THE STATUS OF ROMANIAN-HUNGARIAN BILINGUALISM IN THE OLD EPOCH OF ROMANIAN LANGUAGE

Enikő PÁL
Sapientia University, Miercurea Ciuc
enikopaldr@gmail.com

Abstract:
The present study focuses on the main types of Romanian-Hungarian bilingualism in the old epoch of Romanian language taking into account some of the causes which gave rise to them. Another concern of the paper refers to the consequences of this very bilingualism on the development of Romanian language in terms of its malleability towards the incorporation of Hungarian phonetic properties and lexical elements, on the one hand, and in terms of the borrowings' treatment and adaptive mechanisms, on the other hand.

Keywords:
Bilingualism, linguistic fashion and influence, loanword, adaptation.

1. Preliminaries

Bilingualism is an intensively researched phenomenon which has a vast literature. Nevertheless, various aspects regarding this issue do not have unanimous and unequivocal solutions yet. For instance, there is a debate with respect to the set of criteria which define the *bilingual* status of a speaker. In other words, the conditions and especially the level of linguistic competence to be acquired in both languages by an individual in order for him to be regarded as a bilingual speaker are yet to be clarified. With no intention to impose one or the other of the existent viewpoints[1], in the present paper, those speakers are regarded as 'bilinguals' who use both of the languages *sufficiently* well and in accordance with the basic requirements specific to both systems. In this respect, the level of *sufficiency* implies the conditions of *understanding* and *being understood*, i. e. to

[1]For these see E-M. Tódor 2009, p. 31-39, 41-51.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

produce comprehensible and adequate utterances in both languages regardless of its spoken or written variety. It may happen that while speaking one language certain peculiarities of the other language slip into the current use of the former one which may be regarded as devations from its linguistic norm. But this fact does not revoke the bilingual status of the speaker in question, all the more so because this kind of behaviour might be intentional, the speaker being aware of the fact that these features belong to a different system than the one currently used. On the other hand, there are very few cases, perhaps only idealistically speaking, in which an individual equally masters both systems. Thus, the statistically generated normality is represented by this degree of bilingualism which is defined as *sufficient* knowledge in two different languages. Naturally, this definition of bilingualism is acceptable if and only if the linguistic interferences do not obstruct mutual understanding; neither do they make communication impossible.

2. Types of Romanian-Hungarian bilingualism in the old epoch of Romanian language

Due to the specific conditions generated by Romanian-Hungarian cohabitation, in different larger or smaller regions of the Romanian territory, not only the use and incorporation of elements from the co-present system were natural tendencies, but the emergence of a Romanian-Hungarian bilingual state was also a natural given. The forms which it has taken varies depending on the duration, intensity and surface area of linguistic contacts, on the one hand, and on their penetration and diffusion, on the other hand, as well as on the acquired degree of bilingualism.

We shall also point out that there are certain differencies regarding Hungarians' motivations to learn Romanian language and certain reasons for Romanians to acquire, even partially, Hungarian language respectively. Thus, given the specific contextual frame, Hungarians surrounded by the Romanian majority acquired the language of the latter ones mainly in order to initiate and maintain an everyday communication indispensable to socio-economic and cultural life. In their turn, certain Romanian communities, especially from those regions which were under Hungarian reign, needed to

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

acquire some knowledge in Hungarian language for the same purpose of ensuring socio-cultural dynamics[2].

However, beyond these general causes, in the old epoch and especially in certain Romanian-inhabited areas (such as Transylvania) and among certain social classes, the incorporation of Hungarian elements in Romanian language, for instance, could have beenfacilitated or even imposed, to a certain degree, by the existence of a Hungarian *linguisticfashion* sustained by extralinguistic factors[3]. Thus, in case of those Romanians with high rank and/or of the aristocrats ruled by the Hungarian crown, for instance, the acquisition of Hungarian language, however modest, might have constituted a form and means of accession to the central power, therefore a force capable of generating a fashion among them. This fashion could have spread then also among certain Romanian serfs or free peasants who were in the service of these aristocrats, regardless of their motivation (whether it was imposed on them or they willingly chose to do so, even possibly in order to mock their masters). On the level of the middle class, in those regions where

[2] Linguistic contacts are esentially learning situations, specific sociological situations in which an individual learns elements of a (linguistic, thought, behavioural etc.) system different from his own (D. Hymes 1964, 496).

[3]Naturally, if Hungarian language enjoyed high prestige in the epoch, it was due to specific historical and political circumstances. Moreover, the feudal system in Transylvania generated a state of affairs which is often described as the *tragic* situation of Transylvanian Romanians (see C. Giurescu 1943, p. 33) who, included in a foreign state form, with a chiefly foreign Church and a foreign ruling class (i.e. Hungarian nobility supported by the central power in Hungary), had no other choice but to assimilate to Hungarians. Thus, Hungarian reign inevitably led to the *denationalization* (*ibidem*, p. 315) of the Transylvanian Romanians and then to their*assimilation* (p. 33), this process bearing several consequences and on different levels on the existence of these Romanians. Those who managed to rise from this miserable situation (besides the rightful nobility) have done it, driven by materialism, by means of the apparent help from the foreign rulers. Thereby, the ennoblement promise has attracted a great part of Transylvanian Romanians to the Hungarian realm thus beginning a process of *Hungarianization* which had a great impact on Romanian culture including language. Transylvanian Romanians' denationalization, which concurred with granting noble ranks, had several profound consequences.

Due to this assimilation process, Transylvanian Romanians not only acquire Hungarian language, establish kinship with Hungarian nobility, but a great part of them convert to Catholicism and, in later periods, embrace other doctrines of the Reformation practiced and propagated by Hungarians, such as Calvinism, for instance.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

contacts with Hungarians were close, Hungarian language was not entirely unfamiliar to Romanians from these areas, if not for else, for everyday and momentary needs.

In the old epoch of Romanian language, Romanian-Hungarian bilingualism is characterized by complexity not only due to the several problems which this phenomenon raises in general, but also due to the diversity with which it appears. Thus, on the one hand, we may distinguish different degrees of *individual* vs. *collective* bilingualism which, in their turn, differ in terms of their *folk* vs. *bookish* nature.

Individual bilingualism may occur for so many reasons, (also) determined by psychological factors, and it may have so diverse forms of manifestation that it would be quite difficult to discuss all of these situations. On the other hand, it would be more laborious, if not impossible, to follow these cases with reference to the old period for which the only evidence preserved are their written records in texts. Or, beyond the fact that not all of the speakers were text authors too, old texts are relatively few in number and these usually record regional or local dialects, in other words, the linguistic norm of certain larger or smaller communities[4]. It can be argued, with some probability, that there existed a certain degree of bilingualism within certain socio-professional categories. Such an example is represented by merchants who, for understandable reasons, have been constantly exposed to linguistic stimuli specific to the phenomenon of bilingualism[5].

It is perhaps of greater relevance the case of collective bilingualism mainly propagated by means of folk contacts and which may be observed on the level of more or less compact communities. This type of bilingualism

[4] This is only natural since old writings (at least the ones preserved from those times) were chiefly meant for a larger audience, whereas private writings were even less in number (also) due to poor literacy.

[5]Either occasionally and temporarily or periodically, Romanians and Hungarians were engaged in trade relations for which the *sine qua non* is linguistic contact and exchange. Thus, trade was not only a means of goods' exchange, hence with economic relevance, but also an opportunity for language acquisition and, last but not least, for the diffusion of ideologies and (printed) texts, commerce playing thereby a chief role in the spread and exchange of culture. For the intense trade relationships of Transylvanians with the other principalities, attested in various old Romanian documents, see Șt. Meteș 1920.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

has been facilitated either by the geographic settlement of the communities in the immediate vicinity of each other, or by the mobility of different groups of people, for instance, in case of emigration, which generated the specific conditions of cohabitation, or by political circumstances, as mentioned before.

On the whole, Romanian-Hungarian linguistic contacts have been more lasting and intense in Transylvania than in the other Romanian principalities which were more strongly affected by Slavic influence. Hence, it is easy to understand that in Transylvania not only individuals, independently, but also entire communities could have reached a balanced bilingualism. On the other hand, however, within the large Transylvanian territory there could be distinguished certain regions more strongly influenced by contacts with Hungarians than the others. For instance, although the region of Banat-Hunedoara may be included in the larger context of Transylvania and in that of the northern Romanian subdialect, it has several features of its own (features of a *Banat-Hunedoara idiom*) which make this area different from the others within the contexts mentioned. As a matter of fact, Banat-Hunedoara stands out as the region probably most affected by Hungarian influence which is characterized by a "dialectal bilingualism"[6], in other words, by a degree of Romanian-Hungarian bilingualism which has probably no match in other regions of the country. This state of bilingualism has been sustained, with no doubt, also by intermarriages between the two nations which gave birth to bilingual generations.

The fact that the most significant traces of Hungarian influence may be found in the northwestern dialects of Romanian language, especially in those spoken in the regions of Banat-Hunedoara and Crișana-Maramureș, is largely due to the geographic position of these areas since they are settled on the Romanian-Hungarian border, the crossroads of the most powerful influences. Moreover, in the former region there can be observed a Hungarian *linguistic dominance* – at least compared to the impact which

[6] Cf. A. Avram 1963, p. 622.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

Romanian language, in its turn, has had on the neighbouring Hungarian dialects[7] –, a dominance generated by the peculiarities of the environment.

Although bilingualism was much more intense in Transylvania, certain degree of bilingualism may be found in the other principalities as well, at least on the level of some smaller communities. Thus, bilingual individuals and even entire communities could have existed in Moldavia and Wallacchia too, especially due to movements of people, like in case of emigration.

Beginning with the 14th century, the oppression of the Romanian serfs and the persecution of the "heretic" Romanians by the Catholics became more and more acute. The nobility's frequent retribution after the defeat of rebellions also contributed to the fact that Transylvanian Romanians left their country for the other principalities. Then, in the 16th century, the social and national inequality increases which led to the partial emigration of Romanian population to Moldavia, as far as the Moldavian ruler's policy had been favourable to their acceptance. The same reasons could have had the Hungarian serfs to emigrate as well. However, on the whole, the problem of emigration in case of Hungarians may be distinguished by certain peculiarities regarding their historical, social and cultural conditions[8]. Thus, first of all, it should be noted that the political borders of the Moldavian principality, established in the Middle Ages as a vassal state of the Hungarian kingdom, had changed many times during the centuries. With several occasions, Hungarian groups (especially Szeklers) sought refuge in Moldavia, these migrations also being due to the fact that the Hungarian state pushed its defense borders eastward in order to secure the country against nomadic people. Besides seeking their refuge, Hungarians penetrated into the eastern regions of the Romanian territory sometimes being called upon by the Moldavian ruler. The presence of smaller or larger Hungarian communities is attested in various parts of Moldavia, in the 14th – 15th centuries Hungarians (alongside the Saxons) playing a part in shaping

[7] Statistically speaking, the smallest number of Romanian loanwords is recorded precisely in the Hungarian dialect of Banat (see Gy. Márton – J. Péntek – I. Vöő 1977).

[8] For the reasons which determined Romanians' emigration, on the one hand, and those of the Hungarians, on the other hand, as well as for some common reasons which both of them might have had see Șt. Meteș 1977, mainly p. 13-20, 77-143.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

the urban structure of Moldavia[9], in the development of commerce and crafts. In the golden age of the principality, Hungarian colonists enjoyed several privileges and held various ranks within the court, mainly in the 15th – 16th centuries. Moreover, in this period, Hungarian was the language of diplomacy in the court's chancery[10]. However, emigrations did not follow only one direction, the one discussed above – from Transylvania to Moldavia – but also to Wallacchia and, of course, the other way round too, whenever the external conditions have enforced them. Hence, Transylvania, in its turn, provided refuge for Wallacchian and Moldavian people depending on diplomatic circumstances.

Naturally, there are some differences regarding the extent of Romanian-Hungarian interlinguistic influences in Wallachia, on the one hand, and in Moldavia, on the other hand, the former one being less affected by contacts with Hungarians than the latter one[11]. Thus, with respect to the strength with which Hungarian language exerted its influence on Romanian language, for instance, Moldavian region comes right after Transylvania, but the former one obviously bears another stratum of influence, different from that exerted on Transylvania[12], due to different extralinguistic conditions.

Therefore, a certain degree of bilingualism could have reached not only the established individuals and communities, in the context of cohabitation in the same region or in that of geographic vicinity, but also

[9]For the lists of Moldavian cities, markets, villages where the presence of Hungarian people is attested see F. Pozsony 2002, p. 25-31.

[10] Cf. F. Pozsony 2002, p. 31.

[11]A particular case of Romanian-Hungarian bilingualism is represented by the Csango communities. Their peculiar status is due to certain problems, unsolved yet, not only regarding their ethnic configuration (seeF. Pozsony 2002, I. Dănilă 2005), but also regarding the linguistic features which characterize their idiom. It is certain, though, that the dialect of the Csango people incorporates Romanian and Hungarian elements to a degree which can scarcely be equaled in any other dialects (for the Hungarian and Romanian components respectively of the Csango bilingualism see I.Dănilă 2005, p. 63-81, 81-91).

[12]For the very same notion there can be employed different lexemes in the two regions, even in cases in which both of them are of Hungarian origin. For instance, *sicriu (săcriu*) 'coffin' is widely used in Moldavia, whereas *copârșeu* 'id.' in Transylvania (V. Breban 1958, p. 223). Obviously, the different usage may also be due to the various semantic changes occured in one of the terms or in both of them. Thus, the meaning of the word *sicriu* 'coffin' is, in fact, a derived meaning (< Hung. *szekrény* 'cupboard'), whereas *copârșeu* keeps the etymological meaning (< Hung. *koporsó* 'coffin').

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

individuals and groups in periodical or occasional mobility. In this sense, immigrants become bilingual due to their needs for integration (acceptance and adaptation) which could have even imposed L2[13] (either Hungarian, or Romanian) as a dominant language over the mother tongue, after a few generations becoming literally the mother tongue.

Besides the types of folk bilingualism (individual or collective) discussed above, in the old epoch of Romanian language, we may assume a Romanian-Hungarian bilingualism propagated by bookish means too. In this respect, eloquent evidence is provided, for instance, by the numerous Romanian translations of Hungarian originals. Thus, a certain preference to employ Hungarian language or, in any case, words of Hungarian origin may be found at the authors of old Romanian texts, on the one hand, regarding their option to use Hungarian sources (too) – which could have been done only based on a thorough knowledge or on customary practices, however average, of Hungarian language –, on the other hand, regarding the load of Hungarian lexical elements in these texts – sometimes even in situations in which their presence seems linguistically unmotivated since Romanian language had equivalent words of its own for what these Hungarian loanwords denote. Although the diffusion of the texts did not cover the whole Romanian territory, some of the old texts certainly passed through a considerable amount of areas within this linguistic space.

[13]In the literature dedicated to the phenomenon of bilingualism, it usually appears the distinction between L1 (mother tongue) and L2 (a non-native language learnt simultaneously or after L1). In the context of Romanian-Hungarian relations, there should be made another distinction within the category traditionally denoted as L2. Thus, it can be differentiated a *second* language (L2) and a *foreign* language (L3). L2 refers to a language other than the mother tongue, but which has everyday usage corresponding to needs for social and/or linguistic interaction, whereas L3 is that non-native language which is not employed in daily communication and which may not necessarily respond to social needs. On the other hand, L2 may be common for a number of individuals forming a larger and compact community, such as a minority group, for which L2 is usually the language of the majority they live together with. L3, on the contrary, does not refer to any macro-social level, in the sense that the conditions which favour its acquisition are not the same for several individuals of the same group, at least not necessarily. It is also true that these concepts are relative since their order may vary from one community to the other or from one person to the other, depending on the sequence in which languages are learnt, on the frequency of their use and on other criteria, or it may vary from one epoch to the other, also depending on the linguistic policy of the time. For details see E-M. Tódor2009, mainly p. 33-39, 41-45.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

3. Consequences of Romanian-Hungarian bilingualism on the treatment of (Hungarian) linguistic influence

As a result of contacts between Romanian and Hungarian languages, (also) sustained by extralinguistic factors, there were produced various overlaps of the two intercrossed linguistic systems which had variable consequences on different levels of the languages in question. The constantly variable extent with which the two languages are employed is also due to the fact that in bilingual environment monolinguals may exist too, but in this case the latter ones are more receptive[14] to contacts than those monolinguals who live in preponderantly homogeneous communities, i. e. in regions where there were no contacts between Romanians and Hungarians or only occasional contacts were established. In this sense, bilinguals function as sourse and medium of linguistic features' diffusion to the monolinguals within the same environment.

Naturally, the different types of bilingualism (individual vs. collective, folk vs. bookish etc.) had different consequences on the treatment of linguistic influences coming from L2, and these repercussions, in their turn, may be distinguished, firstly, on the level of the bilingual community and, secondly, on the level of monolingual speakers from bilingual regions or from chiefly monolingual areas. On the whole, what differs is the degree of the mother tongue's permeability. Among the several consequences which the state of bilingualism may have on the shaping of the mother tongue, we shall focus in what follows on two aspects: the permissiveness of L1 with respect to the incorporation of phonetic and lexical elements from L2 and the adaptive mechanisms employed during the process of the L2 lexical elements' integration in the system of L1 respectively. In our case, these aspects shall be discussed mainly in terms of the penetrability of Hungarian influence on Romanian language, although in most of the situations the same very principles govern the mechanisms with respect to the other way round too.

[14]As a matter of fact, a particular type of bilingualism is the *passive* bilingualism, in which case the individual is able to comprehend certain words of the other language or he can possibly figure out the meaning of certain more complex structures by means of contextualization, but he can not employ the language independently, i.e. he can not engage himself in giving answers.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

3. 1. The consequences of bilingualism on the permissiveness of L1 with respect to the incorporation of elements from L2

Theoretically speaking, in similar conditions, speakers of a language adopt very alike linguistic behaviours, in other words, the same stimuli evoke more or less identical reactions. In the actual practice of social life, however, we encounter many different reactions which are mainly due to internal factors. Thus, for instance, the influences of a language other than the mother tongue may manifest themselves in different ways in case of a bilingual – for whom the non-native language is not a foreign language – and of a monolingual respectively – for whom the very same language is a foreign language –, beyond the fact that they also may vary from person to person[15].

3. 1. 1. The treatment of loanwords

The difference between the reaction of a bilingual and that of a monolingual does not only consist of the quantity of the elements borrowed from one linguistic system into the other[16]. Unquestionably, a bilingual speaker allows the incorporation of much more many loanwords from L2 in his own mother tongue than a monolingual speaker. In the case of the latter one, the system of the mother tongue imposes a greater restriction since there is no constant (re) enforcement coming from the source-language and, hence, the foreign nature of the element to be taken is felt more acutely and for longer. Bilinguals, on the other hand, show greater permissiveness towards the penetration of the loanwords in the system of their mother tongue since they have uncountable occasions to relate (or control) and to adjust the "foreign" elements in accordance with the very source of them. In addition, bilinguals borrow not only with a higher rate but also in a faster pace. The vitality of these loanwords, however, is not directly proportional to their quantity, on the contrary. Loanwords once entered into the language of a monolingual are more lasting due to the fact that these have undergone

[15]As a matter of fact, not languages come into contact but rather speakers of the language since the individual is "the ultimate *locus* of contacts" (U. Weinreich 1974, p. 6).

[16]Even the very reasons for borrowing may differ depending on the mono- or bilingual status of the speaker. In case of the latter one, convenience (or "*paresse intelectuelle"*, in: A. Dauzat 1922, p. 119) may also be a reason for it. Thus, a bilingual speaker is more likely to have recourse to words from L2 in order to provide fluency and he does it with much more ease than a monolingual.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

a long process of adaptation and also due to the inherent conservatism of the language system. Bilinguals, on the other hand, employ less adaptive mechanisms, preserving various formal features of the loanwords not only regarding their phonetic structure but also its stress, intonation or rhythm. Therefore, these loanwords are less entrenched in the structure of their mother tongue's vocabulary which is characterized by a continuous (re) enrichment dynamics. This is the reason for which many loanwords borrowed by bilinguals have a short life in their language. Naturally, the differences mentioned above are true not only for the vocabulary of mono- and/or bilinguals; their linguistic behaviour adopts the same strategies with respect to the phonetic, morphological or syntactic levels too.

Regarding the vocabulary of old Romanian language, it appears quite impregnated with words of Hungarian origin. Thus, old Romanian texts have recorded, deliberately or involuntarily[17], a great deal of Hungarian loanwords. Obviously, most of them had limited usage belonging to a *regional norm* strongly influenced by Hungarian language and which, therefore, admitted such elements as a natural given. Nevertheless, the regional usage of the majority of these loanwords should not be considered a reason for them to be neglected, all the more so since that very regional norm which incorporated Hungarian elements had been perfectly functional

[17]In the language of a text, the adoption of a loanword, borrowed simultaneously or subsequently to the act of translation, for example, may be explained, in most of the cases, by the need for filling a conceptual gap or for denoting a certain nuance of a concept, in a word, by a *necessity*, though this need does not always reflect an actual demand, or at any rate, not necessarily governed by solely linguistic reasons. For instance, there are cases in which the system already had a Romanian correspondent to the Hungarian loanword and, therefore, the adoption of the foreign form reflects rather an *option* than a need, a deliberate choice (also) determined by psychosocial factors, such as the bilingual nature of the author. In these cases, borrowing is not necessarily controlled by consciousness and the integration of the loanword is only temporary, its usage being limited to rendering a particular message in a particular context. For example, the Hungarian loanwords *amen* 'amen, so be it' and *joltar* 'psalm' recorded in: *The Book of Psalms* [*Fragmentul Todorescu* 1571-1575] function as an immediate reply to the source-text. These do not correspond to any actual necessity since Romanian language had terms of its own for the notions which these Hungarian loanwords designate. Their presence may be explained either by the bilingual translator in the speech of whom the two linguistic systems are so much entangled that he did not felt the need to replace them with their Romanian correspondents, or by the regional norm, strongly influenced by Hungarian language, which accepts such forms.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

in the epoch and it had real chances to be adopted beyond the direct contact regions too, at least with respect to certain lexemes diffused (also) by bookish means, along the spread of the texts which carried them. In this respect, bilingual communities undoubtedly constitute the source of many Hungarian loanwords adopted by old Romanian language including its standard variety.

3. 1. 2. The treatment of borrowing and/or rendering phonetic features of L2. Hungarian influence on the phonetic level

In principle, after acquiring its individuality, the language admits to a lesser extent foreign influence to penetrate into its phonetic (and morphologic) system and usually only into its peripheral positions. While, on the lexical level, a foreign influence results in the enrichment of the vocabulary with new words, in the domain of phonetics, the borrowing of a new phoneme or the elimination of an existing one due to the influence of another language occurs in very rare cases[18]. Borrowing a phoneme implies that it shall function as an idiosyncratic phoneme of the system which borrowed it, becoming one of its own phonemes, i. e. it shall establish distinctive oppositions with the old ones and it shall be employed not only in the contexts in which it originates from but also in other phonetic contexts even unfamiliar to the source-language. Therefore, in the case of a word like Rom. *zödşiguri* 'vegetables, greens' (< Hung. *zöldség* 'id. ') [19], for instance, the phoneme /ö/, characteristic for Hungarian language, is not a

[18]In the dialect of the Csango people, the phonemes*/ă/, /î/*do constitute borrowings from Romanian language, borrowings from one phonetic system (Romanian) into the other (Hungarian) by means of which the latter one has been enriched (cf. Fr. Király 1969, p. 462).

[19]As a matter of fact, hybrid forms are of interest in many aspects. Thus, in bilinguals' speech, there are cases in which a Hungarian loanword is phonetically unadapted and yet it makes its way into a Romanian inflectional paradigm, hence being morphologically adapted. For example, the sequence of phonemes *zödșiguri* 'greens'reveals its foreign origin, however, its plural ending *–uri* makes the word to be included in the Romanian morphological system. Naturally, these cases are exceptional, they do not belong to the standard variety of Romanian language, nor do they characterize the 16th century writings. Nevertheless, the fact that they are not recorded in old Romanian texts does not mean that the very phenomenon could not have existed in the spoken variety of certain bilingual communities; it only means that, due to lack of written evidence, any discussion on them would easily slip into speculation.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

borrowed phoneme in the Romanian loanword precisely for the reasons mentioned above. This sound appears in the speech of the bilinguals who do not borrow it but simply reproduce it since they possess a base of articulation accustomed to and familiar with such vowels. However, if monolinguals should borrow the same word in the given form – not taking into account here the whole process of adaptation – they would try to pronounce /ö/ with a similar sound which has the status of a phoneme in Romanian language (possibly /ă/ or /o/), since language prefers to have recourse to its internal resources, i. e. substitution and adaptation, to borrowing a completely new phoneme, which would give rise to several difficulties.

Although Romanian language did not borrow any phoneme from Hungarian language and the few observable modifications which appear due to Hungarian influence affect chiefly the phonetic system of different Romanian dialects, rather than its standard variety, Hungarian influence is to be noted within this domain too. The dialects in which Hungarian influence mainly exerted its power on the phonetic level are those spoken in Transylvania, in the north-western regions of the country. In the dialect spoken in Crișana, for instance, the more opened pronunciation of /o/, the palatalization of dentals or the pronunciation of /j/ instead of /ĝ/ in certain phonetic contexts are due to contacts with Hungarians.

On subdialectal level, the presence of the vowel /ǫ/ in the dialect of Crișana has been attributed to the influence of Hungarian speakers in contact with Romanians. Based on the idea that this sound functions as an autonomous phoneme[20] in the mentioned dialect, it was assumed that the given vowel had been developed from the diphthong /ǫa/ due to Hungarian influence: "*since Hungarians did not have [in their language] this diphtong, they replaced it with their vowel /a/*"[21], then, due to the fact that Hungarian /a/ is very close to /ǫ/, this pronunciation with /ǫ/ penetrated into the dialect of Crișana, adopted first by bilinguals, as a consequence of Hungarian speakers' influence. It is undeniable that vivid contacts between Romanians and Hungarians within this particular region have contributed to the adoption of /ǫ/, but this kind of pronunciation has also been facilitated by

[20]Just like /ę/ and /ą̆/ respectively, see Gr. Rusu 1969, p. 290.
[21]I. Pătruț 1953, p. 212.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

the internal tendencies of Romanian language – found not only on dialectal level – which constitute an essential prerequisite too.

In a similar manner, the phenomenon of vowel prolongation[22], observed in certain Romanian dialects, may be regarded as a result of the contacts with Hungarians, though the applicability of the Hungarian pronunciation is restricted by certain properties of the Romanian phonetic system. Thus, while in Hungarian vowel length is not related to stress or to the position of the vowel in the word, in Romanian only those vowels are pronounced prolongated which belong to stressed syllables and more frequently following certain consonants. Additionally, the prolongation of Romanian short vowels does not include all the words nor does it appear in the speech of all speakers. The main source of such pronunciation is to be found among bilinguals who borrow the stronger Hungarian stress along with the loanword, which makes stressed vowels to be pronounced with a longer duration.

The transition /ĝ/ > /j/ in Crişana and western Transylvania has also been regarded as a consequence of Hungarian influence. Speakers of these dialects often pronounce /j/ instead of /ĝ/ not only in words of Hungarian origin including a /*gy*/ (see Hung. *gyalu*‘plane’ > Rom. *jalău*‘id. ’ instead of *gealău* ‘id. ’, Hung. *gyolcs*‘linen’ >*jolj*‘id. ’ instead of *giulgiu* ‘id. ’) but also in other contexts including inherited words of Latin origin (*fuge*‘to run’ – *fuje* ‘to run’, *lege*‘law’ – *leje* ‘law’) [23]. Actually, the affricates /ĉ/ and /ĝ/ may be found with different pronunciations in different regions[24], including the utterance /j/. In addition, the transition of /ĝ/ to /j/ must have taken place, in all likelihood, through an intermediate state with /ẑ/. The contribution of Hungarian language in this process consists of the fact that Hungarian speakers in contacts with Romanians most probably replaced /ẑ/ with /j/ since the former one did not exist in their language or, at any rate, it has been less common and, thus, it gave rise to difficulties in its pronunciation. Its replacement has been carried out, hence, by employing the sound which

[22]Phenomenon discussed in I. Pătruţ 1953, p. 211-217. See also P. Neiescu 1958, p. 135-143 and L. Balázs 1965, p. 81-85.

[23]See B. Kelemen 1971, p. 17. The same phenomenon is discussed in several other works among which I. Pătruţ 1953, p. 212-213; I. Pătruţ 1958, p. 68-69; Gr. Rusu 1966, p. 349-350.

[24]For example, in the dialect of Moldavia, there exists the pronunciation with /ŝ/, /ẑ/, i.e. with palatal fricatives (I. Pătruţ 1953, p. 213).

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

is most close to the desired one and which is also found in Hungarian. The Hungarian pronunciation with /j/ instead of /ẑ/ was then adopted by Romanians too, especially by those in bilingual communities, extending its diffusion area (also) beyond the zone of direct contact with Hungarians. To sum up, the Hungarian influence regarding this particular pronunciation has exerted its power initially in bilingual communities, whereas the propagation of this phenomenon towards Romanian monolinguals is due to bilingual speakers. Additionally, it has also been conditioned by the fact that the utterance in question is not completely novel since it may be found in other geographical areas too and in other stages of the language development as well, in other words, it could have complied with a pre-existing Romanian pattern. It should be noted that the Hungarian influence with respect to the transition of /ĝ/ to /j/ may be valid as a regional phenomenon, being characteristic for the western parts of Transylvania, whereas the larger phenomenon, found in other areas as well, may have other explanations too.

Similarily, the phenomenon of dental's palatalization, observed in the dialect of Crișana[25], is determined both by the internal conditions of the Romanian language system and by foreign (i. e. Hungarian) influences. The internal causes of this sound change consist of the pressure of a palatal element on the nearby sounds, in this particular case of the alteration of the consonants /t/, /d/ followed by a hard palate (/i/, /e/) as a result of which the former ones become palatals, dorsals or even affricates. The process takes place both in monolinguals' and in bilinguals' speech, the difference between the two cases regarding chiefly the state reached on the scale of *palatal – apical – dorsal – affricate* consonant. Foreign influences play a role precisely in determining the intensity with which the palatal vowels trigger changes of the dental consonants. The innovation brought about by foreign influence is adopted in the language system first and foremost by bilinguals and its usage generally remains limited to a smaller region. Actually, the palatalization of dentals has various stages in the Romanian language development. A first change could have occurred due to the influence of the Slavs, as a result of their long-term cohabitation with

[25]This Hungarian pronunciation is also found in Sălaj, Hațeg, Bihor and Banat (A. Philippide, 1894, p. 156).

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

Romanians, which could have been diffused to the whole Romanian territory since the phases /t^{i}, d^{i}/ are relatively accessible to Romanian speakers too without any alteration of their base of articulation. Unlike this situation, the pronunciation with /t", d"/ (cf. Hung. /ty, gy/) is found chiefly in Romanian-Hungarian bilingual communities since these imply a way too long distance from the Romanian articulatory custom. Being characteristic for Hungarian language, these sounds are easily reproduced by bilinguals who have practices in various pronunciations in both languages. On the other hand, bilinguals are constantly exposed to the Hungarian model unlike monolinguals in whose speech these sounds can not become habitual due to lack of contact with a decisive stimulus. Thus, monolinguals do not adopt these foreign sounds in their phonetic system, they can not adapt them since their contact with such utterances is only occasional and temporary and neither can they reproduce them as such due to their lack of feedback. Naturally, such pronunciations can not be entirely excluded from the speech of monolinguals either, especially of those from bilingual environment, yet the main source and medium of these utterances are undoubtedly the bilinguals.

3. 2. The treatment of loanwords' adaptation

The individual's first contact with the foreign element (in this case, with the Hungarian loanword) takes place on its phonetic level to which he responds with his effort to reproduce it as precisely as possible. The comprehension of sounds, however, is usually only approximative. Thus, the foreign word's sequence of sounds appears to have two types of cognizance: its pronunciation by a native speaker, on the one hand, and its perception by the one who borrows it, on the other hand. The latter one segments the sound stream and identifies its composing sounds according to his own phonetic system, and then he converts the received units to units familiar to him. When he tries to reproduce the sound stream, other adjustments may occur due to different reasons: he may perceive the sound just the way the provider does but he can not reproduce it exactly the same way or he may perceive it differently than the native speaker and, furthermore, he can not reproduce it either. In other words, there is a difference between the perceived sound and its accustic image, as well as between what the speaker thinks he produces based on this model and what he actually does reproduce from the provider's point of view.

Therefore, the phonetic reproduction of a certain loanword does not constitute a mere act of imitation, but it also implies "creation": though

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

convinced of the fact that he pronounces what he hears, the speaker who borrows the loanword will re-create every time the foreign element by its more or less close variant. This is only natural since the subject perceives the Hungarian element according to his own (i. e. Romanian) base of articulation[26] and he will reproduce it in relation to the sounds of his mother tongue not because anatomically or physiologically speaking he would not be able to reproduce Hungarian sounds but only because he lacks their perfomative practice, not being accustomed to them.

In these circumstances, in the case of a monolingual, the need for adaptation is felt more acutely than in the case of a bilingual speaker. This is due to the fact that the former ones have to deal with the discomfort caused by a foreign phonetic feature which affects to a greater extent their "normal" and normative usage than in the case of bilinguals who have countless opportunities to use and to adjust these elements. Beyond the differences regarding the motivations for adaptation, the very mechanisms involved in this process may also vary depending on the bilingual or monolingual status of the speaker. Thus, the former ones master certain articulatory skills which are more receptive and suited to (re) produce Hungarian sounds, which is why they do not exclude from their speech the sounds specific for the loanword, not do they replace them by similar ones found in Romanian, but they simply reproduce them as they are. A monolingual, on the other hand, will perform all these operations eventually accomplishing its total adaptation[27].

Once entered into the Romanian language and (phonetically) adapted to its system, Hungarian loanwords become autonomous elements of the language in which they were integrated into and they may be used (also) independently from the contexts in which its etymons appear, in other words, they may undergo series of semantic changes, some of them even

[26]For the role played by the *base of articulation* in the phonetic adaptation process see A. Philippide 1894, p. 158 sqq.; S. Pușcariu 1931-1933, p. 42; *idem* 1959, p. 192-196; Fr. Király 1969, p. 465 sqq.; V. Arvinte 2006, p. 67. As a matter of fact, the speaker who borrows the word does not know more about the sounds of the source-language than a child who learns his mother tongue. The difference between the two would be that a child does several experiments, whereas an adult substitutes the foreign sounds with similar ones from his own language (E. H. Sturtevant 1961, p. 36).

[27]Due to intense and continuous linguistic contacts, the source-language (i.e. Hungarian) could have preserved its modelling pressure on the target-language (i.e. Romanian) by means of permanent control. Thus, certain features of Hungarian language are preserved, quite strongly, chiefly regionally and within bilingual communities. For example, word stress is not always modified. Those in direct contacts with Hungarians often keep it the way it is in Hungarian and the (loan) words stressed in such a manner fulfil the same conditions of usage in the given dialect as the ones accentologically adapted to the standard variety.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

unknown to the source-language. The mechanisms of generating new meanings to Hungarian loanwords are similar to those engaged in case of all the other words of the Romanian language (be they inherited or of other origin). The speakers who borrow the word exhaust the meanings and contexts offered by its etymon, all the more so since they are in vivid contacts with the native speakers (and language) who provide it. Both the former and the latter ones exploit all the valencies of a lexeme, though the end point reached in one language or the other may be different. The competence to produce new meanings, sometimes even at all related to its basic etymological meaning, characterize both bilinguals and monolinguals, but the former ones have the possibility to exploit to a greater extent the potential valencies included in the etymon. Additionally, they retain much more of the nuances related to a semantic nucleus and keep the etymological meanings for longer. Those who do not have direct and permanent contacts with Hungarian speakers operate greater modifications and the loanword is used with more restricted meanings and in more limited contexts, obviously required by their own communicative needs. Hence, it is quite natural that in case of major semantic changes the etymological meanings have been kept till the present day precisely in the regions which today are and/or in the past were influenced by Hungarians, whereas the meanings more remote from those included in the etymon are widely spread in other areas, less or not at all affected by Hungarian influence. Naturally, in most cases, the latter meanings were adopted also by the standard variety of Romanian language.

4. Conclusions

Romanian-Hungarian bilingualism constitutes a very topical subject since this phenomenon is still ongoing. Compared to the contemporary situation, however, the status of Romanian-Hungarian bilingualism in the old epoch may be distinguished by certain features naturally determined by the peculiar conditions of the period. Thus, beyond individual bilingualism, which may be found independently of historical and socio-cultural factors (too), being developed by psycho-affective reasons only, in the old epoch and especially in certain Transylvanian and Moldavian regions we may observe a Romanian-Hungarian collective bilingualism, established and maintained by folk contacts. Due to certain extralinguistic factors, in certain regions of the country and in certain periods respectively, Hungarian influence became dominant if not the only accepted one by the local communities, which could have dislocated the equilibrium turning the balanced bilingualism into a more and more Hungarian dominant one. Naturally, once the external circumstances had changed, this state of affairs transmuted as well, taking a reverse direction. The different types of

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

Romanian-Hungarian bilingualism which characterize the old epoch had variable consequences on the development of the languages in contact and on various levels. In this respect, it should also be noted that bilingualism appears not only as a result of contacts, but it is also a starting point for certain influences which it triggers both regarding the two languages in contact and their use by bilinguals and monolinguals respectively. Thus, though in his speech acts the bilingual speaker tries to use by turns and unaltered the two linguistic systems, this can not be entirely controlled nor is it fully achievable. Interferences might appear at every step, indirectly inducing certain linguistic features in the speech of his monolingual collocutor too. Actually, this fact contributed to the long-term existence of the borrowed Hungarian elements and to their generalization beyond the direct contact zones too.

Bibliography

ARAVINTE, Vasile, 2006, *Studii de istorie a limbii române,* Iaşi: Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”.

BALÁZS, László, 1965, „Aspecte ale interacţiunii limbilor. Relaţii lingvistice româno-maghiare”, in: *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai*, series*Philologia*, fasciculus 1, pp. 80-92.

BREBAN, V., 1958, „Note despre influenţa maghiară asupra limbii române”, in: *Cercetări de lingvistică*, III, pp. 219-225.

GIURESCU, Constantin, 1943, *Istoria românilor, II,* first part, *De la Mircea cel Bătrân și Alexandru cel Bunpână la Mihai Viteazul,* fourth edition, București: Editura Fundaţiei Regale pentru Literatură.

DAUZAT, A., 1922, *La géographie linguistique*, Paris.

DĂNILĂ, Ioan, 2005, *Limba română în graiul ceangăilor din Moldova,* București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică – R. A.

HYMES, Dell (ed.), 1964, *Language in Culture and Society. A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology,* New York & London: Harper &Row.

KELEMEN, Béla, 1971, „Unele aspecte ale împrumuturilor maghiare în limba română”, in: *Cercetări de lingvistică*, XVI, pp. 17-27.

KIRÁLY, Francisc, 1969, „Probleme ale adaptării fonetice: împrumutul și cuvintele străine (din fonetica împrumuturilor de origine maghiară)”, in: *Limba română*, XVIII, nr. 5, pp. 459-469.

MÁRTON, Gy.; PÉNTEK, J.; VÖÖ, I., 1977, *A magyar nyelvjárások román kölcsönszavai,* Bukarest: Kriterion.

METEȘ, Ștefan, 1920, *Relaţiile comerciale ale Ţerii- Româneşti cu Ardealul până în veacul al XVIII-lea,* Sighişoara.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)

METEȘ, Ștefan, 1977, *Emigrări româneşti din Transilvania în secolele XIII-XX (Cercetări de demografie istorică)*, second edition, Bucureşti: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică.
NEIESCU, P., 1958, „Există legătură între cantitate şi accent? Observaţii asupra cuvintelor de origine românească din limba maghiară şi asupra celor de origine maghiară din limba română", in: *Cercetări de lingvistică*, III, pp. 135-143.
PĂTRUȚ, I., 1953, „Influenţe maghiare în limba română", in: *Studii şi cercetări lingvistice*, IV, pp. 211-217.
PĂTRUȚ, I., 1958, „Contribuţii slave şi maghiare la formarea subdialectelor dacoromâne", in: *Cercetări de lingvistică*, III, pp. 63-74.
PHILIPPIDE, A., 1894, *Istoria limbii române*, vol. I., *Principii de istoria limbii*, Iași: Tipografia Națională.
POZSONY, Ferenc, 2002, *Ceangăii din Moldova*, Cluj: Asociația Etnografică Kriza János.
PUȘCARIU, Sextil, 1931-1933, „Considerațiuni asupra sistemului fonetic și fonologic al limbii române", in:*Dacoromania*, VII, pp. 1-55.
PUȘCARIU, Sextil, 1959, *Limba română*, vol. *II. Rostirea*, Bucureşti.
RUSU, Gr., 1966, „Probleme de fonetică şi fonologie dialectală. În legătură cu palatalizarea dentalelor în graiurile dacoromâne", in: *Cercetări de lingvistică*, XI, nr. 2, pp. 345-353.
RUSU, Gr., 1969, „Statutul fonologic al vocalelor o̯, e̯ și ă în graiurile dacoromâne", in: *Cercetări de lingvistică*, XIV, nr. 2, pp. 279-290.
STURTEVANT, E. H., 1961, *Linguistic Change. An Introduction to the Historical Study of Language*, Phoenix Books, University of Chicago Press.
TÓDOR, Erika-Mária, 2009, *Predarea-învăţarea limbii române ca ne-maternă (O alternativă a lingvisticii aplicate)*, Cluj Napoca: Scientia.
WEINREICH, U., 1974, *Languages in Contact. Findings and Problems*, Haga-Paris: Mouton.

BDD-A17656 © 2015 Editura Muzeul Literaturii Române
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-26 14:00:44 UTC)