of language variability within the framework of general linguistics, in the international literature most of the research in this direction are found primarily in sociolinguistics. The basic premise of sociolinguistics is that there is no homogeneous speaking community and there are no single style speakers, at least in contemporary European type cultures. Language variance thus serves to map the relationships between the mother tongue variant (vernacular) and other variants and to express self-identity and social roles.

As noted by Gak [4], who carried out general linguistic research, in his already mentioned book, variability as a fundamental feature of language, is so general that it cannot be examined in isolation, limited to individual linguistic facts but should be studied within the framework of *variology*, an independent theoretical scientific discipline dealing with the theory of variability.

The term *variantology* also appears in the Russian literature as a name for the discipline [5, 12]. The research subject of variantology, an independent linguistic discipline, can be defined as the study of the variability of individual linguistic units as a universal feature. Within this framework, he discusses variability as a way of the existence and functioning of linguistic elements, a fundamental

feature of the language system. This concurs with Gak's [4] and Solntsev's [24] definition of variability and Yartseva's [30] views on terminological issues of variability.

Variantology traditionally examines two groups of phenomena within variability:

1. Moving from the language system to speech activity, the realization of the systematic features of language at the level of speech.

2. The changes of linguistic elements in correlation with linguistic elements with the same content, and vice versa: changes in content in correlation with elements with the same sound composition.

The most elaborate part of the discipline called variantology is, based on the mentioned correlation, the accent, so variantology developed primarily within the framework of phonology, by examining the phoneme (invariant) / allophone (variant) relationship. This was followed by variantological studies in the fields of lexicology, then morphology and word formation, which is already apparent in the research of the Prague linguistic circle. The most important subject of research at these levels is the correlation of lexical and morphological elements of language with fluctuations in the sound side and differing contents [5, 12].

It is also obvious from the above that even if the names of the discipline dealing with the issues of linguistic variability (variability, variology,

variantology) are not variants of one another, because the concept is not always defined from the same perspectives, they can be considered to be synonymous.

The concepts of variability and variativity are often used interchangeably in the Hungarian and international literature [6]. The term variability in linguistics denotes the possibility when an independent linguistic unit can be realized in different variations [1, 503]. Variability can therefore also be referred to as alternating realization, in the course of which closely related linguistic variants are created. Variability can be observed at all levels of language, from the individual details of sound and sign production to the visual and auditory processing of the linguistic signal [29].

According to Solntsev [24, 60], the concept of variativity is used in the linguistic literature in a dual sense:

1. It is a feature of language change as a result of all kinds of evolution.

2. The way in which synchronous linguistic phenomena exist and function.

Despite their differences, the concepts of variability and variativity also show similarity in some features. Individual and group change are examples. In the course of individual change, the development of a variant characteristic of a given language user can be observed, while group change results in variants characteristic of a whole group or class of language users [4, 367].

Based on the above, in conclusion, language variability is a broader category, which also includes linguistic phenomena beside variativity.

Materials and methods

In this paper the types of variants based on Hungarian, Russian and German literature (published monographs, articles and dictionaries) are examined. According to contrastive approach the Russian and German types are also compared to Hungarian examples. Moreover, the systematization and the typology of so-called (Hungarian-Slovak and Hungarian-Romanian) contact variants (formal loanwords, variants of direct loanwords, hypercorrect forms, back-borrowed lexemes) are expound, due to the few examples of the 2nd, revised edition of [The Concise Dictionary of Hungarian Language] [21] and the Dictionary of Foreign Words of Osiris Publisher] [26]. The research is qualitative, because the exploration and description of the language phenomenas are targeted.

Results

Since most linguistic research involving variants focuses on the lexeme level, the most accurate definition in the literature with respect to variants in this linguistic plane were found by the authors. Lexical variants are language units that are very similar in form (they show only partial, phonetic differences in form that do not constitute a morpheme-level deviation), that have completely identical referential (denotative) lexical and grammatical meanings, but their pragmatic meanings are different, i.e. there is a difference in their usability in communication situations in the individual language layers [18, 110]. This definition may also serve as a starting point for determining the semantic and formal characteristics of variants appearing at other linguistic levels, but is not fully applicable to them. For example, the place or method of articulation (and thus function) of phoneme variants is nearly the same in most cases, but they do not have an independent meaning because they are sign elements. With regard to textual variants, however, it can be said that two texts can be considered to be variants of each other if their meanings are the same, but similarity in form need not necessarily accompany the identity of meaning.

The Russian Dictionary of Linguistic Terms [22] distinguishes between the following types of variants:

1. Accentologic: *одновременно/одновременно* 'simultaneously, at the same time';

2. Phonetic (phonematic): *ноль/нуль* 'zero', *туннель/тоннель* 'tunnel'

3. Orthoepic: *булочная/булошная* 'pastry shop'

4. Morphological: *глист/глиста* 'worm', *искренно/искренне* 'honestly'

(here, the first three types are combined)

5. Wordformational: *полсотня/полусотня* 'half a hundred'

6. Semantic: *холодный ветер* 'cold wind', *холодный костюм* 'cold (as in warm against the cold!) costume', *холодный климат* 'cold climate'.

It should be noted, however, that the individual meanings of polysemes are referred to primarily as semantic variants in the literature. In such cases, the invariant is the (prototypical) denotative meaning closest to the signified, the other meanings that are related through a metaphorical or metonymic relationship within the web of meanings are variants of this.

In the Hungarian literature [16; 17; 18] the following variant types were found:

1. Phonetic / phonological variants:

(a) different allophones of a phoneme: *e / ä* (e.g. *este / ästä* ‘evening’)

(b) the difference occurs at the lexeme level in pronunciation (pronunciation variants), phoneme composition, or as a combination of these characteristics: *fonal / fonál* ‘thread’, *kecske / kécске* ‘goat’.

2. Morphological variants:

(a) lexical variants (word and word form variants): *csoda / csuda* ‘wonder’, *ajtaja / ajtója* ‘its door’

(b) root/stem morpheme variants: *sugár- / sugárz-* ‘beam’, *tó / tav-* ‘lake’

(c) affix morpheme variants: *-ban / -ben* ‘in’, *-nál / -nél* ‘by, at’

3. Syntactic variants:

(a) word structure variants: *javasol* ‘propose’ / *javaslatot tesz* ‘make a proposal’

(b) sentence composition variants: *A viselkedésed felháborító!* ‘Your behaviour is revolting’ / *Felháborít engem, ahogy viselkedsz!* ‘It revolts me how you behave’.

4. Text variants: variants and transcripts of a text showing a greater or lesser difference with the same information content

5. Language variety variants:

(a) various official varieties of the Hungarian standard in other countries,

(b) horizontally and vertically separated varieties of the (Hungarian) language.

6. Spelling variants that also appear on several linguistic planes:

(a) Grapheme variants: *cz / tz / c*.

(b) Spelling and pronunciation variants of words of foreign origin: *imázs / imidzs* ‘image’, *sztenderd / standard* ‘standard’; special humorous variants: *Bundesliga / Bundásliga* (*bunda* ‘match fixing’), *Messi / Missi* (he missed penalties) [9, 82–85; 10, 57–58].

(c) Spelling variants: *Nemzeti Színház / nemzeti színház* ‘national theatre’, *galántai Városi Hivatal / Galántai Városi Hivatal* ‘town hall of Galanta’ [19, 123].

In connection with the above classification, it should be noted that not all pronunciation variant pairs fit perfectly into the system, as the members of most of them actually differ only in their pragmatic meanings *nekem / nekēm / nēkēm* ‘for me’, others, however, are included in the meaning of homonymy *nēm* ‘no’ – *nem* ‘sex’.

In the German literature a multitude of variant typologies that are somewhat different from the

Hungarian ones were studied; and the two most important ones for the paper are detailed in the following. The first categorization is named after Muthmann. Although the pairs in question are designated by the author as dual forms (*Doppelformen*), but he points out in the introduction to his book that, contrary to its generally accepted meaning in linguistics, the pairs included in this category are only those pairs in which either the pronunciation or the spelling or both change at the same time [20, 4]. Based on the above criteria, the author distinguishes between three types [20, 6–9], which, with the exception of certain items in group 3a, can be equated to variants as they fit the criteria system defined above:

1. Pronunciation variants: *grob* [gro:p / grɔp] ‘rough’.

2. Spelling variants: *Friseur / Frisör* ‘hairdresser’, *krängen / kringen* ‘overturn, overthrow, refute’.

3. Form variants: *Cabriolet / Kabriolett, der Fleck / der Flecken* ‘mark, stain’.

a) Wordformational variants: *hormonal / hormonell* ‘hormonal’, *Schankstube / Schänkstube* ‘taproom’, *Kolonisation / Kolonisierung* ‘colonization’, *Missbehagen / Unbehagen* ‘anxious, bad feeling’.

b) Inflection variants: *Lexika / Lexiken* ‘lexicons’, *Generale / Generäle* ‘generals’.

The examples show well that there are more than just variant pairs in group 3a: the forms *Kolonisation – Kolonisierung* have derivational suffixes and *Misbehagen – Umbehagen* have their prefixes synonymous with each other and thus the two word forms must also be considered to be synonymous.

The other categorization comes from W. P. Klein. The author designates as doubtful cases (*Zweifelsfälle*) those variant pairs or series (words, word forms, sentences) at various linguistic levels that are used in the standard, in the case of which a competent speaker, who is a native speaker but not a linguist, has doubts since he cannot decide which of them is appropriate, i.e. adequate, in a particular communication situation or context. In most cases, the members of these pairs and series show a partial difference in form; this does not mean that all pairs showing a partial difference in form fall into this group. They do not include e.g. the agrammatical formations (also classifiable as linguistic error), or the so-called minimum pairs. It is important to note, therefore, that there must also be a strong semantic relationship (often complete equivalence) between

the two figures [11, 7–11]. The author distinguishes between the following types by linguistic levels [12, 14–15]:

1. Phonetic variants: *Senf* [-nf / mf] ‘horse radish’, *Kaffee* [‘kafe / ka’fe].

2. Graphematic variants: *im allgemeinen* / *im Allgemeinen* ‘usually, generally’, *brustschwimmen* / *brustschwimmen* / *Brust schwimmen* ‘breaststroke’.

3. Inflection variants: *dummer* / *dümmer* ‘dumb, dumber’, *ich laufe* / *lauf* ‘I run’.

4. Wordformational variants: *Schadenerarzt* / *Schadenserarzt* ‘damages’, *formell* / *formal* ‘formal’.

5. Syntactic variants: *wir Deutsche* / *wir Deutschen* ‘we Germans’, *westlich Kölns* / *westlich von Köln* ‘West of Cologne’.

6. Lexical variants:

(a) monolexematic: *Quell* / *Quelle* ‘spring’, *nutzen/nützen* ‘to use’;

(b) polylexematic: *Adresse* / *Anschrift* ‘address’, *kehren* / *fegen* ‘sweep’.

However, Klein examines not only variants but also a wider range of similarly shaped linguistic variables, which is well illustrated by the fact that, for example, at the lexical level, he distinguishes between mono- and polylexematic variants: although the former meet the criteria of variability (*Friede* / *Frieden* ‘peace’, *gern* / *gerne* ‘with pleasure’, *der* / *das Teil* ‘part, section’), the latter (*Fleischer* – *Metzger* ‘butcher’, *Mundart* – *Platt* – *Dialekt* ‘dialect’, *Notebook* – *Laptop*) are clearly synonyms. If such a distinction is kept in mind in all cases, with the exception of the phonetic and graphematic planes, then the system is (also) fully suitable for the classification of variants. In addition, at each linguistic level, Klein groups the linguistic elements in accordance with two other aspects: the frequency of use and the context of use. He considers this important because, although the standard language variety remains the reference, the elements of the other language varieties are not stigmatized (only pairs of variants are shown in the example material):

I. Frequency of use, degree of frequency:

1. free variation – all variants are used and accepted: *siebte* / *siebente* ‘seventh’, *gern* / *gerne* ‘with pleasure’;

2. partial variation – one element is more commonly used, more accepted than the other: *das* / *der Balg* ‘suede, leather’, *magerer* / *magrer* ‘thinner, skinnier’, *dubios* / *dubiös* ‘dubious, shady’;

3. null variation – one variant is accepted (from the point of view of the standard), the other is not: *Felsblöcke* / *Felsblocks* ‘boulders’.

II. Context of use:

1. stylistic variation – the connotation of one element is different from that of the other: *baldmöglichst* / *möglichst bald* ‘as soon as possible’;

2. regional variation – one element is idiomatic, the other belongs to a dialect: *Erlasse* / *Erlässe* ‘decree’, *die Ersparnis* / *das Ersparnis* ‘savings’, *Ochse* / *Ochs* ‘ox’;

3. technical language variation – one variant is idiomatic, the other belongs to a technical language: *die Niete* / *der Niet* ‘rivet’;

4. spoken language variation – one element is idiomatic, the other is used in spoken language: *für das* / *fürs* ‘for’, *Jungen* / *Jungens* / *Jungs* ‘boys/young men’, *Herumlaufen* / *rumlaufen* ‘to run around’;

5. historical variation – one word is standard today, the other was standard in the past: *Likör* / *Liqueur*, *Frömmigkeit* / *Frommheit* ‘piety, godliness’;

6. supplementary variation – one element is adequate in a certain context and the other element in other contexts: *der* / *das Moment* ‘moment’ [11, 19–20].

The study has not been dealt with the English (language) literature aspects of the issue in this paper because the authors had not found a system similar to the above that covers all (or at least more than two) linguistic levels. They had found only one example of a narrower interpretation of lexical-level variants (which distinguishes between variants and synonyms), in Harpring’s [7, 29] study (e.g. *pediatrics* / *paediatrics*, *Romania* / *Rumania* / *Roumania*), who discusses form variants within the framework of equivalence. Although the book of Irén Hegedűs contains some references to variant pairs occurring in the English language, the author mentions them in connection with doublets (etymological twins), in a broader context. She points out that pairs that can be considered variants can be the spelling (*cheque* / *check*) or lexical (*gaol* / *jail*) variants observable in a British-American language context [8, 33–35].

The Hungarian language is currently developing in eight countries of the Carpathian Basin at the same time. The program of unbordering started in the 90s, in relation to works in lexicology, lexicography and corpus linguistics, the goal of which is that elements of cross-border varieties of the Hungarian language in the neighbouring countries be included in linguistic publications in Hungary [13, 60].

Cross-border lexical variants can be linked mainly to formal loanwords, because these elements of Hungarian minority varieties are variants of their Hungarian standard counterparts: *internát* –

internátus ‘boarding school’, *infarkt* – *infarktus* ‘infarct’. Language varieties can be linked to hypercorrect forms as well. It can be assumed that a lexeme is a hypercorrect form, if it has an exact homophone neither in the majority language, neither in other Hungarian language varieties, but a phonetically very similar lexeme in language varieties in Hungary can be found (in many cases in Slovak and Romanian as well), e.g. *konkurencia* – *konkurenció* ‘competition’, *kompetencia* – *kompetenció* ‘competence’ [15, 51; 3, 78]. Language variety on the lexical level has minority connotations as well, which are related to direct loanwords, since many of them have formal variation which are not (or only seldom) used by speakers of the majority language, while they are common among minority speakers: e.g. *chripka* – *kripka* – *ripka* ‘influenza’, *dránica* – *drányica* ‘cladding board’ [14]. Variations of formal loanwords, hypercorrect forms, and direct loanwords can be collectively denoted as contact variants. The variation type at the lexical level must be mentioned, which enters the language via back-borrowing. Back-borrowing is a process by which a lexical element after a phonetic change returns from the source language (in this case the Romanian language) to a language variety of the source language (in this case the Hungarian language), e.g. HU *perzsel*, *pörzsöl* > RO *pîrjoli* ‘the burning of fallen leaves’ > HU dial. *pizsolál* ‘id.’ [2, 124].

In the following, a number of Slovak and Romanian entries in the revised edition of The Concise Dictionary of Hungarian Language [21] and the Dictionary of Foreign Words of Osiris Publisher [26] are analysed, which can be linked to the topic of language varieties. Variations appear in the dictionaries in a number of ways. There are respective cases for a single entry (*bagger* – *báger* ‘excavator’), for two or three individual entries, which do not refer to each other (*kurz*, *kurzus* ‘course’; *intri*, *internát*, *internátus* ‘boarding school’), and also for individual entries, which do mutually refer to each other (*chata* → *hata* ‘weekend house’, *joghurt* → *jogurt* ‘yogurt’). The denotative meaning of the pairs is the same, but there are also examples, where the divergence in form and meaning has already started, thus they are in a phase of word-splitting. These cases are highly interesting, since in the majority of cases one out of the two forms is only used in the Hungarian, while the other only in the Slovak standard, but in the Hungarian language varieties in Slovakia they are both present either with a partly or completely different meaning. The first word in the pair *desszert*

– *dezert* apart from meaning ‘delicacy, dessert’ also conveys the meaning of ‘filled chocolate’. However, the form *dezert* used by Hungarian speakers in Slovakia means ‘a box of small, filled chocolates in a variety of shapes’, thus it has a separate entry in the dictionary. It is clear that the range of meanings in the case of *dezert* is narrower than that of the standard Hungarian *desszert* [25, 251; 16, 75–80].

There are some entries with an association with the Hungarian minority in Romania among the ones in the Osiris Dictionary of Foreign Words, that have almost the same meaning as their standard counterparts and the formal difference is also minimal. Such examples are *referinca*, which is a colloquial variant of *referencia* ‘reference’, *lunka*, a formal variation of *lanka* ‘downhill’, or *fenta*, an equivalent of *finta* ‘blunderbuss’. In spite of this, the dictionary points to the relationship between the formal variants only in the case of the first example. However, there are also pairs where a partial divergence in the meanings of words can be observed. *Kalifikál* is very similar to *kvalifikál* ‘qualify’ in a formal sense (this link is pointed out by the dictionary), however, the former lacks the meaning of ‘to evaluate’, while the word *kolektív* (which was considered to be included among potential entries, but at the end it did not get into the dictionary) cannot simply be considered a variation of *kollektíva* ‘collective’, since it conveys the meaning of ‘agricultural co-operatives’, so its range of meanings is narrower than that of the similar standard form.

Those loanwords which are similar phonetically and in meaning in both the Slovak and Romanian language varieties must be mentioned. It is not appropriate to consider these pairs as variations, since they can under no circumstances both be present in the vernacular of a single person: e.g. a Hungarian in Slovakia would never use *jaurt* (because they would not be familiar with it), while a Hungarian in Romania would not say *jogurt*. However, they are both variations of the standard lexeme *joghurt*, although obviously not in the same linguistic environment. There are also examples, when, in comparison with the standard lexeme, in one of the cross-border language varieties a formal difference can only be expected, while in the other variety there is a difference in form and meaning as well. The word *bufet* used by Hungarians in Slovakia is only a formal variation of the standard *büfé* ‘buffet’ with the same meaning, while in the case of Hungarians in Romania there is also a difference in meaning due to the general use as a word for ‘pub’, since in the former case it does not convey the latter meaning.

Discussion and conclusions

In this study the theoretical aspects of language variability and the topic of contact variants were addressed. The description of the definition and characteristic traits of variability and variability was followed by a typology of variants given primarily based on the Hungarian, Russian and German literature. The English literature on variability differs significantly from the previous ones, so in the framework of this study it was not presented. Moreover, the systematization and the typology of so-called contact variants (formal loanwords, variants of direct loanwords, hypercorrect forms, back-borrowed lexemes) were reviewed, which arose in the correlation of two languages (Slovak–Hungarian, Romanian–Hungarian).

There are many terminological ambiguities and overlaps connected to language variability in both the Hungarian and the international literature. A description of the system of relations between variants and polysemy, synonymy, paronymy, the partial distribution of form and meaning, the splitting of words, doublets and convergent development of form and meaning based on the domestic and international literature requires a thorough explanation similar to the above and should therefore be the subject matter of another study, as also the minority proper name variants effected by the Slovak and Hungarian language contacts. It's worth to pay attention to the differences of cultural aspects and the linguistic picture of the world in Slovak and Hungarian languages [23; 27; 28].

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Lőrincz Gábor, Assistant Professor, Department of Hungarian Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, J. Selye University (94501, Slovakia, Komárno, Bratislavská cesta, 3322), PhD in Linguistics.

lorinczg@ujs.sk

ORCID.ORG: 0000-0001-7543-7758

Lőrincz Julianna, Associate Professor, Department of Hungarian Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, J. Selye University (94501, Slovakia, Komárno, Bratislavská cesta, 3322), Habil., PhD in Linguistics.

jel2@gmail.com

ORCID.ORG: 0000-0002-1748-7033

Török Tamás, Assistant Professor, Department of Hungarian Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, J. Selye University (94501, Slovakia, Komárno, Bratislavská cesta, 3322), PhD in Linguistics.

torokt@ujs.sk

ORCID.ORG: 0000-0002-3116-9875

ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ОБ АВТОРАХ

Габор Лоринц, старший преподаватель, кафедра венгерского языка и литературы, Университет им. Яноша Шейе (94501, Словакия, Комарно, Братиславска честа, 3322), доктор философии, языкознание.

lorinczg@ujs.sk

ORCID.ORG: 0000-0001-7543-7758

Юлианна Лоринц, доцент, кафедра венгерского языка и литературы, Университет им. Яноша Шейе (94501, Словакия, Комарно, Братиславска честа, 3322), доктор хабил, PhD, языкознание.

jel2@gmail.com

ORCID.ORG: 0000-0002-1748-7033

Тамаш Торок, старший преподаватель, кафедра венгерского языка и литературы, Университет им. Яноша Шейе (94501, Словакия, Комарно, Братиславска честа, 3322), доктор философии, языкознание.

torokt@ujs.sk

ORCID.ORG: 0000-0002-3116-9875