LANGUAGE AWARENESS AND LINGUISTIC INTERFERENCE IN THE DISCOURSE OF ROMANIAN IMMIGRANTS IN SPAIN

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Abstract: Romanian immigration in Spain reached its peak towards the end of the 2000's putting the Romanians on the first place amongst the immigrant communities in Spain and thus creating the proper environment for language contact between Romanian and Spanish. This linguistic reality has been studied only recently but conclusions arising from this research already account for the existence of a new variety of Romanian, lately referred to as Rumañol.
According to the first studies that dealt with the topic, Rumañol was a mixed variety used by Romanian immigrants living in Spain and characterised by linguistic interferences. However, some recent papers have shown that from a quantitative point of view this is highly debatable since the amount of interference seems to be very low.
The present paper combines this quantitative criterion with a sociological view, by firstly investigating the degree to which Romanian immigrants might be aware of Rumañol as a distinct variety of Romanian, and secondly by aiming at identifying any possible correlation between the awareness level and the amount of interference present in their discourse.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, language contact, linguistic interference, Rumañol, identity.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the validity of the newly coined term *Rumañol* as an identity marker used by the Romanian immigrants living in Spain by analysing the degree in which immigrants are aware of the existence of the concept and/or use it to identify the Romanian variety that they speak. The sociological data consists of the answers of 92 informants from 6 areas in Spain to the questions "Have you ever heard the word Rumañol?" and "What is, in your opinion, *Rumañol*?" These two questions were the last ones to be asked in a series of guided conversations that were used to gather linguistic data on the Romanian-Spanish language contact.

2. Romanian immigration in Spain and the term *Rumañol*

Presently, there are approximately one million Romanian immigrants living in Spain and one of the aspects in which these people feel most strongly the cultural contact with the Spanish society is their day to day communication. This situation is, undoubtedly, due to the growth of Romanian immigration in Spain during the last twenty years. Romanian presence in Spain can be tracked back to earlier dates but it used to be so low that Romanians did not even show up in the statistics and it was only at the beginning of the 2000's when it became more evident. Following the political regime change in Romania and a series of immigrant friendly laws that were passed in Spain, Romanian immigration in Spain started to grow constantly

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during the second half of the 90's and reached a boom during the 2000's[1]. The figures offered by the National Institute of Statistics in Spain are extremely relevant. Back in 1999 there were about 3.000 Romanians in Spain, which meant 0,4% of the total number of foreigners in the country and thus, Romanian community was not even among the first 30 ethnic minorities. At the beginning of 2008 the number of registered Romanian immigrants was 731.806 and the Romanian community became the largest in Spain (Viruela Martínez 2006: 159). Around these dates, when the effects of the economic crisis started to be felt in Spain as well, the rhythm of immigration slows down and some of the immigrants even decide to move back to Romania (Tamames 2008: 69-79). Nevertheless, the overall number has continued to grow and has presently got to 925.140 which represent 16% of the total number of immigrants in Spain, according to the figures offered by the General Secretary for Immigration and Emigration, within the Ministry of Labor and Social Security in Spain[2].

The term *Rumañol* started to be used to designate the way in which Romanian immigrants speak in Spain in 2005 when the Spanish journal *El Mundo* published in its Sunday supplement an article written by the Spanish journalist of Romanian origin Alexandru Emil Petrescu, in which the author used this term to refer to the mix of Romanian and Spanish that he considered to be the jargon (*jerga* in Spanish) of the second generation of Romanian immigrants (Petrescu 2005). The concept appeared afterwards several times in the media, mostly in newspaper, radio and TV programs in different versions: *romaniola* (Mihalcea 2007), *rumaniola* (ziare.ro 2009), *rumaniol* (Dinu 2009) or *romañol* (Mateaş, 2010). In most of these cases, the linguistic reality designated by these terms was mostly perceived negatively and it was considered a badly spoken Romanian. It is also worth mentioning the fact that in 2007 the Romanian government decided to implement a project by which classes of Romanian language, culture and civilization started to be taught in schools where Romanian kids are learning (Mae.ro 2012). This confirms and validates somehow the purist attitudes of Romanian media. However, there were also several attempts to legitimize the concept done by different Romanian associations in Spain such as the organization in Torrelaguna of a debate on the topic, titled "Copilul tău în ce limbă visează?[3]" in July, 2009, with the participation of the Romanian Cultural Institute (ICR). It was the first time when opinions about *Rumañol* that have previously appeared only in media met with the more cautious and more documented ideas of some scholars, some of them linguists who were working on the Romanian-Spanish language contact, such as Ofelia Mariana Uţă Burcea, PhD student at Universidad Complutense de Madrid or Diego Muñoz Carrobles, researcher at the same university. In spite of these efforts, the term *Rumañol* and the linguistic reality it refers to are still the object of controversy. On one hand linguists do not share the radical ideas that have appeared in the media according to which *Rumañol* would be a new language (Mihalcea 2007) or a new dialect of Romanian (Dinu 2009, Tercero 2010). On the other hand, there is no agreement between those linguists who have written on the topic either.

[1] More details on Romanian immigration to Spain in Caeiro García 2010, Marcu 2009, Pajares Alonso 2008, Roesler 2007, Sandu 2009, Tamames 2008, Viruela Martínez 2006 y 2010.
[2] Latest figures reflect the situation as of June, 30, 2013 and can be consulted on the official webpage: Ministerio de Empleo y Seguridad Social – http://extranjeros.empleo.gob.es/es/estadisticas/operaciones/con-certificado/index.html
[3] In what language does your kid dream?

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There are not too many studies which deal with the Romanian-Spanish language contact and those which do, use the concept with different meanings and do not manage to clarify what it refers to. Thus, Munteanu Colán refers in an article from 2011 to the discourse of Romanian immigrants by calling it a new linguistic means marked by Spanish interferences which represent, in the author's opinion, "early signs, but very likely to continue to the extent that radical changes might take place in this variety, that can go as far as becoming another type of pidgin, the so called *rumañol*, as it is jocularly and fondly referred to, distinct from the variety spoken in Romania" (Munteanu Colán 2011: 34). A more extended study, that of Ioana Jieanu, states that *Rumañol* is the sociolect of Romanian immigrants in Spain, characterized by cases of linguistic interference (Jieanu 2011: 191 – 199). Other papers have the same approach, presenting and classifying the interferences that can be identified in the Romanian oral (Roesler 2007; Schulte 2012; Brânză 2012) and written (Uţă Burcea 2010; Duţă 2012) discourse. However, most of them use the term *Rumañol* to name this linguistic reality without investigating if this reality has indeed the characteristics of a new variety that could be called differently and some papers even make some statements that, in our opinion, are not demonstrated. Jieanu, for example, after making a detailed presentation of the different cases of interference that can be found in the corpus she used, says that *Rumañol* can be considered a Romanian sociolect because those cases can be found in the discourse of most Romanian immigrants in Spain, and that most of them are aware of the fact that they speak a different variety then that which is used in Romania and they call it *Rumañol* (Jieanu 2012: 195). That would mean that most of the Romanians use the term as an identity marker. We believe that this is not entirely correct and will try to show in the next few chapters why.

3. Awareness of *Rumañol* among the Romanian immigrants in Spain

We have stated in previous papers (Buzilă 2013b; Buzilă 2013c) that the similitude between various immigrant discourses is highly debatable as the quantitative data we analysed revealed important differences in the amount of interference (ranging from 0,51% to 7,89%) between various informants depending on the social variables involved. That is normal because any language variety present a certain degree of variation but it also means that in order to consider *Rumañol* a sociolect, we need to take into account the social variables involved and better describe the possible *Rumañol* speaker. Identifying this with all Romanian immigrants in Spain is too vague and premature.

On the other hand, the amount of interference in the discourse of the immigrants is very low overall (1,49 at group level) and therefore it can be argued that the variety spoken by the Romanian immigrants in Spain does not deviate so much from the standard as previous studies suggest (Buzilă 2013c). The quantitative data comes from only a small sample out of a larger corpus we gathered in order to analyse the language contact situation and these figures would need to be confirmed by analysing the whole corpus.

However, even if this proves to be right, it is still possible to consider *Rumañol* a strong concept if we can prove that the term is used by the Romanian immigrant community as an identity marker. In other words, it is not necessary that the new variety be so different from the standard one as long as the speakers feel it like that and use a different name to refer to the way they speak and if, at the same time, they use this name to individualize themselves as a group. Without going into the details related to the different attitudes the immigrants

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might have towards this new variety (some may feel it natural, some may reject it etc.) the first step towards using the concept as an identity marker would be knowing it. Our intention was to check if Jieanu's assumption was right and if, indeed, most of the Romanians in Spain use this term. In order to do that, we decided to ask at the end of the 92 guided conversations we used to gather linguistic data, the following two questions: "Have you ever heard the word *Rumañol*?" and "What does *Rumañol* mean, in your opinion?" If Jieanu's assumption is correct we would expect to get a lot of "Yes" answers for the first one. The second one is used as a control question in order to make sure that the informants use the concept with the meaning we have described. Figure 1 reflects the answers received for the first question and shows the fact that the situation is rather different.

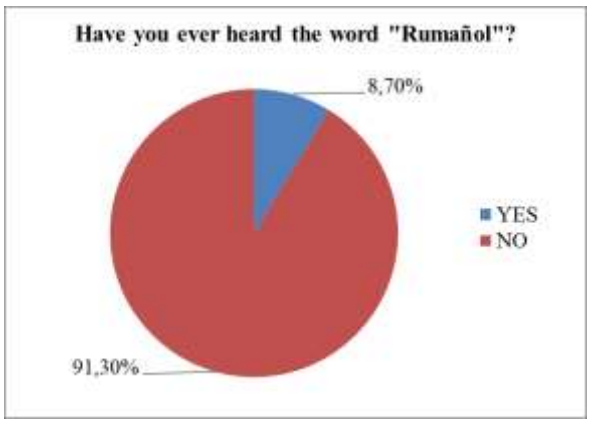


Figure 1 – Awareness of Rumañol

It is evident that most of the informants have not heard the word before as 84 informants have answered NO to this question and therefore don't know what it may refer to. Of the 8 informants who answered YES, 7 said that it refers to the mixture of Romanian and Spanish and one informant used relatively precise linguistic terminology saying that it refers to the linguistic interference phenomenon taking place in the Romanian communities due to the fact that this informant was a PhD student in Humanities. The high percentage of informants who are not aware of the concept nor of its meaning, points to the conclusion that the fact that Romanian immigrants consider *Rumañol* a linguistic variety that define them as a social group and differentiate them from the speakers in Romania is highly debatable. We are dealing with a small sample, of course, but with a high degree of diversity (as it can be seen from chapter 4) so we consider the results relevant.

However, the percentage of YES answers is higher than 0 so, even if at a group level we cannot consider this new variety something that the immigrants identify themselves with, it would be interesting to find out which are the social variables that contribute to *Rumañol* being recognized and considered an identity label. By analysing the social variables involved we intend to understand what social groups are more likely to acknowledge and use this concept.

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4. Awareness of *Rumañol* vs. social variables

There are seven social variables that were observed and analysed in order to determine which are the relevant characteristics that favour the use of *Rumañol* as an identity marker by the Romanian immigrants in Spain. Figure 2 present these variables and the respective scales.

Social variable	Scale
Sexo	Men Women
Age	5-14 15-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 64+
Origin (Region in Romania)	Dobruja Moldavia Transylvania Walachia Romania(?) - Cannot remember Spain - born in Spain
Residence (Spanish province)	Alicante Badajoz Castellón Madrid Málaga Tarragona
Studies	Completed in Romania - Gimnaziu (Middle school) - Liceu (Highschool) - Învăţământ superior (Higher education) Attending in Spain - CEIP (Primary school) - ESO (Secondary school) - Educación superior (Higher education)
Time spent in Spain	Less then 5 years (<5) Between 5 and 10 years (5-10) More then 10 years (>10)
Type of billingualism	Late bilingualism Early bilingualism

Figure 2 – Social variables and scales

These scales were used to calculate the awareness level for each group configured by the social variables. The next sections present the result of this analysis.

4.1. Sex

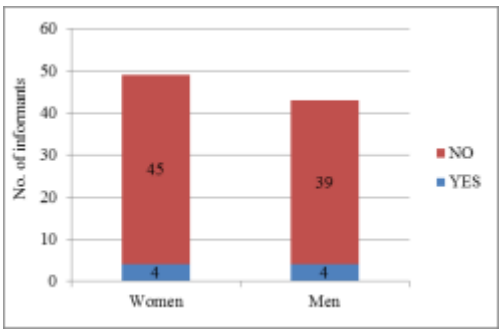


Figure 3 – Awareness vs. Sex

The split between YES and NO answers for this variable can be seen in Figure 3. YES answers represent 8,16% in the case of women and 9,30% in the case of men. Although women discourse tend to present a higher amount of interference (Buzilă 2013b), women informants don't seem to be more aware then men of the fact that they speak a different variety. Judging by the similar percentages we can draw the conclusion that sex is not a

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relevant variable in acknowledging *Rumañol* as a different linguistic variety and in using it as an identity marker.

4.2. Age

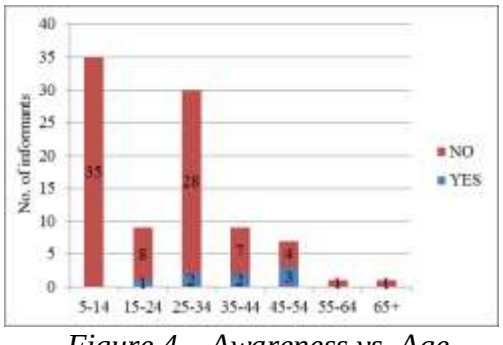


Figure 4 – Awareness vs. Age

Informants were divided in seven groups according to the variable "Age" variable, starting from the lowest age considered in this study (5 years old) and going by decades. The results can be seen in Figure 4. It can be noticed that the concept is not known at all by kids (5 – 14) nor by senior informants (55 +). YES answers were only recorded in what could be called the active population (25 – 54) with one exception in the 15 – 24 group. This is probably due to the fact that language awareness in general does not usually appear at very early ages so awareness of a variety is even less probable to appear in a kid. As for the 55+ informants, there are several aspects that have to be mentioned here. First of all, more than 90% of the Romanian immigrants can be included in age groups <54 (Tamames 2008: 30) so there are relatively few older immigrants in the first place. Secondly, those who are older than 54 are in general less interested in dealing with the details of the language contact situation triggered by the social contact. They are not "active" workers who plan to spend a significant time in Spain but people who are about to retire (and most of them decide to go back to Romania) or grandparents who have just moved to Spain to take care of other members of their family and do not even speak Spanish. Besides being far fewer than those belonging to other age groups senior immigrants are also the people that are least probable to debate on identity matters.

4.3. Origin

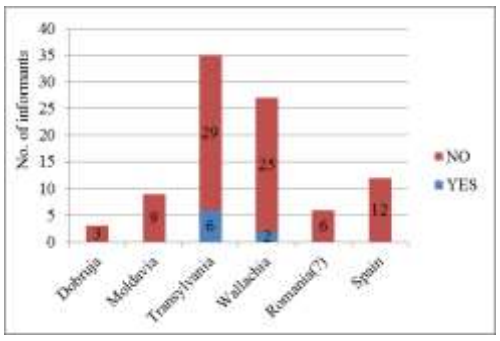


Figure 5 – Awareness vs. Origin

As mentioned in Figure 1, it was the historical-geographic regions in Romania where the informants come from that were taken into account under this variable. However, as we can already talk about an emerging second generation of immigrants, we had to account for two more groups: those who were not born in Romania and those who were born in Romania but left the country at very early ages so that they cannot remember where they come from. We called these groups "Spain" and "Romania(?)".

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The results (Figure 5) are somewhat surprising. The only two groups where we got YES answers are Transylvania (75% of those who heard about *Rumañol*) and Wallachia (25%). If it's normal not to get any YES answer in the last two groups, as they are mostly made of kids under 15, it is somewhat surprising to have the same negative result for the Dobruja and Moldavia groups. On one hand the total number of informants from these two regions is lower but another possible explanation is related to the way that most of the Romanians immigrated: through social networks (Tamames 2008: 31 – 35). These networks, which at the beginning, are made of people from the same region in Romania, are very strong, and besides being an infrastructure for mutual help, it also facilitates the flow of information. Most of this is related to job opportunities and everyday needs but sometimes it can refer to other aspects like language and identity. If a certain small group begin to be interested in such aspects it is very probable that soon there will be more members of their social network knowing about it. However, in order to be able to claim that a Transylvanian origin implies a higher probability that a certain person use *Rumañol* to identify themselves, more informants from other areas should be included in the analysis.

4.4. Residence

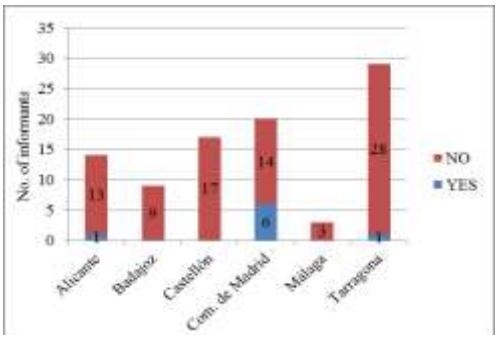


Figure 6 – Awareness vs. Residence

Romanians live all over the Spanish territory but for the present paper we have interviewed immigrants living in six different provinces. Figure 6 shows the results according to the variable "Residence". There are two isolated cases of informants who know what *Rumañol* refers to (both of them PhD students) from Alicante and Tarragona and the rest of those who answered YES are from Madrid. It can be assumed that this is because Madrid acts as a centre from various points of view and it is also the place where information flow has the highest level, so regardless of social networks (or exactly because Madrid is an important node in most of the social networks) someone living in Madrid is more likely to have heard about other issues regarding the immigrant's life than someone living in a small village.

4.5. Education

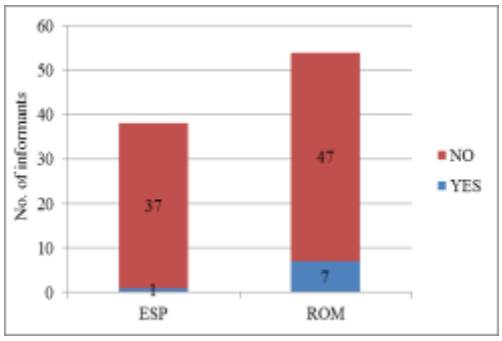


Figure 7 – Awareness vs. Education (country)

A preliminary distinction needs to be made for this variable. A considerable number of informants have not concluded yet their formal education which means that they are currently receiving it in Spanish. Some of them started school in Romania and are continuing it in Spain while others started it directly in Spain. We identify this group as ESP. On the other side, there is the big group of those who concluded their education in Romania before immigrating. We refer to them as ROM. Therefore, a first comparison was done between these two groups (Figure 7) showing that with only one exception, those who talk about

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Rumañol are members of the later which is not very surprising taking into account the fact that ESP group is mostly made of kids under 15 years old and we have already seen in 4.2. that this age group has no YES answer. Actually, the one exception mentioned above is a young university student who graduated high school in Romania, prior to immigration experience and, after a several years break, decided to continue go for a university degree as well. This is one of the reasons for which we decided to look further only into the different education levels that we can identify in the ROM group. The other reason is the fact that education level works as a social variable only if education is concluded, if not, it is the variable age that is relevant, like in the case of kids, and not the school level they are currently attending. Therefore, Figure 8 presents the results of the analysis only for those informants who graduated a school in Romania. The data suggests that the probability that immigrants might be aware of the concept of *Rumañol* is directly proportional with the number of formal education years attended. That's why no informant having graduated only secondary school knows about *Rumañol*, but 2 high school graduates and 5 informants with Higher Education have heard of it and know what it refers to. If we consider the percentages these numbers represent, the trend is even more obvious. The 2 high school graduates represent 6,89% of all the informants in their group the 5 University graduates represent 27,7%. It is, therefore, obvious that knowing and talking about *Rumañol* as a different Romanian variety and considering it an identity mark are issues that tend to be related to immigrants with higher education.

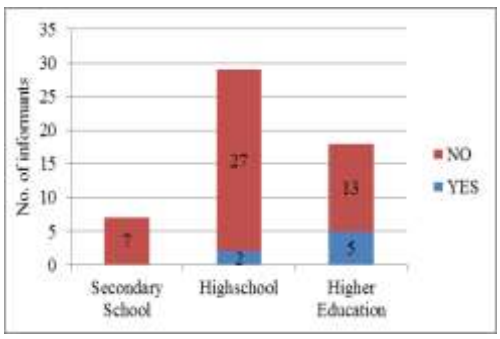


Figure 8 – Awareness vs. Education (level)

4.6. Time spent in Spain

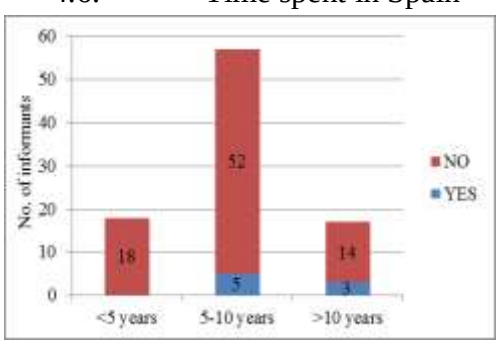


Figure 9 – Awareness vs. Time spent in Spain

This variable is usually a relevant one when analysing language contact situations as it influences the amount and type of interference that appear in the discourse of Romanian immigrants. It is, therefore, interesting to check if it also influences the level of linguistic awareness. The results presented in Figure 9 seem to point to the conclusion that it is less probable that an immigrant having lived less than 5 years in Spain could have heard about *Rumañol* whereas any period greater than that favours this kind of awareness. This can be explained by the fact that "newcomers" usually spend some time in acquiring the local language, even if Romanians learn Spanish earlier than immigrants of other origins (Tamames 2008: 89 – 88), and only after that, the newly acquired language begins to influence their Romanian. On the other hand, they usually deal with several other problems at the beginning such as finding a job and a home, doing the necessary paperwork, and they focus their efforts on finding information about those burning issues rather than abstract discussions about how the language they speak changes or not.

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4.7. Type of bilingualism

This variable is used to account for the differences that exist between what could be called generational groups. However, we avoid using the term generation because there is actually no second generation of Romanian immigrants in Spain in proper sociolinguistic terms, but rather an emerging one, as most of the members of this group are still under 15 years old. However, there is a noticeable higher amount of interference that can be recorded in this second group and in order to account for it a variable had to be used. From this linguistic point of view, the differences between "generations" are actually linked to the way and the moment in which the two languages that are in contact are acquired. Therefore, it is relevant to make the distinction between those who acquired Romanian first and, then, as adults, immigrated and acquired Spanish as a second language and those who were born in or moved to Spain at an early age and acquired Romanian and Spanish at the same time. We will use the terms **late** and **early** bilingualism[4]. The data presented in Figure 10 reveals a clear tendency of those immigrants with early bilingualism to not be aware of the concept of *Rumañol* as there is only one informant in this group who has heard of it. It is relevant the fact that this exception is due to a young university student (different from the one mentioned in 4.5). That shows that, rather than one social variable, we should consider a mix of several such variables if we want to understand which elements favour the linguistic awareness of *Rumañol*. Among them, age and education seems to play an important role.

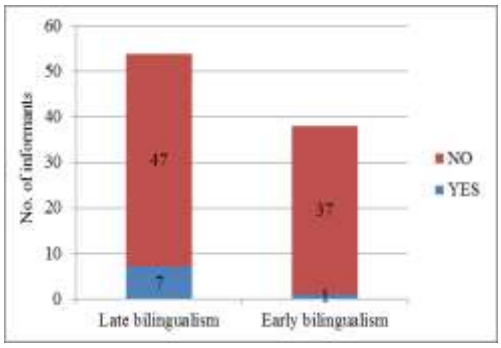


Figure 10 – Awareness vs. Type of bilingualism

By putting together data from sections 4.1. – 4.7. and by looking at the factors that favour awareness of *Rumañol* as a distinct linguistic variety, we can construct a composite profile of the Romanian immigrant most likely to have heard of and use *Rumañol* to refer to the way he/she speaks. Thus we will see that there is a higher probability that a Romanian immigrant uses this term as an identity marker if he or she (sex proved to be irrelevant) is at an active age (25 – 54), is original from Transylvania, leaves in Madrid, has graduated a higher education institution, spent more than 5 years in Spain and present a late bilingualism, that is, belongs to the first generation of immigrants. Figure 11 summarizes this data.

Sex	Irrelevant
Age	Active age (25 - 54)
Origin	Transilvania
Residence	Madrid
Education	Higher Education (ROM)
Time spent in Spain	>5
Type of Billingualism	Late

Figure 11 – Composite profile of a Romanian immigrant aware of the concept Rumañol

[4] Myers-Scotton, from whom we took the definitions of the two concepts, use the terms **late** and **child** bilingualism (Myers-Scotton 2005: 324-325).

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Some final remarks need to be made here as the analysis that has just been presented might create the impression that *Rumañol* is indeed an identity label for the group of people who match the description above. We believe it is not entirely so and that's why we repeat that someone having the features presented in Figure 11 is more likely but not sure to have heard of and use the term *Rumañol*. Actually, in the case of each variable we could see that the percentage of people answering YES is rather low even in those groups that we use for the composite. Moreover, we considered relevant the fact that some of the groups that had the most YES answers (e.g. Higher Education; Late bilingualism) seems to be the same groups that proved to have the discourse with the lowest amount of interference as resulting from another study (Buzilă 2013b). Therefore we decided to calculate the total amount of interference for the two groups, those who answered YES and those who answered NO, regardless of the social variables involved. If *Rumañol* is indeed an identity marker for those who speak it we would expect to find a correlation between YES answers and a high amount of interference. As the linguistic data that was recorded for each informant has not yet been transliterated in totality we could only calculate this for the first 16 informants. By recalculating the YES/NO split (Figure 12) only for those 16 informants we can notice a higher percentage of YES answers compared to the results presented in chapter 3 but most of them are still those who answered NO so the trend is the same. By calculating the amount of interference[5] for the two groups, we get a somehow surprising result (Figure 13). The discourse of the 25% of informants who know the concept and use it to refer to a way of talking by mixing Spanish and Romanian has only a 0,65% of linguistic interference while the discourse of the 75% of informants who have never heard of *Rumañol* present a higher amount of interference, that is 2,35%. Apart from the fact that the amount of interference is very low in both cases, the one thing that stands out is the fact that *Rumañol* seems to be more suitable to describe the discourse of those who have never heard of it while those who use it to individualize their have a discourse that hardly deviates from the standard. From this point of view *Rumañol*, as a concept, seems to be more of a fancy abstraction created by educated first generation immigrants, mostly from Madrid who, wishing to individualize themselves, turn to linguistics in order to find a concept that might offer some weight to their effort. The true linguistic reality –the true *Rumañol*– is actually present more in the discourse of those who have never heard of it and it takes the form of a linguistic variety only slightly deviated from the standard one and marked by a rather low amount of linguistic interference.

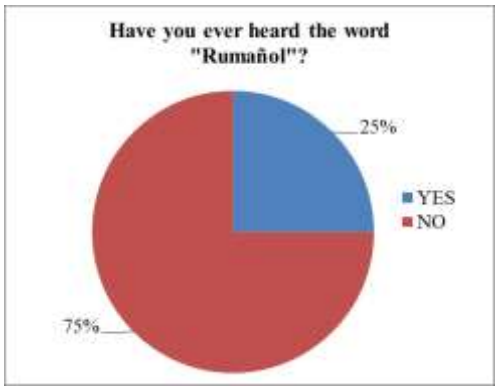


Figure 12 – Awareness of Rumañol in a smaller sample used to calculate the amount of interference

[5] The methodology used for calculating the amount of interference is presented in Buzilă 2013b

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	YES	NO
% of Informants	25%	75%
Amount of interference	0,65%	2,35%

Figure 13 – Awareness of Rumañol vs. Amount of linguistic interference

5. Conclusions

In this paper we discussed the validity of the term *Rumañol* used as an identity marker and the extent to which the concept is used by the Romanian immigrants living in Spain by analysing the degree in which immigrants are aware of the existence of the concept. The data gathered from 92 informants who live in six different regions in Spain point to the fact that this concept is only known by a minority of immigrants. The analysis of the social variables involved helped us identify the characteristics of the members of this minority and construct a composite profile of such a Romanian immigrant who is aware of the concept. Finally, by correlating this analysis with the amount of interference that the discourse of the informants in the two groups present, we argued that *Rumañol* can be seen either as a false identity marker as it has no real corespondence in the linguistic reality of the minority who use the term or as a linguistic variety only slightly different from standard Romanian but which is not used as identity marker by those who speak it. The last group si also the majority.

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