

## **Termini Online Hungarian Dictionary: New Era in Hungarian Lexicography**

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### **Abstract**

The Termini Online Hungarian Dictionary (TOHD) represents a pioneering achievement in the documentation of Hungarian as a pluricentric language, shaped by post-Trianon sociolinguistic realities. Following the fragmentation of the Hungarian language area, distinct state varieties emerged, characterized by lexical divergence under conditions of minority bilingualism. Established in 2007 within the Termini Hungarian Language Research Network, TOHD systematically collects, classifies, and analyses the lexical specificities of Hungarian used in minority contexts across the Carpathian Basin. The dictionary's database-driven digital structure enables the continuous expansion and refinement of entries, incorporating authentic written and spoken examples, visual and audio materials, and rich metadata concerning regional, stylistic, and etymological dimensions. Functioning both as a sociolinguistic corpus and a lexicographical resource, TOHD provides empirical data for studying language contact, borrowing, and regional standardization processes. Its open-access format supports not only scholarly research but also pedagogical applications, facilitating awareness of lexical variation within Hungarian. The dictionary thus constitutes a dynamic platform for examining the interplay between language, identity, and technology in a pluricentric linguistic environment, while exemplifying innovative practices in digital lexicography and minority language documentation.

*Keywords:* Hungarian language, Termini, dictionary, lexicography, dictionary use, dictionary skills

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## Introduction

Following the Treaty of Trianon, the Hungarian linguistic area was divided among the neighbouring successor states of Hungary. Consequently, millions of Hungarian speakers found themselves in new political and linguistic environments, becoming minority populations, whose mother tongue assumed minority language status. In these contexts, Hungarian-speaking communities developed various forms of bilingualism, as Hungarian no longer possessed the political authority or institutional support it had held previously. This sociopolitical and linguistic configuration fostered active bilingualism and contributed to the evolution of Hungarian as a pluricentric language. Distinct state varieties of Hungarian gradually emerged, each developing its own standard variety. These varieties differ primarily in their lexicon, while their syntactic and grammatical systems remain largely uniform, thus ensuring mutual intelligibility across the Hungarian-speaking world. Before the political transitions of the late twentieth century, there was little systematic effort to document or standardize these lexical divergences, partly due to the limited number of Hungarian dictionaries and the absence of coordinated lexicographic initiatives.

Institutionalized and collaborative research on these varieties began only after 2001, when the Hungarian Academy of Sciences established a research centre to coordinate linguistic research communities in the neighbouring countries. This initiative led to the formation of the Termini Association in 2013. One of the Association's primary aims has been to reaffirm the linguistic unity of Hungarian throughout the Carpathian Basin, a process referred to as the "debordering" or "detrianonization" of the Hungarian language.

Within this framework, linguists began compiling a dictionary to record lexical items characteristic of bilingual Hungarian communities. This effort resulted in the establishment of the Termini Online Hungarian Dictionary (TOHD) in 2007 – a continuously developed, specialized resource. TOHD documents and classifies contact-induced phenomena (primarily direct and indirect loanwords) as well as independent lexical innovations found in the state and minority varieties of Hungarian (further information on the Association and its activities is available at <http://termini.nytud.hu> or via the accompanying QR code).



### Documenting the Lexicon of Hungarian Varieties in Minority Contexts

From the very beginning, one of the principal research objectives of the research stations affiliated with the *Termini Hungarian Language Research Network* has been the systematic collection, investigation, and analysis of the distinctive lexical features of Hungarian language varieties spoken in minority settings. TOHD serves not only as a snapshot of the borrowed and contact-induced elements characterizing the lexicon of Hungarian used beyond the borders of Hungary, but also as a dynamic tool enabling both temporal (including synchronic–diachronic) and spatial analyses. Within this lexicographical framework, the dictionary seeks to collect and document – accompanied by regional labels, visual illustrations, and authentic audio samples – those lexical items, word meanings, and idiomatic expressions that diverge from standard Hungarian as used in Hungary. These include both foreign-origin and internally developed

elements attested in the speech of Hungarian communities throughout the Carpathian Basin, primarily outside Hungary's present-day territory (cf. Csernicskó et al., 2022; M. Pintér et al., 2023).

Consequently, the dictionary encompasses region-specific items from the Hungarian-speaking areas of the seven neighbouring countries – Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine, Croatia, Slovenia, and Austria. Its corpus includes regionally specific words, direct and hybrid loanwords, semantic and stylistic borrowings, calques and loan translations, as well as internally coined neologisms and preserved archaisms of the former common Hungarian lexicon.

The “life cycle” and development trajectory of the dictionary and database are multifaceted, extending beyond the strictly lexicological and lexicographical domains into the realm of computational linguistics and digital humanities. A significant milestone in the project's evolution was reached in 2015, when the technical capacity to include illustrative images in the dictionary entries was introduced, resulting in the addition of hundreds of visual materials. Another major advance occurred in 2019, when the infrastructure for uploading audio files was established, allowing for the inclusion of authentic spoken examples derived from field recordings conducted in minority Hungarian communities.

The content of the dictionary (and the SQL database beyond) is continuously expanding and improving, and the lexical material is designed to reflect synchronic developments observable in real time. These changes can be traced within the editorial history and revision process of individual entries. The scientific work underpinning the dictionary's ongoing development draws directly upon several practical innovations, and numerous studies – both in Hungarian and in other languages – have analysed various aspects of the project. In recent years, special attention has been devoted to the refinement of etymological analyses of loanwords and to their lexicological and typological classification (pointing out the fact that the editors are sociolinguists and not lexicographers).

In parallel with this theoretically grounded lexicographical work, a nuanced system of lexicological and lexicographical categorization has been elaborated, encompassing dialectal, register-based, stylistic, temporal, affective, and frequency-related dimensions. The digital and informatics solutions implemented in the Termini project represented, for a long time, a unique innovation within Hungarian lexicography. Importantly, the platform continues to facilitate sustained scholarly and technical development, ensuring that the dictionary remains a living and evolving linguistic resource (for the lexical documentation of newly emerged lexicon, see Váradi & Csernicskó, 2025).

## **The Digital Nature and Structure of the Termini Hungarian–Hungarian Dictionary**

TOHD is published exclusively in an online environment; consequently, none of its entries can be regarded as closed or finalized. The data contained in the dictionary remain open to continuous expansion, revision, and correction. One of the principal advantages of digital publication lies precisely in this flexibility: the editors face no constraints of space, allowing for the inclusion of a virtually unlimited number of illustrative example sentences and images. Similarly, there are no limitations regarding the number of entries that can be incorporated – any lexical item deemed relevant by the editors may be added to the dictionary.

From the user's perspective, the online format offers further benefits through the customizable and adaptable nature of the interface. During search operations, users may filter results to display only the types of information they wish to see (for example, only equivalents, only data from specific regions, or even aggregated results of several queries). Such functional and ergonomic considerations have shaped the design of the interface, where clarity of presentation and user-directed customization are of primary importance.

A further significant advantage of database-driven lexicography is that it offers analytical and research possibilities unavailable – or only with great difficulty – in traditional print dictionaries. For instance, users and researchers alike can access and analyse the entire dataset simultaneously or generate statistical summaries based on the corpus (just like it was done on the lexicon for Hungarian as the language of the Carpathian Basin – see Váradi, 2024).

As of October 2025, the dictionary contained 5,615 entries. While this number would conventionally classify it as a *small-sized dictionary* in quantitative terms, the highly detailed structure of the entries provides far greater linguistic and user-oriented potential than typical concise dictionaries. The dictionary documents the distinctive lexical elements of the contact varieties of Hungarian spoken throughout the Carpathian Basin. It focuses on both the *standard* and *substandard* elements of Hungarian used outside Hungary – that is, on the overall linguistic repertoire of Hungarian-speaking communities beyond the borders rather than on regionally confined dialectal lexicon. These varieties remain mutually intelligible with standard Hungarian.

The dictionary is primarily intended for researchers studying *living language use*. Beyond its sociolinguistic relevance, however, its practical applicability is equally significant: the editors aim to make the specific vocabulary and meanings of Hungarian regional varieties accessible to a broader audience. The lexicological and lexicographical processing of the material – including the structural organization of entries and the elaboration of inter-entry relationships – allows the dictionary to be interpreted on multiple levels of use. It can, for instance, be regarded as (1) a descriptive dictionary of present-day Hungarian, (2) a general-purpose dictionary, (3) a dictionary of foreign words, and (4) a database-oriented digital lexicographic resource.

The lexical material primarily reflects *synchronic* language use, incorporating a wide range of neologisms. At the same time, it also includes lexical items characteristic of earlier historical periods, such as the interwar years and the socialist era. When selecting entries, the editors apply a key criterion: any word, phrase, or sense included must be attested across a broader geographic area of the Hungarian-speaking communities outside Hungary, rather than confined to a narrowly local, stylistic, or register-specific variant.

Since many of the words and meanings recorded in the dictionary represent lexical units originating from the majority (state) languages of the respective regions, but which have since become integral components of the local Hungarian usage, TOHD can also be regarded, in part, as a dictionary of foreign words. Furthermore, it includes headwords that are also in use in Hungary but exhibit distinctive meanings characteristic of the minority Hungarian varieties, differing from those in standard Hungarian.

## Lexicographic Structure and Editorial Principles of the Dictionary

In several respects, TOHD departs from traditional lexicographical practices, both in conception and in implementation. Its innovations include the exceptional level of detail in its microstructure, its synchronic compilation from multiple regions, its web-based presentation and editing environment, and its database-driven design. From a lexicographical standpoint, the database possesses an exceptionally rich internal structure, seeking to offer a precise and detailed representation of each lemma's lexical and conceptual content.

Each entry comprises three typographically distinct parts: the head, the body, and the foot. The head section contains two categories of elements. The *mandatory elements* include the headword, part of speech, grammatical categories, and key inflectional forms. The *optional elements* appear only where linguistically justified, such as alternative spellings or pronunciation variants. The complexity of the entries is most clearly reflected in the richness of information contained within the main body. This section encompasses two distinct types of information: (1) the semantic description of the lemma, and (2) usage-based examples that illustrate and refine meaning. Additional features such as domain labels, regional designations, and stylistic qualifiers further support the interpretation of the headword. As a monolingual explanatory dictionary, TOHD provides three types of interpretive equivalents: synonymous, explanatory, and paraphrastic definitions. The example sentences play a dual role: beyond elucidating meanings and nuances, they also serve to illustrate the lemma's stylistic and pragmatic value across a variety of usage contexts. The digital format allows editors to include as many examples as desired, enabling the display of a richly typologized set of examples – something that would be impossible in a print dictionary.

Since the dictionary documents *living language use* and is designed primarily for *sociolinguistic research*, the primary criterion for classifying example sentences is *authenticity*. Editors endeavour to use attested examples – either spoken or written – while avoiding artificially constructed sentences. Accordingly, the examples are grouped into three main types:

1. authentic written examples (attested in written sources),
2. authentic spoken examples (attested in speech data), and
3. non-authentic examples (with uncertain or unverifiable sources).

The majority of examples in the dictionary are authentic (meaning not written by the editors). An additional noteworthy feature of the annotation system is that, for authentic examples, editors record the regional origin of the speaker and, where applicable, the exact source of the data.

The foot of each entry contains etymological information about the headword, as well as cross-references to other lexemes belonging to the same word family and attested elsewhere in the dictionary.

A central goal of the dictionary is to enrich the empirical foundation for lexicological research on the Hungarian language by incorporating lexical data from Hungarian-speaking communities beyond Hungary's borders. In doing so, it also documents the lexical differences between Hungary and external regions and maps the network of lexical relations across the Carpathian Basin. The project aims to open new dimensions in Hungarian etymological, contact-linguistic, and bilingualism research, while also pioneering technological innovation in Hungarian lexicography – such as the integration of audio and visual materials.

The dictionary's primary purpose is the monitoring of Hungarian language varieties outside Hungary. However, recent developments have expanded its scope to include (1) the documentation of specifically Hungarian lexical items and meanings – modern *realia* (see Váradi, 2024; Váradi & Csernicskó, 2025) – and (2) the inclusion of words used with identical meanings across all regions of the Carpathian Basin. The significance of TOHD for linguistics lies primarily in its sociolinguistic value, but also in the wealth of information encoded in the microstructure of its entries. These data include stylistic, dialectological, etymological, and contact-linguistic information, which make the resource highly relevant for diverse branches of linguistic research. Furthermore, the dictionary offers valuable material for *realia* studies, as its illustrative elements – both textual and visual – provide culturally embedded representations of meaning.

The dictionary serves as a particularly rich research field for linguists. While its public interface allows any user to browse and perform searches, the more complex data queries and statistical analyses of the underlying networked dataset are currently available only to researchers. Nevertheless, the dictionary also has educational and outreach value: non-specialist users can explore the specific vocabulary of a given region and gain insight into its linguistic and sociolinguistic characteristics, such as conceptual domains, regional or stylistic distribution, temporal usage, affective value, and relative frequency (cf. Karmacs et al., 2022).

Beyond these explicit data, the example sentences contain a wealth of implicit information about spoken language use. Since the dictionary imposes no restriction on the number of examples per entry, each lemma can be accompanied by numerous sentences revealing untagged but linguistically relevant features of speech. The examples thus not only provide a finer-grained representation of the lemma's denotative and connotative meanings but, when sufficiently numerous, also allow for relatively reliable assessments of its stylistic and pragmatic value.

A further noteworthy feature is the inclusion of illustrative images associated with meanings, typically presented in context, which visually reinforce the semantic content of the lemma or its specific senses.

Having now operated for nearly two decades, the dictionary's structure and editorial principles have remained largely stable. The time has come, however, to introduce primarily technical innovations. Conceptual modifications are naturally constrained by the existing lexical framework, since any changes to the structure of entries would affect the already processed material. Accordingly, future developments will primarily concern the user and editor interfaces – for instance, through the adoption of modern XML-based architectures.

## Standardization Efforts

As the dictionary is edited by linguists residing in several countries, certain measures for standardization are necessary to maintain linguistic consistency, since editorial work is not a common daily task for all editors. Online meetings and shared documents are used to ensure the unity of editorial practices and lexical content. However, as the editors are not professional lexicographers and online communication can be cumbersome, standardization tasks must periodically be undertaken.

In 2024, a major effort was carried out to identify errors and inconsistencies in the microstructure and to integrate new knowledge into the editorial process. Following extensive unification work, several aspects of the dictionary were revised.

At the level of the entry headwords, grammatical forms were corrected and inconsistencies in their representation resolved (e.g., order of forms, representation in compound words, and use of the tilde). Within the body, example sentences were revised where the affected word was part of a compound rather than the headword itself, and bibliographic references were elaborated. In the footnotes, erroneous etymologies and malfunctioning cross-references were corrected. In the final stage of the process, new functionalities for the website were defined, including localization into English.

In 2025, the work was consolidated, resulting in a more coherent lexicon with fewer inconsistencies.

### **Educational Use**

TOHD holds particular educational significance, as it provides learners with authentic examples that reflect the linguistic diversity of Hungarian across regions. Its inclusion in the National Curriculum highlights its role as a key pedagogical tool for developing vocabulary, language awareness, and dictionary skills. By integrating its use into classroom practice, educators can foster students' understanding of linguistic variation and promote a more comprehensive, modern approach to language learning. Generally, the use of dictionaries constitutes an essential component of language learning and teaching (P. Márkus, 2023), as they enable learners to understand the precise meanings of words and recognise their appropriate usage across various contexts. This aspect is particularly significant in the case of Hungarian, where the various state varieties have developed distinct standard norms and differing patterns of usage within minority language communities. These differences have emerged as a result of close interaction with the respective majority cultures, as well as differing institutional and legal frameworks. Consequently, Hungarian can be regarded as a pluricentric language, characterized by several national varieties that coexist and influence one another.

In such a linguistic environment, dictionaries play a crucial role in documenting these contact varieties and supporting users in navigating between regional and standard norms, thus promoting a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of the language. TOHD significantly contributes to vocabulary development by providing authentic example sentences, grammatical information, and pronunciation guidance (see Karmacsí et al., 2022). Its integration into education can take several forms, depending on the linguistic and pedagogical objectives. For instance, teachers can use the dictionary to demonstrate regional differences in word usage, helping students understand variation within the Hungarian language. The entry structure enables learners to compare meanings, registers, and usage across different Hungarian-speaking regions, fostering critical awareness of linguistic diversity. In grammar instruction, example sentences from the dictionary can be employed to illustrate the syntactic and pragmatic functions of specific constructions in real-life contexts. Additionally, as it is an open dictionary, it provides opportunities for collaborative, project-based learning, where students can collect and discuss regional expressions under teacher supervision. Such practices not only enhance lexical and grammatical competence but also develop digital literacy and promote an active, research-based approach to language learning.

In the following, a few effective practices are outlined that demonstrate how TOHD can be successfully integrated into educational settings. The first classroom activity focuses on exploring regional semantic variation through the dictionary's search functions. The dictionary allows users to search not only by headword but also by meaning and example sentence, which makes it particularly suitable for comparative lexical analysis. For instance, when students look up the headword "letér", they discover that in Hungary it means "to leave the proper path", while in Slovakia it means "to turn into a street". This activity encourages learners to observe how meanings can shift across different language varieties and to reflect on the cultural and geographical factors influencing language use. By guiding students to compare and discuss such differences, teachers can promote both linguistic awareness and critical thinking.

In another exercise, students can focus on the use of geographic labels to explore the regional distribution of particular words and meanings. The dictionary applies such labels to indicate where a headword or sense is used, for example, *Fv* for *Felvidék* (part of Slovakia where Hungarian is spoken) and *Ka* for *Kárpátalja* (part of Ukraine where Hungarian is spoken). By examining these labels for the headword "letér", learners can identify in which regions specific meanings occur and compare regional lexical patterns. This type of activity not only deepens students' understanding of linguistic variation but also enhances their ability to interpret lexicographical information critically and to discover the many sides of lexicography, including how detailed and context-sensitive dictionary descriptions can be.

Another useful practice involves examining differences in usage between general and specialized meanings. When students search for the headword "abszolvál" in the online dictionary, they find that in Slovakia the word is used broadly with the meaning to finish something, whereas in Hungary it has a narrower, context-specific meaning, referring mainly to completing studies or passing an exam. This exercise helps learners recognize how the same lexical item can develop distinct semantic ranges depending on the linguistic environment. Such comparisons raise students' awareness of contextual appropriateness and encourage reflection on how social and institutional settings shape the meanings of words.

Another, completely different aspect of dictionary use is highlighted in the following exercise, which focuses on searching by meaning rather than by headword. Students are asked to find the regional varieties corresponding to a given standard Hungarian word, such as "autópálya" (motorway). Through this search, they discover that different words are used across regions, for example, "autobahn" in Austria and "autoceszta" in Slovenia. This task draws attention not only to lexical variation influenced by contact with majority languages but also illustrates how regional vocabulary reflects social and cultural integration. It also demonstrates how meaning-based searches can reveal patterns of linguistic diversity that might not be visible through headword-based exploration alone.

The final exercise focuses on exploring word families and semantic relations within the dictionary. Students are required to find the standard Hungarian equivalent of a given headword, along with all its related words and derived forms. For example, when searching for "nanuk" (ice cream), learners can find the standard Hungarian equivalent and then explore other related words listed at the end of the entry as hyperlinks (e.g. "nanukszelet" – piece of ice cream); "nanuktorta" – ice cream cake). By clicking on these links, they can easily navigate through the network of connected words, which helps them understand the broader semantic field of the headword. This activity promotes vocabulary expansion and raises awareness of morphological relationships, while also encouraging autonomous learning through interactive exploration.

Contemporary online dictionaries, such as TOHD, further enrich the learning experience through multimedia features including sound files, images, and hyperlinks, which facilitate deeper lexical engagement. Integrating systematic dictionary use into educational practice helps learners become more independent, precise, and effective language users. In this way, dictionaries function not merely as reference works but as indispensable pedagogical tools that foster the development of comprehensive language competence.

## Conclusions

The Termini Online Hungarian Dictionary (TOHD) exemplifies a unique integration of sociolinguistic theory, empirical lexicographic practice, and digital innovation. Over nearly two decades of development, TOHD has become an indispensable linguistic resource for documenting and analysing the pluricentric nature of Hungarian as spoken across the Carpathian Basin. It stands at the intersection of language contact, identity construction, and digital humanities, reflecting both the diversity and the unity of Hungarian linguistic practice in transnational contexts.

From a theoretical standpoint, TOHD confirms that Hungarian, fragmented after the Treaty of Trianon, has evolved into a network of mutually intelligible yet regionally differentiated varieties. These varieties – shaped by differing sociopolitical environments and prolonged bilingualism – have produced contact-induced lexical phenomena that challenge monolithic conceptions of standard language. Through systematic documentation of these forms, TOHD contributes to the empirical foundation of pluricentricity studies, offering a nuanced representation of how lexical innovation, borrowing, and semantic shift emerge in minority language settings.

Methodologically, TOHD redefines lexicographic practice through its database-driven, continuously evolving structure. Its digital architecture allows for dynamic microstructural expansion – unrestricted by the limitations of printed media – and integrates multimodal resources, such as authentic audio and visual illustrations. The inclusion of metadata (e.g., regional labels, stylistic qualifiers, and etymological notes) situates each lexical item within its full sociolinguistic context. Moreover, the annotation of authentic spoken and written examples provides valuable insight into the pragmatics of minority Hungarian usage, enabling researchers to trace variation and frequency across time and space.

The dictionary's editorial model – collaborative, cross-border, and interdisciplinary – illustrates a sustainable approach to collective lexicography. Although standardization challenges persist due to the participation of editors from multiple regions, recent harmonization efforts (2024–2025) have significantly enhanced coherence and accuracy.

Beyond its scholarly significance, TOHD fulfills an important pedagogical and societal role. Its open-access design enables both specialists and non-specialists to explore the linguistic landscape of Hungarian beyond Hungary's borders. In educational contexts, the dictionary promotes linguistic awareness by exposing learners to authentic examples of regional and stylistic variation, thereby fostering understanding of language diversity and identity. As a pedagogical tool, TOHD embodies the principles of modern lexicography: inclusivity, transparency, and interactivity. It facilitates a deeper comprehension of lexical meaning, contextual use, and cross-regional communication within the Hungarian-speaking world.

Ultimately, TOHD demonstrates that digital lexicography can serve not merely as a descriptive enterprise but as a form of linguistic empowerment. By documenting the living lexicon of minority Hungarian communities, the dictionary strengthens the visibility and legitimacy of these varieties within the broader linguistic ecosystem. It bridges the gap between academic research and community engagement, between standardization and diversity. As it continues to evolve technologically and conceptually, TOHD will remain a cornerstone for the study of Hungarian pluricentricity, language contact, and digital lexicography, which is an enduring testament to the resilience and adaptability of language in the face of political and cultural boundaries.

### **Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process**

The authors declare that ChatGPT was used in proofreading and refining the language used in the manuscript. The usage was limited to correcting grammatical and spelling errors and rephrasing statements for accuracy and clarity.

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