ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN BUSINESS DISCOURSE

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Abstract

Languages are living bodies: they are born, live and die and during their lives they change all the time. The most obvious changes are noticed in the vocabulary, which can be done in many ways, through conversion, changing of meaning, borrowings and so on. The last phenomenon is widely spread in many languages, Romanian being no exception. Recent borrowings have been observed from the English language and the paper deals with English words used in the Romanian business vernacular.

Introduction

The formation of the Romanian language was a lasting process. It was a following up of the common Latin language spoken on the territory between Dacia, the Balkan Mountains and the Black Sea. From the initial Thracian dialect there are only 70 or 80 words left. A major influence was the Slavonic language but the grammar is wholly Latin. The Romanian lexicon contains up to 20 per cent words of Slavonic origin.

Latin and Greek had a very important influence on Romanian thinking, language and literature until the second half of the eighteenth century. These two languages had to be known by those who pretended to be scholarly people. Romance languages began to be taught in the 30s, 40s and 50s of the 19th century, among which French was the most important foreign language until the end of the Second World War. After the Second World War the lingua franca of the communist countries was Russian. It was the main language obligatory taught in many Romanian schools until 1989. In fact, for a period of almost twenty years it occupied 80% of the foreign languages taught in Romania. Although everybody learned Russian for about eight years in school, the paradox was that nobody spoke the language.

There is not much information about the place of English as a foreign language before 1800 but its use is supposed to have been limited to the main ports and routes and must have been used for economic reasons. English was taught sporadically in Romania between the two World Wars, in schools of commerce by native and foreign teachers.

Of all the foreign languages that are taught in Romania, the English language has got the upper hand. This is due to many reasons: music, films, magazines, international trade and commerce, advertising, a chance to get a better job and maybe a job in another country. And above all it is the language of the computers, let alone its relatively easy grammar and productive word formation.

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In a way, the English language seems to be teaching itself. Even people who have never studied it use English words in their everyday talk. Many of them entered the vocabulary a long time ago, presumably around the Second World War and they belong mainly to the fields of cinema, sports, motoring and clothing, such as *bob (sleigh), bridge, box, knock-out, hockey, jockey, football, match, corner, off-side, hands, derby, dribble, fair-play, rugby, tennis, volley(ball), tandem, crawl, finish, rally, record, handicap, looping, shorts, sprint, start, blazer, jacket, cardigan, cape, pullover, shawl, sweater, star, film, gag, western, thriller, automobile, carting.*

English words in the Romanian language

As life changes faster than one now expects, language has to change too, but, as we know, slower and unpredictably sometimes. Thus, some words are borrowed because they express things that do not exist in the culture of the borrowers; this is true for the most part of the words. But sometimes they circulate in parallel with native words expressing the same things, for instance, the Romanian *patine cu rotile* for *rollers*.

Some words are used only in speech, and not in writing, either because they are too new or they have a difficult spelling. One of them is *fifty-fifty*, very often heard but seldom printed. Some words have a wide-world use and are found in other languages, but others are specific to one vernacular only. For example, if we compare the two main languages spoken in Romania, Hungarian and Romanian, the former, not the latter, has words like *kick-box, snooker, forehand, backhand game, stopper, tip, canter, ham and eggs, toast, grill, sherry dry, baby-doll, moon-boots, overall, topless, zipper, farmer, corduroy, pacemaker, walkie-talkie, off-set, colt, hobo, peep talk, kennel, gentry, happening, matchbox, nonsense, nurse, slang, tank, teenager*. Other words belong only to Romanian: *fan, goal getter, stock, rollers, audit*.

In Romanian the spelling is preserved but the pronunciation is adapted. Words that are old enough changed at a certain time in the past and are written according to our rules, such as *folclor*. If you tell anybody in Romania that this was an originally English word, they won't believe you. But like in Hungarian, words have got inflected, verbs have an ending for person and number, nouns for plural and case, adjectives for number and gender.

In Romanian we have examples such as *to park = a parca* with all the endings for person and number. The noun *pampers* is used only in the plural because it sounds more Romanian - *pempărşi*; the noun *site* has two pronunciations [sit] for historical places and [sait] for the computer science; the adjective *homeless* is used as a noun and has the plural *hăumleşi*.

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There are also words, both in Hungarian and Romanian, which have one meaning in English and another one in the new language: *training* in both languages means *tracksuit*; only recently, after 1989 it has got the meaning of 'teaching a person to perform a particular job or skill'. Another word is *fault* with the meaning of 'foul play', again in both language and other words are *smoking* with the meaning of 'dinner jacket' (both in Hungarian and Romanian dictionaries of etymology the origin of this word is given as English, probably from its out-dated meaning of 'smoking jacket', a man's comfortable jacket usually made of velvet); *dress* with the meaning of 'stockings', again with its plural form in Romanian of 'dresuri'.

In both languages there are words which were borrowed with one meaning only, for instance *to toast* with its equivalent noun, *toast – toasts*.

A great majority of words has been imported after the iron curtain fell down, that is during the last two decades. Most of them belong to the domains of

- economics and business: *job, manager, dealer, leader, partner, producer, standard, dumping, marketing, meeting, concern, firm, company (Co.), leasing, stock, trust, audit, due-diligence, greenfield, market value, retail, broker, timing, boom, public relations, target, holding, cash flow, asset, discount, real estate, e-payment, time-out;*
- sports: *aerobic, badminton, body-building, cross, body-check, jogging, kick-box, fault, centre, ping-pong, forehand, backhand, game, bicycle, mountain, bike, dress, doping, fitness (salon), stop(per), team, tip, train(training/trainer), turf, canter;*
- music: *band, fan, rocker, HiFi, hit, jam, session, musical, play back, song, walkman, beat, blues, country music, disco, Dixieland, jazz, heavy metal, hard rock, rock-and-roll, pop, ragtime, reggae, soul, swing, twist, underground, video-clip;*
- food and drinks: *bacon, ham, ham and eggs, pudding, sandwich, beefsteak, roast-beef, toaster; cakes; cheeseburger; hamburger; hot dog; chips; pop corn; dressing; drops, jam, juice, grapefruit, grill, (cherry) brandy, cocktail, gin tonic, whisky, sherry dry;*
- cosmetics: *after-shave, spray*;
- clothes: *smoking, top(less); zipper, jeans, stretch, tweed;*
- traffic: *airbag, bulldozer, trolley-bus, jeep, scooter, charter, inter-city, wagon, cutter, clipper, trailer;*

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- technical activities and things: *boiler, defroster, container, jet, lift, pacemaker, pager, propeller, walkie-talkie, design, trend, feed-back, off-set, colt, revolver, laser, safe;*
- information technology: *computer, hard /soft /share –wear, hard disc, floppy (disc), chip, bit, byte, CD-ROM, PC, cursor, decoder, disc(drive), driver, file, keyboard, printer, processor, mouse, Winchester, copy-right, digital, display, layout, e-mail, fax, input, reset (a seta), output, password,*
- miscellaneous: *baby (sitter), call-girl, cover-girl, camping, campus, cow-boy, check, dandy, detective, dock(er), hippie, hooligan, joker, Yankee, outsider, playboy, punk, skinhead, bar, (with the Romanian feminine barmana) drink bar, snack bar, (night) club, drug-store, show pub, interview, jury, clips, comfort, fifty-fifty, flirt, folk-lore, (garden) party, gang(ster), prairie, puzzle, second hand, report(er,) season, hall, happy end, hobby, lobby, lynch, mixer, plaid, poster, non-stop, OK, hello, bye, park, picnic, shock, sketch, smog, speaker, speech, steward(ess), (love) story, trance, stress, strip-tease, sex-appeal, sexy, slogan, test, weekend, site, pampers, homeless.*[1]

English and Romanian economics discourse

There are quite a few newspapers, journals and magazines printed in English such as, "9 O'clock", "Romanian Economic Daily", "Romanian Business Journal", "Romanian Reports in Physics", "Medical Update", "Romanian Journal of Neurology", "Romanian Journal of Sociology", "Holidays in Romania" and others. In other dailies and magazines, some specialized in economics and business such as, "Piata financiara" (The Financial Market), "I&P" (Investments and Profit), "Ziarul financiar" (The Financial Newspaper), "Money Express", "Business magazine", "Capital" and so on, the articles are so crammed with English words that a person who does not speak English has a hard time trying to understand them.

As already mentioned, English is also an instrumental language which helps people get a good job or be promoted in their careers. Statistics have been made about the percentage of Business English vocabulary in the Romanian language and how business people regard the use of the English language and its influence on their career development. Some research has used questionnaires developed to reveal how many people use English and especially

[1] Tatiana Iatcu & Ildiko Zoltan: *The English Language: From a Victim to an Invader*, paper presented at the International Conference **MAVEN 3 –** Freiburg-Germany 2001

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Business English at their offices. One of these[2] was handed out to different people from different domains and career levels. The following table contains their current jobs, ages and sex.

Current job	**Age**	**Sex**
Project manager	27	Male
Administrator	32	Male
Territorial director	38	Female
Front desk officer	26	Male
Assistant manager	24	Female
Product manager	24	Male
Senior developer	31	Male
CEO (*chief executive officer*)	41	Female
Project manager	43	Male
Software engineer	29	Male

Table 1. People involved in a survey about the use of English in business offices (May 2008)

As the table shows seven of the interviewed people were males and only three females and the average age was 31.5. The people who answered the questions work in domains like banking, import-export at a meddle-sized company, freelancers in web development and even multinational corporations. For example, the person who had the highest career level was a female; she is CEO at a company which has offices in 17 countries. The people who learned English in the years of college and especially those who have attended a special English course that enriched their knowledge and vocabulary have reached much higher positions in a firm at a much younger age than the rest.

The questions used in the questionnaire are: "Do you use English at your job?" "What kind of words coming from the English language do you use at work? (Standard vocabulary, specialized basic vocabulary, specialized high-level vocabulary)" "Did your knowledge of English help you obtain a job?" "Did you study English during high-school or college?" "Have you attended an English course just to help you in your career or to get a job?", "Would you learn Business English in order to help you in your career?", "If you have never studied Business English but you speak Standard English, what do you think of the first one?", "Do you consider borrowing some terms from English into Romanian as bad or useful for the language?" "Using English is helpful for: a) The development of small and middle-

[2] Bondoroi, Daniel *Latest Acquisitions in Business English in the Romanian Language* (graduation paper 2008, unpublished)

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sized industrial units; b) The development of the Romanian companies; c) The economic development of the country; d) All the above-mentioned".

Briefly, the answers to these questions can be summarized as follows:

- The questionnaire has been handed out to ten people, seven men and three women with ages between 24 and 43, with an average of 31.5 years.
- All the respondents use English at work, the level depending on their job description and responsibilities.
- Half of the interviewed persons use the standard vocabulary, the rest using the specialized vocabulary, basic or high-leveled.
- 80% of the people who answered the questionnaire used their English language knowledge in order to get a job even though only 70% studied English in school.
- Only a quarter of the respondents attended extra English courses in order to get a better job.
- All the interviewed people would be open to studying Business English if this helped them in their career.
- None of the people who speak English but haven't studied specialized vocabulary thinks that it is very difficult to learn and use Business English.
- Two thirds of the interviewed people think that borrowing some terms from English into Romanian isn't bad for our language.
- Half of the respondents believe that using English is helpful for the development of Romanian companies, small and middle-sized industrial units and the economic development of the country.

Business English is not only made out of specific terminology for every business key areas. As in daily life, the first contact you have with your client, partner, future boss and so on, starts off with a ritual that implies meeting and greeting people that usually come from another culture. This is followed by small talk meant to ease the conversation with someone you have just met, also called phatic language. Although the order of questions may vary, the same questions are always asked and the same remarks made: "How are you?" is answered by "Fine, thanks". This is not an inquiry into your physical health, it is a standard greeting. This is usually followed by "I'm fine, thank you" in order to respond to that polite manner of greeting, even if you are not in your best state of being. Romanians usually use a full answer to that question, explaining what they are doing indeed, as the meaning of the question is "What are you doing, by the way?"

Small talk can take place between people who know each other, or at first-time meetings. Obviously, when meeting someone for the first time, you are limited in what you

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may and may not say. You do not want to be rude by asking personal questions or saying anything negative. For the most part of people, small talk is a restrictive and unnatural way of communication, not typical of private discourse. If you do not take part in this polite type of repartee, you will be considered rude and unfriendly; therefore it is essential to learn the formulas. Paradoxically, the goal of small talk is to get to know someone, yet you should never ask personal questions too soon, instead you should start with questions or comments that elicit an expected response. This tells you if the person you are talking to is willing to communicate with you and if so, on what level. You can then decide if you wish to continue talking or not and whether you can move the conversation into another direction. You can see that even with formulas there is always room to express your attitude towards the person addressing you.

In business, we use small talk when we introduce ourselves, or others, before business meetings or business lunches, or when we see someone in the office after a long period of absence. In the business world, there is small talk until a relationship is established, after which one may talk specifically about business or personal concerns. After business hours, when socializing with colleagues or associates, you will need to know the acceptable topics of conversation: weather, sports, good news, travel, positive comments about your host country, movies, entertainment, food or the challenges of learning a foreign language. If asked, you may discuss about work, where you live or where you are staying. After work hours, when people want to relax, discussions about work or anything too serious are usually not welcomed. This is what also happens when talking business in offices of Romanian companies, people obeying the same etiquette of social behavior, trying to be good-mannered and helpful.

Conclusion

The present tendency is to find Romanian equivalents, either single items or phrases to express the same ideas with our own words and not to change Romanian into a creole language. For example, they have been working for some time to make up a vernacular for computer science, which uses now 90% English words.

Nevertheless, the changes in a language cannot be totally controlled by linguists but by the necessities of the day and the speed of the information flow. As Romania is among the countries which make use of the newest information technologies and is fast developing, dragging itself out of the transition period, these changes can also be noticed at the linguistic level and mainly nowadays in the economic field, where people prefer to use a borrowed word, either as it is or with Romanian inflection, instead of coining one in the mother tongue.

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