HUNGARIAN INFLUENCE UPON ROMANIAN PEOPLE AND LANGUAGE FROM THE BEGINNINGS UNTIL THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

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Abstract: In case of linguistic contacts the meeting of different cultures and mentalities which are actualized within and through language are inevitable. There are some common features that characterize all kinds of language contacts, but in describing specific situations we will take into account different causes, geographical conditions and particular socio-historical settings.

The present research focuses on the peculiarities of Romanian – Hungarian contacts from the beginnings until the sixteenth century insisting on the consequences of Hungarian influence upon Romanian people and language. Hungarians induced, directly or indirectly, many social and cultural transformations in the Romanian society and, as expected, linguistic elements (e.g. specific terminologies) were borrowed altogether with these. In addition, Hungarian language influence may be found on each level of Romanian language (phonetic, lexical etc.), its contribution consists of enriching the Romanian language system with new elements and also of triggering and accelerating some internal tendencies.

In the same time, bilingualism has been a social reality for many communities, mainly in Transylvania, which contributed to various linguistic changes of Romanian language not only in this region, but in other Romanian linguistic areas as well. Hungarian elements once taken over by bilinguals were passed on to monolinguals, determining the development of Romanian language.

Keywords: language contact, (Hungarian) language influence, linguistic change, bilingualism, borrowings

Preliminary considerations

Language contacts are part of everyday social life for millions of people all around the world (G. Sankoff, in Trudgill-Chambers-Schilling-Estes 2001, 1). These phenomena enjoyed a large interest in interdisciplinary researches, such as psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, in anthropological studies or those concerned with language acquisition, applied linguistics or bilingualism (Chambers-Trudgill-Schilling-Estes 2003, 1). For instance, from an anthropological view (see Duranti 1997) contacts are established not between languages as such but rather speakers of different languages come into contact in some specific historical and social circumstances. Language contact occurs whenever and wherever two or more human groups with different languages encounter one another and attempt to engage in linguistic communication (Garrett P., in Duranti 2006, 48). When languages in contact, the meeting of different cultures and mentalities which are actualized within and through language are inevitable. Contacts are essentially learning situations, specific sociological situations in which an individual learns elements of a (language) system different from his own (Hymes 1964, 496).

There are some common features that characterize all kinds of language contacts, but in describing specific situations we will take into account different causes, geographical conditions and socio-historical settings (Dauzat 1922, 136).

The present research focuses on the peculiarities of Romanian – Hungarian contacts from the beginnings until the sixteenth century insisting on the distinctive features of these
relations. The main goal of the study is concerned with the consequences of Hungarian influence upon Romanian people and language.

**Peculiarities of Romanian – Hungarian contacts**

When two linguistic communities are in contact, they appear to each other with the repertoire they might have in common as well as with their own distinctive features. Then the meeting of the two groups may lead to cooperation or to a conflicting state. Romanian – Hungarian contacts went through both of these states: mutual support when common interests and fiery battles against each other when political oppression. Between these two extremes there was relative tolerance from time to time, attitudes which changed alongside the changing external conditions.

In fact, contacts are the historical product of social forces (G. Sankoff, in Chambers-Trudgill-Schilling-Estes 2003, 2/23) that take place in situations of social inequality. This inequality however is not value oriented in terms of the superiority of any of the two but simply refers to a non-equivalence of their experience. With respect to Romanian-Hungarian contacts, the inequality is to be observed, first of all, numerically leading to a specific type of contacts between a minority (Hungarians) and the majority (Romanians) within the same region. Additionally, there are many differences that naturally appear between the two nations. Probably the most relevant distinction is based on religion since it determined their cultural orientation, for Hungarians towards the Western civilization through their Roman-Catholicism and for Romanians towards the Balkans by their Greek- Slav(onic) orthodoxism. Partially, this fact explains Romanians’ reluctance to Western influences, whereas Hungarians embraced European spiritual tendencies (such as Humanism, Reformation) almost at the same time as they appeared (Tamás 1944, 338). Thus, Hungarians could become intermediators for some socio-cultural innovations to gain ground among Romanians.

On the other hand, the particular nature of Romanian – Hungarian contacts derives not solely from differences but also from some cultural proximities. Among these similarities we may place the way of life of common people - Romanians, Hungarians but also Saxons of Transylvania - which are reflected by some common features of their folk literature. The concept of transylvanism is also due to various similarities existent in the region, independently of ethnicity.

Romanian – Hungarian contacts are distinguished by complexity involving many controversies, oldness, profundity and importance as it has been a long-term contact which is still ongoing. Contacts with Hungarian speakers constitutes one of the secondary factors of the Romanian language evolution since “the longer the contact, the deeper the influence” (Aitchison 2001, 138). Not only quantitative reasons – i.e. the considerable number of Hungarian elements in Romanian - make this language contact significant, but also – and what is more important – its quality.

Romanians’ contacts with Hungarians are different from all the other contacts of the former one with other nations in their controversial nature. For instance, the temporal limits of the first Hungarian influences are placed in different epochs. The majority of the specialists however agree that the beginnings are marked, especially, by the eleventh centuries (Ivănescu 2000, 438) when Hungarians penetrated Crișana, Banat and Transylvania, the latter one being conquered by 1200. Then, probably the most striking consequences of Romanian – Hungarian
contacts can be noticed from the fourteenth century – “the golden age” of Hungarian political power over Transylvania. For that very reason, Hungarian oppression has often been stressed out. It might seem paradoxical that for many decades the Romanian population – although numerically surpassed the rest of Transylvanian nations – had been declared only “tolerated” by the three “privileged” ones: the Hungarian nobility, the Saxon patricians and the chieftain of militarized Szeklers (Bóna 1989, 299). Hence, the Hungarian minority not only remained unassimilated, assimilation taking place in case of all the other nations Romanians came into contact with on this territory, but it gained enough power to influence Romanians’ social and cultural life.

As for the main linguistic controversy concerning Romanian – Hungarian contacts, it may be discussed in a larger framework that refers to the distinction between direct vs. indirect contact. Some specialists claim that Romanians did not get into direct contact with Hungarians from the beginnings, but there was a Slavonic zone between them as a means of intermediation. As a consequence, Hungarian influence for a long time had been neglected or its importance was reduced. This mediation theory can be found particularly with respect to the “search for the etymon” and to the adaptation of words of Hungarian origin.

The origin of a word is easily determined when its phonetic aspect and meaning coincide with its etymon. Nonetheless, there are cases when two etymons are possible for the same loan word. Thus, the origin of these uncertain elements (Tagliavini 1930, 125) cannot be based solely on a linguistic approach, but other criteria have to be taken into account, such as geographical, cultural conditions and also the characteristics of the language community which borrows these elements. Dealing with difficulties in explaining the phonetic changes or a nuance of the meaning many researchers – especially among the first generation of Romanian philologists – have proposed a false etymon for some of the Hungarian borrowings or assumed their indirect borrowing through Slavonic. These errors could have been easily avoided however if they had started not from the literary form of the etymon but from a dialectal one, as vivid contacts were established especially in regional areas; or from an inflexional form instead of the nominative or the infinitive one; or if they had presumed that the same word “in Wallachia could have been borrowed from Slavonic, whereas in Transylvania it could have derived from Hungarian” (Tagliavini 1930, 125). For instance, verbs with –ui ending such as: a bănui ‘to suspect’, a băntui ‘to haunt’, a făgădui ‘to promise’, a îngădui ‘to allow’, a mântui ‘to redeem’, a tăgădui ‘to deny’ etc. were supposed to have entered Romanian vocabulary through Slavonic because the Hungarian infinitive forms end in –ni, which could not explain the changing into –ui, which is a suffix of Slavonic origin. The problem however could be solved by starting not from a standard Hungarian form i.e. infinitive but from an inflection: 3rd person singular: bánt, fogad, ment, tagad to which the suffix –ui, which in time became a productive Romanian suffix, has been added on Romanian ground. Lastly, although the Slavonic mediation may be true for some of the cases, for some of the words, it cannot be extended to all situations as each and every borrowing must be explained on its own. Additionally, the fact that Slavonic contacts temporally preceded Hungarian ones does not constitute an obstacle in the way of the latter’s direct contacts with Romanians.

**Hungarian influence on Romanian people and language**

First of all, we shall point out that the notion influence does not refer to a unidirectional pressure of one of the two groups and/or languages in contact but to an interaction of them, a
mutual interrelation in different domains of life. Although the main preoccupation of the present research is the configuration of Hungarian contributions to the development of Romanian society and culture, on one hand, and to the evolution of Romanian language, on the other hand, it does not mean that Romanian people and language did not influence Hungarians as well (see Herman 1914; Blédy 1942; Márton – Péntek – Vöö 1977; Bakos 1982) only that in the epoch Hungarians’ role seem to be quite relevant.

Hungarian influence manifests itself in many different ways and in various degrees, but, in overall, we may differentiate between two types of influences. On one hand we may distinguish folk influences sustained by vivid contacts between Romanians and Hungarians from elitist (bookish) influences propagated by the circulation of books. On the other hand we may speak of a Hungarian influence which penetrated the whole territory of nowadays’ Romania, whose power seems to diminish in time, and of a regional influence unfinished yet (Mîndrescu 1892, 13). Additionally, Hungarian influence was exerted on a horizontal level, i.e. in the epoch and on a vertical one too, i.e. in evolution. Altogether “Hungarian influence did not remain on the surface, but it reached the deepest layer of Romanian spirituality” (Gunda 1943, 479).

Folk Hungarian influences flourished especially in the main contact zone that is Transylvania which provided the premises of contacts between Romanians and Hungarians. During many centuries of cohabitation Hungarians induced, directly or indirectly, many social and cultural transformations in the Romanian society (see Giurescu 2011).

Hungarians settled down in Transylvania influenced the development of the feudal system in the intracarpathian basin (Horedt 1958, 109). As they were one of European Late Medieval authorities (Tamás 1944, 342), some Western institutions penetrated into the Romanian environment much more easily through Hungarian intermediation. Some aspects of knight and court life (e.g. Rom. aprod cf. Hung. apród ‘henchman’), of feudal order (e.g. Rom. ban cf. Hung. bán ‘name of old officiality’; Rom. pârălab cf. Hung. porkoláb; Rom. pârgar cf. Hung. poľgár ‘citizen’), the organization of urban life (e.g. Rom. vârmegie cf. Hung. vármegeye ‘county’), the village structure in the plains, some of the trades or elements from the domains of nourishment (see Gunda 1943, 476) or clothing (ibidem, 477) are examples of Hungarian models borrowed by Romanians. As expected, lexical elements, specific terminologies which designate these social and administrative institutions, were borrowed altogether with these.

Some of these influences could also reach beyond Transylvania either through Hungarians or through Romanians who were directly exposed to Hungarian influences. This was possible because, in spite of its relative autonomy, Transylvanian people were not isolated but in permanent contacts with the neighbouring principalities sustained by commercial relations (see Meteș 1920), by emigrations (see Meteș 1977) and also by the policy of Moldavian and Muntenian (Wallachian) voivodes.

In terms of religious life, Hungarian influence penetrated Romanian spirituality in both folk and bookish means. In overall, Hungarians contributed to Romanians’ orientation towards the Catholic – Latin medieval Europe. In the sixteenth century Hungarians played a major role in promoting Reformation among Romanians, whereas Hungarian religious texts served as sources and models for Romanian translations. Some of the first holy books written in Romanian language had Hungarian texts as originals. Among these there may be included, for example: Catechism [Catechism] (1560), which seems to have had a Hungarian Protestant model.
(Gheție and Mareș 1985, 228); Cazania I [the first Homiliary] of Coresi whose original may be found in Hungarian Calvinist teachings (ibidem, 239); Molitvenic [The Prayer Book] produced by Calvinism which seems to follow Heltai’s Agenda (ibidem, 267). Additionally, Cartea de cântece [The Book of Psalms] (1570-1573) is also a translation of similar Hungarian collections of Calvinist songbooks (ibidem, 114) and the Hungarian source of Palia de la Orăștie [Old Testament from Orăștie] (1581-1582) is also beyond any doubt (Roques 1925, III-LXIII). These Romanian translations include many Hungarian elements among which many borrowings either of folk or of bookish nature, as well as various linguistic calques of bookish nature.

In linguistic terms Hungarian influence is manifold. It has been the object of many researches beginning the end of the nineteenth century but the majority of them restricted this influence to the domain of vocabulary, statistically cataloguing the loan words. Although it is true that the domain par excellence of influences is vocabulary, it also has to be considered that words are “like the centre of a constellation” (Saussure 1955, 174). In the same manner, language has to be viewed as a system in which each and every element is interconnected and a change on one level is not without effect on the others. Thus, lexical borrowings are not simply additions to an existing inventory, but they reorganize the system itself as their viability is conditioned by the relations they establish with its entourage (Wartburg 1963, 167).

Additionally, the introduction of foreign lexical material carries not only phonological baggage, but it often may carry morphological and syntactic ones as well.

Although Hungarian influence did not change the phonetic system of Romanian language nor introduced new phonemes, its role has to be mentioned in the extension of occurrence positions of Romanian phonemes as well as a factor which triggered, accelerated, intensified or nuanced some internal tendencies. Eloquent examples of Hungarian influences on the phonetical level are the protraction of vowels and the palatalization of dentals mainly due to bilinguals. In their speech acts elements of articulatory features can be transferred from one language to the other. In Hungarian the quantity of vowels has phonological value unlike in Romanian. In the process of borrowing these long vowels of the Hungarian etymons are represented as stressed vowels in Romanian – since a relation between quantity and stress has been observed – and are pronounced more elongated. On the other hand, the palatalization of Romanian dentals [t, d, n + i, e] under Hungarian influence [ty, gy, ny] is a controversial topic. Some regard it as the result of Slavonic contacts, others as exclusively due to Hungarian language and again others emphasize the importance of internal tendencies. It is true that Romanian language presented in all times a general tendency toward a more palatal pronunciation of these consonants - being familiarized with it through Slavonic mediation -, nevertheless, it should not be mistaken for the phenomena developed in Transylvania by contacts with Hungarian speakers. In addition, some dialectal pronunciation of vowels is assumed to be governed by Hungarian influence.

The most affected level is of course vocabulary. Of all the lexical influences suffered by Romanian language during its long-term evolution - except for the Slav(onic) ones - the most consistent, important and amazing in its weight is the Hungarian influence (Gafton 2007, 109). Here we can mention suffixes of Hungarian origin, such as -șig / -șug, -ău and many loan words. These suffixes came along Hungarian words such as mesterség > Rom. meșteșug ‘profession’; hitlenség > Rom. vielenșug ‘craftiness’; bőség > Rom. belșug ‘richness’ and
became productive as Romanian suffixes being added to words of other origins as well. As for lexical borrowings, they may be grouped in different semantic classes as well as in terms of their connection with the Hungarian economic, social or cultural influences. What is remarkable is that many of them deeply penetrated into today’s Romanian language and its spirituality. It is interesting, for instance, that in the contemporary Romanian language there is no verb of Latin origin that expresses the general notion of ‘thinking’, not even Slavonic ones. Almost all the verbs that mean ‘to think’ are of Hungarian origin: a (se) gândi < gond; a (se) chibzui < képezni. Other examples for Hungarian borrowings which took roots deeply in Romanian language are related to the body: talpă (<talp ‘sole of the foot’), labă (<láb ‘paw’), chip (<kép ‘face, image’), some verbs: a alcătui (<alkotni ‘to create’), a cheltui (<költeni ‘to spend money’), a îngădui (<engedni ‘to allow’), a locui (<lakni ‘to reside’), or other aspects of life: fel (<féle ‘manner, way, kind of’), oraș (<város ‘city’), marfă (<marha ‘goods’) etc. Then again others of this kind could not be eliminated either by their neological “rivals” during the centuries as a sign of their being part of the Romanian mentality – in part because these borrowings carry the biblical origin as they were known from religious texts: a îngădui (vs. a permite < Fr. permettre, Lat. permettere) ‘to allow’, a făgădui (vs. a promise < Lat. promittere, Fr. pronetter) ‘to promise’, pildă (vs. exemplu < Fr. exemple, Lat. exemplum) ‘example’. In spite of the fact that the majority of Hungarian loan words are of regional use, characteristic for the direct contact zone, many of them were introduced in the basic vocabulary of Romanian language penetrating its “internal form” (for this term see Coșeriucă 2009, 282).

Although morphology is regarded the fortress of a language, the most reluctant to external influences, it does not remain completely unchanged in contact situations. The main effects of Hungarian influence can be described as part of the adaptation process (Kis 1975). Thus, the integration of Hungarian lexical borrowings enriched the Romanian morphological system in the frequency of some consonantal and vocalic themes on which the gender of the newly incorporated nouns depends - since Hungarian lacks the category of gender. In the same time, Hungarian borrowings also reorganized Romanian morphological system with respect to the distribution and frequency of its existing parts of speech. Lastly, Hungarian influence may be found in some linguistic calques of bookish origin which have morphological implications.

Syntax, alongside morphology, was considered less susceptible to contact influences. Nonetheless, lexical borrowings affect this level as well as every etymon is detached from a certain Hungarian syntagm or phrase and the loan word is introduced into a certain Romanian one. Those words are usually borrowed which are more frequently used in speaking and here they appear with some syntactic functions. The category of case in Hungarian is tightly related to syntactic functions expressed by means of suffixes. As these forms of nouns appear in relation with the other words of the sentence some Hungarian words, for instance, were borrowed altogether with their case suffixes: for example, the nouns with –ă ending (talpă, labă from above). Additionally, the syntactic level was influenced in the sixteenth century especially in the case of Romanian translations of a Hungarian model. The first translators of the Bible confronted some difficulties in translating the nuances, delicacy of biblical messages which sometimes they solved by slavish imitation of Hungarian phraseology and word order leading to different types of syntactic calques.

In overall, the spatial diffusion of these Hungarian language influences follows some principles, directions. As a well known fact, the eastern (Moldavia) and southern (Wallachia)
Romanian territories had been dominated by Slavonic culture for a long time, unlike Transylvania, which had been strongly influenced by the Hungarian culture and language. Thus it is easy to assume that Hungarian elements entered the Romanian circuit first in Transylvania and afterwards they reached beyond the Carpathian Mountains (Niculescu 2005, 113).

Lastly, we should point out an other consequence of the particular historical, social and cultural context of the two peoples and languages in contact namely the phenomenon of bilingualism. Folk bilingualism characterized mainly Transylvania and smaller parts of Moldavia and it appeared as a natural product of cohabitation. In addition to these Romanian – Hungarian bilingual communities of a more or less stable and compact nature we might also take into account other groups of bilinguals such as immigrants and tradesmen from all the Romanian principalities. Motivated by everyday necessity of communication many of these Romanians must have spoken Hungarian, at least to a certain degree. On the other hand, besides this type of bilingualism, in the sixteenth century we might also suppose the existence of an elitist (bookish) bilingualism propagated by the circulation of religious books (see translations above).

**Conclusions**

Hungarian influence on Romanian language in the early period was of a particular importance and it had been favored by a complex of political, legal, administrative and socio-cultural factors, sometimes even forced by these circumstances. Given this peculiar context, Hungarian language acquisition was a condition of social competence for a considerable number of Romanian speakers.

In the early period of Romanian language, Hungarian elements were widely spread, covering several regions of the country, and they gained not only a regional usage but, in some respects, they reached the norm of the common Romanian language. Started as a regional influence, Hungarian language broadened its power of influence on (north-) western and eastern Romanian dialects as well as on some southern areas of the country. In the first two linguistic areas, Hungarian influences penetrated by both folk and bookish means and in the latter one Hungarian elements have found its roots especially by cultivated (bookish) manners.

Contacts with Hungarian language affected, especially, the vocabulary of the Romanian language, but Hungarian influence left its trace on the phonetic and morpho-syntactic domains as well.

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