LA QUALITÉ DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT DES LANGUES ET DANS LA RECHERCHE

SOCIAL DYNAMICS AND THE LINGUISTIC NORM

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Abstract:
This paper employs a neo-Darwinian point of view to describe the dynamics to which language is subjected from a linguistic, social, and intellectual perspective. In particular, we follow the differences between how language evolves in traditional communities and how it mutates in today's world, with all the possible consequences of paradigm change.

Key words:
Language, dynamics, linguistic, social, intellectual perspective.

Preliminaries

Although seemingly just a means of communication, language –as one of the functions of the human being– is a reality produced through evolution. It has gradually developed into a complex organism which partially overtook the roles of other means of transmitting information (since any sign or symptom, such as gestures, mime, the flushing of the face, sweating, etc., can be expressed in linguistic form) while developing new competencies towards this purpose (starting with the economical character of the second articulation and ending with the finer semantic and stylistic nuances). It has thus come to convey various types of information:

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affective, emotional, volitive, behavioural, intellectual, cognitive, aesthetic, social, ethno-psychological, etc. The functions of language progressively tailored its structure, as verbal and non-verbal communication needs generated formal reorganisations. These, in turn, led to anatomic modifications which further increased language's ability to convey information, enhancing it with new roles (language not only communicates, but is communicated; it not only expresses, but emphasises) and values (which indicate attitudes and hierarchies with axiological or cultural roots).

Due to the fact that language captures and conveys reality in ways ingrained with its own structural and functional characteristics, those who speak it (and through which it is spoken), both individuals and groups, have come to perceive this organism as an autonomous reality, and to use it as an instrument. Since language is a form of human behaviour like any other, the adaptation of its speakers to its requirements in various communication situations led to a marked congruity of their behaviours. That is, insofar as the speakers possessed multiple idiolects, they developed different linguistic behaviours for each of their social circles: one for the circle of friends, one or more for the different members of the family (the father, the authoritative uncle, a younger brother, an older sister, etc.), one at work, one with a friendly bartender, one with a rigid clerk, and another one in the academic auditorium – the members of each social category tend towards the same type of behaviour. Through its symbolic values (familiar, intimate, official, occasional, etc., depending on the context and the degree of familiarity, intimacy, etc.), language became a factor of identification with a group, be it ethnic, spatial, social, etc. Between language and speaker, as well as between the linguistic norm and community, a cybernetic type of relationship has been established.

The language of a community tends naturally towards homogeneity, with the contacts between different usages delimiting and shaping the linguistic norm. Individuals who are socially organised across a contiguous territory exist as members of a group, which in turn may be an integral part of a larger community. Although individuals and groups within the community exhibit variations typical of the different parts of the same organism, the anatomy and physiology of the "whole" show a reasonable degree of homogeneity, manifested on a linguistic level through the emergence of a linguistic norm. At the same time, even though language manifests itself and interactions occur on an individual level, given the

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social character of language, i.e., the fact that individuals must somehow (either positively or negatively[1]) relate to the group, and the fact that language serves the purpose of communicating with other individuals, the use of language results in the crystallization of a linguistic norm, a compromise accepted and practised by the group.

In a natural way, to the extent permitted by the general conditions of the times, individuals and groups within a linguistic community are always in contact. Whether they are ample and intense (when occurring on an individual or social (micro)group level), or rather limited, the results of these contacts depend on their extent – not only in the number of those involved or the area of contact, but also the prestige and authority of the participants. The first consequence of these contacts is stability, through the establishment and consolidation of an efficient norm which stabilises the language. The other consequence is variability, through the diffusion and adoption of linguistic changes. The interplay between these two sets of effects generates reactions of either acceptance[2] or (conservative) rejection of the elements arisen and transmitted through contact.

If a community were deprived of contacts with other communities, the evolution processes occurring inside it would be relatively slow-paced, governed by the same tendencies and dynamics as a live and autarchic organism. If, within that community, evolution of all kinds did not increase social stratification beyond a certain level, one would expect language to exhibit similarly unimportant variations. Although the lack of diatopic and diastratic differentiation only characterises certain primitive societies (micro-communities spread across a limited territory and with a weak social

[1] On how society and the group control the individual, and on the process of actually learning the group's norm, see G.R. Cardona, *Introduzione all'etnolinguistica*, UTET, Bologna, 1976, p. 95-97.

[2] It is not important in itself that changes to the linguistic norm occur. What matters is for these changes to be integrated into the existing norm a) without endangering its structural integrity, and b) with the endorsement of an authoritative segment of the community. Over at least the past fifty years, this role has drifted from the hands of those competent and with authority (i.e., reflective and experienced speakers, not necessarily linguists) to the bulk of the speakers, remarkably imitative and thus prone to homogenisation. The "takeover" of the endorser role by a (sub)mediocre majority stems from socially equalitarian changes through which the bulk of society participates in a variety of social activities, resulting in a waning social division of labour, with the "competent" minorities originating from the same incompetent majority.

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stratification), this hypothetical situation is relevant as a theoretical, ideal one, serving as reference for what actually happens in more evolved societies.

In reality, a language spoken across a certain territory tends towards a degree of stratification that depends on both the physical extent of the geographical territory itself and the social stratification of its inhabitant community. Spatial and social distances are natural stratification factors, and can only be attenuated through the circulation and interaction of individuals. Even then, groups formed naturally as a consequence of these stratifications tend to conserve their sub-identity as part of the larger community[3].

Interactions on a diatopic and diastratic level

In general, linguistic areas (or rather the groups that they delimit) cannot avoid the effects of linguistic evolution occurring in those neighbouring territories that use the same language, since contact with neighbours is inherent. While attempting to safeguard the linguistic characteristics it has developed and cultivated through evolution, the group may react to outside innovations in such a way as to conserve – proportionally to the force, means, and efficiency of this reaction, as well as to the stakes at play– its own individualising features. Since no group exists as an immutable and indivisible entity, the ultimate factor one must have in mind is the individual, who can act by himself, as part of the group, as its representative, or as a coagulant and catalysing factor.

Studying the process of stratification within a language at the level of local patois and referring to how in such a case speakers belonging to different patois can nevertheless understand each other, A. Meillet asserts the existence of certain rules of correspondence between these patois, rules which speakers are mindful of, and which constitute themselves into a "moyen de transposer en gros un parler dans l'autre"[4]. The same savant also

[3] Even though they may function better as part of larger conglomerates or organisms, elements in the Universe (from the tiny atomic nucleus to the eukaryotic cell and up to the most massive galaxy clusters) tend to delimit themselves and maintain a certain degree of identity (often to the limit of their own extinction), with all the energy spent on the interplay between simple existence and participation in a superior "whole".

[4] See A. Meillet, *Différenciation et unification dans les langues*, in *Linguistique historique et linguistique générale*, H. Champion, Paris, 1921, p. 111. Similarly to any situation where two or more entities sharing a common space are necessarily driven to compete, groups also tend to acquire prestige in order to become models and gain pre-eminence over other

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shows that "Dès l'instant que des hommes appartenant à des groupes divers emploient des parlers déjà différenciés, ils ont le sentiment de ces règles de correspondance (...)"[5].

Different groups with more or less different norms often have opposing tendencies with roots at the level of the individual. The central factor is what could generically be called *prestige*. While proving the predominantly social character of language evolution, A. Meillet shows that, although linguistic innovations partly originate in anatomical, physiological, and psychological realities, what actually settles the forms and determines linguistic evolution is the social environment of the speakers. This idea, prevalent in the Saussurean linguistic school, is nuanced by Meillet beyond a strictly theoretical and abstract interpretation: "Toutes les langues connues, populaires ou savantes, trahissent la préoccupation d'un mieux dire qui partout conduit les sujets parlants à emprunter le langage de ceux qui sont censées parler mieux. Chaque différenciation est tôt ou tard, et parfois immédiatement, suivie d'une réaction qui tend à rétablir ou à instaurer l'unité de la langue là où il y a unité de civilisation"[6].

Social dynamics of groups, a consequence of socialisation and of the individual's tendency to search for new forms of identity, leads to (sometimes marked) variations in the idiolects, which result in an increased heterogeneity of individual speech. In this context, one might argue the existence of a relation of indeterminateness between individual variations that have social significance and the linguistic structures[7]. What W. Labov affirms when referring to the individual ("every speaker we have encountered shows a shift of some linguistic variables as the social context and topic change"[8]) also applies to the community as a whole, as discussed

groups. After hierarchy is established, subordinate groups may exhibit tendencies of preserving their identity in various ways and with various means of action.

[5] *Ibid*.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 129.

[7] Cf. W. Labov, *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*, Washington, 1966, p. 5.

[8] W. Labov, *The Study of Language in Its Social Context*, in *Sociolinguistic Patterns*, Philadelphia, 1972, p. 208. Of course, the occurrence of some forms may be caused by a special situation of communication –the dialectological interview–, and therefore by the onset of the interviewer–informant relationship. It is remarkable that as a rule, regardless of the dialectological source area of the interviewer, the relationship between the two participants is centred on two coordinates: the *literary* / *popular* one, and the one based on social group stratification (cf. AD, p. 36f).

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by J. Gillieron: "Le langage est ainsi l'objet d'une étude incessante, un travail d'assimilation et de retouche, qui paralysent la liberté de son developpement, soit qu'un parler fier de soi et dédaigneux de voisins qu'il juge inférieurs, peut-être parce qu'ils représentent un état social moins avancé, se prenne lui-même comme modèle, refonde à son image les mots qui lui viennent du dehors et impose à la diversité historiquement régulière de ses éléments une régularité factice, mais actuellement saisisable, soit qu'au contraire des parlers, qui ne veulent plus ou ne peuvent plus être indépendants, trouvent hors de chez eux ce qu'ils tiennent pour le modèle du bien dire et refaçonnent leur personalité méprisée à l'image de celle qu'ils admirent"[9].

The two situations illustrate in a clear way how the one and the same language naturally experiences both diatopic and diastratic stratifications. Speakers have the ability to observe these differences and seem to have the tendency to alleviate them. The latter type of action, however, does not manifest itself as (re)unification, but rather as conquest or assimilation. Groups within the same community and individuals within the same group are not on a position of equality, because the natural tendency is not towards quasi-amorphous and unspecialised unification of cells in a functional organism, but towards hierarchization and refined stratification of specialised "tissues" as part of an efficient structure. In essence, whether we look at the linguistic norm of a random community or group, or at the literary norm itself, that language form is nothing else but a reasonable compromise established through the refinement of the norm belonging to the group that won the linguistic "battle".

Individuals and groups normally exhibit behaviours that promote the homogeneity and stability of the linguistic norm (its imitation and weight within the group being its most obvious vector), with a subgroup often assuming the role of custodian of the norm. It is, at the same time, just as usual for both individuals and groups to exhibit evolutionary tendencies with either internal causes (with roots in social or cultural dynamics, gender or age dynamics, mentality changes, as well as certain structural or functional requirements of the language), or external ones (mainly related to circulation and interaction). Some individuals may show a strong tendency to revolutionise the norm, and some may even escape by assimilating different norms (other regional norms or the literary norm).

[9] In *Études de géographie*, p. 74.

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Relation to external norms

As participant to the linguistic act, especially in the role of listener, one has the ability to notice differences between one's own norm and an external one with which one comes into contact, an ability that may facilitate or impose the reorientation of one's discourse towards and according to the expectations of the recipient. If the speaker identifies sufficiently many or good reasons, he might feel compelled to either reduce or cancel some of the vertically significant differences, or to mark them accordingly[10]. In that case, speech gains formality of some sort, through the use of elements from the interlocutor's norm, or from the more elevated aspect of the speaker's own norm, that is, by generating the highest form of the linguistic norm of his vernacular. In general, the causes that lead there are related to the stakes that the speaker has in mind.

A hierarchy is always established between two norms that come into contact. Whether one of them is the literary norm or both are regional or social norms, from the point of view of the speaker there is always a ranking. Usually, an individual who masters the supradialectal literary norm uses it almost exclusively, since it is the result of an effort to learn an instrument considered the most perfected and widely-accepted, and therefore universal. At times, however, even when fully capable of using the literary norm, the individual may choose otherwise for reasons he considers to be important. For instance, interacting speakers belonging to the same (regional) norm may consider the use of a different norm –even the literary norm, and even if it is mastered by all the participants– as an aggression. The literary norm does not, therefore, necessarily and universally find itself on a privileged position. For certain classes of diatopically and diastratically delimited speakers, their linguistic norm is the one that truly counts.

> In Cameroon, for instance, Pidgin English (also known as Cameroonian Creole or Kamtok), is used for insults or in less serious situations when one can joke, while Bangwa is used in all other communication situations. In the Central African Republic, French is the official language, while Sango is the vernacular. The former is used for official purposes and as an instrument of ascension on the social ladder[11]. The choice of language depends on the context, and ignoring conventions may lead

[10] Cf. Ch. Bailly, *Le langage et la vie*, Zürich, 1935, p. 156, where it is stated that "l'entendeur est –toutes choses égales, d'ailleurs– plus conscient que le parleur".
[11] J. Leclerc, *Langue et société*, deuxième édition, Mondia Éditeurs, Québec, 1992, p. 31f.

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to the social expulsion of the perpetrator. Even though the above examples refer to norms that do not exclusively originate in the language of the locals, but of their conquerors, these situations are significant since in both cases the tendency of the bulk of the speakers is to reject not only foreign languages but also superordinate norms, and so to favour not only their own languages but also their own norms.

Upward social mobility

In general, communities tend to safeguard their identity through conservative and retractile reactions towards innovations, whether these are internal or generated by interactions with other groups. Their reactions are aimed at preserving the particularities that characterise and differentiate the community, i.e., the entity's identity. Within itself, the group perceives, recognises, and imposes subdivisions on all levels of language, for all categories of speakers (according to age, gender, cultural and intellectual status, education, social status, etc.). Nevertheless, the group maintains its unity, and a rigorous control is performed on each subdivision. In this way, both the existing members of the group and those who –aiming to obtain this status– have been recognised as aspiring to it are subjected to a severe control aimed at conserving the linguistic norm, i.e., a true "language police"[12].

Both speaker and group can react against intrusions that threaten to affect the norm, through conscious changes aimed at maintaining the equilibrium between the part and the whole. This type of group cohesion can manifest in numerous ways. Speakers of a local patois may intentionally preserve their characteristic (regional or local) particularities, even upon contact with the literary norm. The most educated speakers may return to the etymon, or may simply refine their speech. For example, although stress is a markedly physiological trait, which depends on the dosage of exhaled air, it may be changed on purpose when a term is adopted by a much too broader category of speakers, from which the educated ones wish to dissociate. This is how, for instance, rom. *ántic* and *butelíe* become *antíc* and *butélie*, respectively, how *tráfic* pairs up with *trafíc*, and *caractér* with *carácter*. In turn, the normal speaker may come to adopt both variants, which determines the instructed speaker to invent a new position to retreat

[12] W. von Wartburg, *Problèmes et méthodes de la linguistique*, second edition, S. Ullmann, Paris, 1963, p. 26. For the social implications of obeying or ignoring the norm, and the importance of the individual's compliance to it, see Chr. Baylon, *Sociolinguistique. Société, langue, discours*, Nathan, Paris, 1991, p. 165-168.

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on: semantic differentiation (which is not terribly successful from the point of view of functionality and efficiency, since *tráfic* is now meant to refer to 'illegal trade or exchange of goods' and *trafíc* to 'vehicles on roads, or the flux thereof', while *caractér* should have the meaning 'mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual' and *carácter* 'written or printed symbol, or letter'). Such reactions indicate the existence of cohesion within the community, labelled by S. Puşcariu as "regional solidarity"[13], and are characteristic of live organisms driven by their survival instinct.

> As it failed to resist the pressures of the supradialectal norm, the utterance of the former literary Banat subdialect became to a great extent a regional norm. In fact, it was not the case that the patois from which this norm emerged and on which it was based resorbed its literary aspect due to its local prestige, but that its prestige, as well as the literary aspect's ability to survive, allowed it to take the place of the local patois. Many of today's regionalisms are old particularities of literary dialect which were not selected by the supradialectal literary norm, a situation similar to how the norm changes its position within the community[14].

On the other hand, however, speakers may manifest and follow tendencies of adjustment to the linguistic particularities of their interlocutor. This reaction is an indicator of both the adaptability of organisms and the possibility for causes to develop that set in motion this complex pattern.

A special type of propensity towards upward mobility emerges during dialectological interviews. Due to the special circumstances of this subtype of linguistic contact, the subject may exhibit reactions of adjustment to the interviewer's own linguistic norm. In this respect, individuals who during dialectological interviews are striving to pass as representative models of the vernacular in question are comparable to those who refuse it. Both types are

[13] S. Puşcariu, LR II, p. 310-311. Advancing the idea of linguistic stratification (within relatively small groups) formed by various criteria and aimed at creating new norms, A. Meillet shows how it may result from acts of will, sometimes with far-reaching consequences: "Quand il ne se produit pas de réactions, la différenciation aboutit à des résultats tels que l'utilité du langage en est singulièrement diminuée" (A. Meillet, *op.cit*., p. 116). Also cf. Millardet, *Linguistique*, p. 270, then p. 275, where he talks about a „tradition phonétique locale". A. Dauzat observes that „l'action du groupe est, particulièrement notable en matière de phonétique" (in *Les patois*, p. 65). Cf. W. Labov, *The Social Stratification of English in New York City*, Washington, 1966, p. 405.

[14] For examples from Anglophone areas of how phonetisms belonging to the authoritative norm are enforced, but also of how elements belonging to the subordinate norm may be preserved, see Hagège, Haudricourt, p. 148-149.

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conscious of the differences between norms, and some of the individuals are able to make an effort to alleviate them. As for those who refuse collaboration, they declare in this manner their incapacity of obtaining a satisfying result from that effort. Their gesture does not betray indifference towards the distinctions between norms, but rather the exact opposite. One way or another, all informers make comments on a linguistic level and emit reflections about their own norm (even when that is the literary norm), which apart from the ability of observing differences between norms also indicates a preoccupation in this direction[15].

> E. Petrovici[16] encounters subjects with variegated speech ("grai împestriţat"), owing to their attempts to pronounce "more literarily", and who avoid, for instance, the palatalization of dentals "and of course of labials" (p. 50), then a subject who is ashamed to pronounce /k'/, /g'/, because he maintains that –except for youngsters and shepherds ("flăcăii şi ciobanii"), who palatalise– people in the village no longer speak like that (p. 69), or another one who pretends that palatal occlusives for *p* and *b* are characteristic of women ("muiereşte se zice aşa") (p. 70, 73-74). He also points out that in the village of Vînători (in Mureş county), the locals are embarrassed to pass as representatives of a patois they consider unpleasant, though with each other they do speak exclusively with palatalized labials (p. 87).
>
> Talking about the conscious reactions encountered in speakers belonging to the dialectal norm, S. Puşcariu presents a form such as *vinimă* for *inimă*, acquired from a subject in point 122 of ALR[17]. The informer wishes to prove his ability to adopt forms belonging to the norm used by well-educated people –to adapt his speech, even partially, to the requirements of the educated norm–, and to operate with the principles of the educated norm by applying them to his speech. Somewhat mindful of the mistakes he risks making at any moment by acting this way, he reacts excessively against his own forms and eliminates the palatal consonant, replacing it with the corresponding labiodental. Such a situation shows that *inimă* was pronounced in that point of ALR with a voiced palatal approximant, with the de-palatalization following the model /*yin*/ < /*vin*/, /*yisat*/ < /*visat*/. A similar situation is

[15] Cf. S. Puşcariu, *Études de linguistique roumaine*, p. 85, 189-190. The literature on this subject is actually very rich in examples that attest changes in the speaker's usual discourse, depending on his social position, geographic origin, gender, the listener's age, etc. The example of the country priest given by Puşcariu on p. 85 is therefore typical. (While on a trip in the mountains, S. Puşcariu is helped by the local priest. Before leaving, the latter addresses a villager: "Bade Ioane, sînt *potcoyiţi* caii?", after which he turns to S. Puşcariu and explains: "Cînd pleci călare pe munte trebuie să te uiţi mai întîi dacă calul este bine *potcovit.*"). S. Puşcariu also describes the case of an individual who employs multiple norms, depending on his interlocutor.

[16] In EPI.

[17] S. Puşcariu, LR II, p. 238-239, where the author talks about hyper-zeal ("hiperzel").

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that of *viarili rîsului*[18], where hyper-regression from *y* occurs through the modification of the initial sequence of the word *gheare*. Conversely, a form such as /*yínir*^{i}/ for /*viner*^{i}/ 'vineri' results from overbidding the dialectal phonetism, and possibly from a reaction that tries to settle things on solid ground (i.e., on the speaker's own vernacular, the one language form he truly masters)[19].

Apart from the psychic mechanisms of surrender which come into play, these exaggerations indicate the existence of active capabilities of analysis and orientation of the speaker, who by means of language constructs a speech, sometimes unlocatable ("iréperable"), but always in relation to a different level which he compares to his own, and from which he borrows the mechanisms of change[20].

The tendencies illustrated above refer to temporary contacts through which speakers only make some sort of exercise inside their own environment, upon interacting with representatives of an external environment, with all intentions strictly limited to the duration of that contact.

However, situations occur that determine the speaker of a regional norm to adopt a different regional norm, particularly in the case of an individual relocated from one place to another. While outside their environment, surrounded by speakers of another norm, these individuals no longer act on a temporary impulse, but on the need to adapt to the norm of the majority. Comparable to those who suffer this spatially determined pressure are those who reinvent themselves for social purposes. That is, the same process of abandoning one's norm occurs in individuals who seek to ascend on the social ladder, and who consequently adopt the literary norm. These are two situations in which individuals give up their own norms for social reasons. This sustains the idea that normally, even when he recognises the superiority of another norm (be it parallel or superordinate), the individual will not adopt it or use it unless there are important reasons for him to do so.

In fact, the reasons that strongly determine the speaker to preserve the linguistic norm (but also the social, moral, behavioural, aesthetic, mentality,

[18] This is how situations like *livian* for *lighean*, *viară* for *gheară*, etc. appear, all pointing out that, in the mind of the speaker, such a correspondence exists.

[19] See AD, p. 293.

[20] From a phonologic perspective, one should stress that it is not mandatory for these changes to ease the articulation, since the principle of economy in language, often acting in less direct and obvious ways, is not the driver of this type of change if narrowly interpreted under the particular aspect of its ease of use.

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etc., norms) of his group also influence the individuals who wish to get accepted and settle into that group. Even though, in that case, it is no longer about maintaining the group's identity through the loyalty of its members, but about converting the individuals who pursue access into the group, the stakes are the same and therefore the requirements remain unchanged[21].

The speaker belonging to the dialectal norm (either inferior from a social point of view or just unpopular in the group he wishes to join) is subject to considerable pressure from the group to adopt the types of behaviour that characterise the group. He will perhaps try to eliminate differentiating peculiarities from his speech, and adopt instead the corresponding traits of the norm he aspires towards, since access to that norm primarily regards those elements that are in most contrast between the two norms. Being characteristic to social classes and individuals in social ascension, equipped with mobility[22] and driven by social stakes[23], this process may generate "socially" or "socio-symbolically conditioned variants", which would not represent distinctions in the universe of primary discourse but would only serve to express the relative social status of the speaker[24].

[21] For transitions between norms, the defence of one's own norm, and the conservativeness of groups, and for the relationships between various groups and the literary norm, see Shick, p. 293 and 323f.

[22] See also M. Tiugan, *Sociolinguistics analysis of a phonological variable*, in RRL, t. XXII, 1977, p. 431-444, who, following the steps of W. Labov in a discussion on "lack of Security", shows how "*The linguistic insecurity* is specific to the speakers which adopt standards of correctness imposed by a group other than their own reference one and leads to hypercorrection because the speakers did not internalise yet the forms lately learned. So they are not able to apply the rules which can tell them where their «correction must stop»" (s.a.) (p. 437). The proof that hypercorrection is a hallmark in particular of this class of speakers, who focussing on pronunciation or on their speech in general control themselves to an exaggerate reaction, is also discussed in two other papers by the same author, *The depalatalization of* ***d*** *before* ***e****. A Sociolinguistic Approach*, in RRL, t. XXIII, Supplément (1978), p. 55-63, and *The pronunciation of the diphthong [ia] in the Speech of Bucharest City Community*, in RRL, t. XXIV (1979), p. 491-498.

[23] Along these lines, see also J.L. Fischer, *Social influences*, p. 52: "even though the mechanisms of psychic economy are becoming better understood in diachronic phonemics, they are not always sufficient to fully explain the progressive adaptation of variant forms; (...) people adopt a variant primarily not because it is easier to pronounce (which most frequently is, but not always), or because it facilitates some important distinction in denotational meaning, but because it exposes how they feel about their relative status versus other conversants".

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 51.

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The success of an individual who builds himself a linguistic and behavioural structure similar or identical to that of the group towards which he aspires depends on finding comparison terms, having access to the model structure, possessing the capacity to analyse the language of that model, and responding to the reactions of others to his new behaviour. The method of choice is imitation by way of analogic substitution, with the main goal of the process being to discard his own old norm and adopt the new one instead[25].

This process is not effortless and its results are not guaranteed. Exaggerations often appear as a result of inadequate usage of the target norm, and they essentially stem from the difficulty of equally mastering two norms[26], since the natural tendency is to regard and assess the target-norm (the unknown) from the perspective of one's own norm (the known). Practically, these speakers exhibit the same behaviour as children: they apply rules from "langue" in order to get through to a "parole" which they do not know.

The existence of such realities may on the other hand generate reactions of preserving social stratification by expressly marking it in a number of ways, including linguistically. In general, an organism such as the literary norm or a superordinate norm –a construction that required a laborious evolution process, the creation and enforcement of certain principles, as well as protocols and criteria for its working and development– exhibits identity-safeguarding tendencies directly proportional to the quantity and quality of the energy spent on developing that norm, as well as to its functional value.

[25] Sometimes, however, it is difficult to reveal the exact effect that social pressures in shaping linguistic behaviour, in some situations the individual being more loyal to his small community than to the larger one, i.e., to his own stratum instead of the cultured one. See also W. Labov, *L'influenza relativa della famiglia e dei compagni sull'oppuralimento del linguaggio*, in *Aspetti sociolinguistici dell'Italia contemporaneo. Atti dell'Congresso internazionale di studi*, Bressanone, 31 maggio–2 giugno, Roma, 1977, p. 11–53; D. Parisi, *Sulla diversità delle competenze linguistiche*, in *vol. cit.*, p. 127-138; Nora Galli de'Paratesi, *La standardizzazione delle pronuncia nell'italiano contemporaneo*, in *vol. cit.*, p. 167-195; Peter A.M. Seuren, *Riorientamenti metodologici nell studio delle variabilità linguistica*, in *Ideologia, filosofia e linguistica. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi* Rende (cs), 15-17 settembre, 1978, Roma 1982, p. 499-515.

[26] See, however, the example given by E. Petrovici, who encountered a speaker whose excellent knowledge of the particularities of the patois in various zones of Banat did not affect his own norm, and who kept the traits of all the norms he mastered separated (EPI, p. 43).

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For this reason, the education process involves focussing upon and learning the educated norm, and those who already use this norm exert a rigorous control over those who wish to adopt it (and also, mutually, over those who are already using it). At the same time, speakers of the literary norm preserve their linguistic and cultural instrument through a severe demarcation from all other norms. The reactions against the tendency of subordinate groups to narrow this gap are aimed at preserving the linguistically-marked integrity and individuality. Even though the speakers and the custodians of both regional and literary linguistic norms may act with similar means, the former only aim to preserve their identity and, implicitly, their existence, while the latter are also interested in the non-interference of other norms and the sole usage of the literary norm's characteristic features. For this reason, they will not tolerate a certain overlap with the regional norms, but will tolerate principles and even elements inspired by foreign literary norms. Thus, in response to the invasive motion of the regional norms, the speakers of the literary norm will change the accent, the sounds, and in general will return to the etymon just to avoid confusion with the regional norms.

Compared to the stable groups, which only seek to protect their identity, mobile groups –and in particular their members– have the social tendency of acceding to the superior group by any means, sometimes regardless of how well they master the norms of that group, i.e., of the degree of actual integration. The linguistic uniformity thus generated aims to make the norms compatible up to the removal of identifying differences[27], with the stakes being in fact social, not linguistic, and with the individual pursuing the escape from his own group and the integration into the target group. This situation occurs in certain epochs, reflecting the tendencies of vertical, upward social mobility.

The current situation reflects more and more this type of behaviour with all its consequences. In older times, social stratification was both clearer and more acutely felt, with no supradialectal norm having an 'equilibrium' role between the various dialects, and therefore without a position for these dialects to aspire to and compete for. Differences were in fact reinforced and functioning as such due to the existence –within each

[27] In the sense of removing those differences that, given the social stratification, are unfavourable to that community. Cf. J.C. Corbeil, *Éléments d'une théorie de la régulation linguistique*, in *La norme linguistique*, p. 281-303.

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subdialect– of a prestige class which maintained its individuality. The lack of intense contacts between the various groups within each subdialect, as well as between the corresponding groups of different subdialects, the possibility of a somewhat autarchic evolution, and the prestige of each elite class were conditions that favoured the independent evolution, along separate lines, of the patois and subdialects. The intensification of social contacts regardless of the quality of the groups and subgroups, the expansionist tendencies of certain social classes together with their possibilities to accede to superior levels of the social hierarchy –without the linguistic norm being a *sine qua non* condition any more– have led to the formation of a critical mass of the individuals who entered into the social category that traditionally used the literary norm. This social situation unbalanced the linguistic and social scale, in that it deteriorated the filtering and assimilation mechanisms of the literary norms.

Between the regional and the literary linguistic norms there is an intermediary, "standard" norm, a possible meeting point of all the speakers who do not fully master the literary norm, but manage to raise themselves above the local or dialectal particularities. In this place one migrates from the regional norm, sometimes with the intention of continuing towards the literary norm. For some, this intermediate level may be the final destination, while for others it remains a space of accommodation with principles that, being closer to those of the literary norm, are superior to those belonging to the regional norm. While things remain that way, using the standard norm is either a way to pass through an indispensable "apprenticeship" on the way to the literary norm, or to just raise oneself above the status of "dialectal speaker" by acceding into a norm somehow "joined to" the literary norm. Nowadays, however, the standard norm tends to be altered through an overload of vulgarisms, agrammatisms, semantic improprieties, and all sort of linguistic innovations stemming from the excessive instrumentalisation of language. The access into a system of a large number of people who do not possess the qualities inherent to that system inevitably leads to the lowering of the system's standards and tensions that ultimately give it life and quality.

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Conclusions

As a consequence of natural evolution processes occurring on a linguistic, mental, and social level (language, thought, society), the linguistic material undergoes changes in all compartments of language

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(phonologic, grammatical, lexical and semantic). Whether we talk about regional norms or the literary norm, the dynamic and evolutionary equilibrium between the tendency for variability (which generates evolution by adaptation) and the tendency for conservation (which ensures continuity and self-identity) constitutes a process that is natural, normal, and beneficial for the optimal evolution of the language "organism". Amidst the forces that oppose the stability of language, apart from its own needs to adjust to the events of its own evolution, are the effects of the interactions between individuals and between groups. Linked primarily to upward or even simple social mobility, these interactions put to test the action of the centripetal forces, which act as a conservative filter. In such moments, numerous preservation mechanisms may be set into motion, with the (literary or regional) norm defending itself not against the aspiring individual but against his linguistic particularities, which could affect it. The normal defence mechanism is forcing the individual to integrate, i.e., directing him towards adopting the norm spoken by the social group he intends to belong to. Since social dynamics is a natural process, which ensures the health of the social organism, it is in equilibrium with the conservation forces, and each time an individual succeeds in entering a group through integration, he brings benefits to that group. Obviously, it is sometimes possible, as part of this process, for the superordinate norm to adopt elements brought over by external individuals, which is not a pure coincidence but one of the means by which the norm itself evolves and develops.

The major problems occur when the individual who aspires to a higher social status does not exhibit the capacity and the will to integrate himself through adaptation. By ignoring the adaptation process –notwithstanding his aspiration towards a higher status characterised by certain particularities, exigencies, principles, and operation rules–, the aspirant practically negates the identity of that social status, which makes his access into it a nonsense. In reality, by acceding without a preliminary adaptation process and without obeying the requirements of that group, he dilutes the characteristics of the target group with those of his original one, thus nullifying the very traits he coveted and the identity of the target group. Since this process leaves the individual's original group unchanged but destroys the filters of the target group –and cancels the criteria that support its exponent groups–, it leads to the transformation of superordinate groups into parallel, alternative groups, depriving society of the groups that lead it forward and that can constitute a goal to aspire to.

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