LINGUISTIC NORM AND LANGUAGE CONTACT: THE CASE OF THE HUNGARIAN LANGUAGE IN ROMANIA

FAZAKAS Noémi, Assistant Professor, PhD and BOTH Csaba Attila, "Sapientia" University of Târgu-Mureş

Abstract: Based on its linguistic norms and the traditions of language use, as well as the history of the standard language, Hungarian has been considered a monocentric language, as it does not accept more than one language variants to be normative. For a long period of time this monocentric nature has been militantly defended by the adepts of language cultivation, although repeatedly argued with by the sociolinguistic scholarly literature. Our paper aims to present the complexities of Hungarian language in Transylvania, where language contact has had a considerable impact upon its use, and what is more, even upon some structural levels. We also present the different attitudes toward the "decentralization" of the Hungarian language as well as the endeavours to make it "borderless", together with some respects of Romanian linguistic norm.

Keywords: linguistic norm, monocentric languages, pluricentric languages, Hungarian language use in Transylvania, "borderless" Hungarian

1. Introduction

According to linguistic scholarly literature, a language is considered to be "structured along a set of rules, or 'norms', that prevail over all aspects of the language: phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics." (Bowerman 2006: 701). A functional definition of the linguistic norms states that these serve "to make the language distinctive, intelligible within a wide speech community, and learnable" (Bowerman 2006: 701). It is also important to distinguish between descriptive norms, that refer to the description of a language or language variant, and prescriptive norms or the so-called 'pedagogical norms', which in a fact are a constant referral to an abstract ideal "of how a language should be used, rather than the actual practice of native speakers of that language" (Bowerman 2006; Gross 2006).

There is a significant difference between spoken and written language in this respect: while in spoken language the linguistic norms are more inconsistently applied by native speakers, in written language the norms are more rigid and much more easily identified. Norms and the deviation from them imply the question of correctness of language use: prescriptive linguistic norms usually operate with the correct-incorrect dimension, while descriptive linguistic norms (or sociolinguistic norms) tend to focus on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of a certain linguistic form.

It is also important to state that as most languages have numerous individual, regional and social varieties, the normative variant "generally becomes attached to the general set of prevailing linguistic norms associated with an influential or high-status group", which is then often imposed on the entire speech community (Bowerman 2006: 702).

From the point of view of our research it is also important to mention that in the case of languages with several regional varieties (e.g. English) the scholarly literature identifies localized or "endocentric" norms, which have a well-established cultural and linguistic

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identity (also called the *norm-developing* varieties, such as Singapore English or Indian English), as well as the *norm-dependent* or exocentric varieties, where the norms are external (e.g. the norms of American or British English apply to the usage of English in Korea, Iran, or Saudi Arabia) (Bolton 2004: 376). General language change and regional varieties can be considered both as errors or decay from the point of view of a strong prescriptive norm or as innovation from the point of view of the non-normative, descriptive tradition.

In discussing linguistic norm and standardization, as well as the codification of standard varieties we also need to emphasize the implications of monocentrism and pluricentrism in determining the common standard: the monocentric attitude is most committed to the preservation of the unity of a language which has only one language norm, excluding regional, dialectal variations, while the pluricentric attitude not only promotes the presence of these regional varieties, but in some cases demands the recognition of these variants as equally normative and standard (see e.g. Martinez–Montoya 2011 regarding monocentrism vs. pluricentrism in Catalan). "The central notions of monocentrism can thus be summed up under the following terms: *centralist, elitist, monolingual, mono-normative and derogatory towards non-core-norm speakers*" (Muhr 2004). These attitudes often trigger significant inferiority-complexes on the side of the speakers of non-dominant or non-standard language varieties, while the speakers of standard language varieties "have the tendency to consider their norms as the only correct one and any other as 'dialect'" (Muhr 2004).

The term pluricentric was employed by Kloss to describe languages with several interacting centres having two or more standard varieties, as "languages evolve around cultural or political centres (towns or states) whose varieties have higher prestige" (Ammon quoted by Kenesei 2006: 1). The scholarly literature describes plurinational languages (Spanish in Spain, Mexico, Argentina, etc.) or pluriregional languages (Northern and Southern Germany), but also pluristatal languages (when a single nation has been politically divided into separate administrative units with different norms, such as Korean in North vs. South Korea). Scholars also mention the concept of divided languages such as Serbian and Croatian or Romanian vs. Romanian spoken in Moldavia/Moldavian (Kenesei 2006: 1).

2. The linguistic norm in the Hungarian language

2.1. A short history of the standardization process in the case of Hungarian

In discussing the process of establishing the linguistic norms in any language one needs to take into consideration the theory of language planning elaborated by Einar Haugen, whose definition of language planning highlights its most important features: "By language planning I understand the activity of preparing a normative orthography, grammar, and dictionary for the guidance of writers and speakers of a non-homogeneous speech community" (Haugen quoted by Hornberger 2006: 26). Haugen described this complex process as standardization, as through it a dialect becomes standard language. In the history of European languages it is fairly common that the different language communities reached a stage in which they laid down the system of linguistic norms, which had already determined their daily practice. The first step in establishing these norms is codification, the inclusion of the normative language variant in grammars, dictionaries, orthographies (Laczkó 2006: 404).

Similar to many European languages the standardization of the Hungarian language was completed by the 19th-20th century. Several stages of language planning preceded the

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establishment of the normative language variant, such as the selection and implementation of the Latin writing system in the 11th-12th century, as well as the establishment of orthographical schools and the reforms of orthography, the publication of the first Hungarian grammars, dictionaries and glossaries in the 16th century. By the last third of the 18th century the movement that aimed to change the status of the Hungarian language became more and more powerful, but the most important work was carried out by the so-called "language reform" (in Hungarian *nyelvújítás*), which focused mainly on the modernization of the Hungarian vocabulary and literary styles (Sándor 2006: 961).

By the end of the 19th century the grammar of the standard variant of the Hungarian language was mostly outlined, and in 1832 the first edition of the orthographic rules was crafted by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The 10th edition of these academic regulations (the set of orthographic rules laid down by the Hungarian Language Committee of the Research Institute for Linguistics of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences) published in 1954 established the unity of Hungarian orthography, which then became the prestige variant with a strong prescriptive nature, being considered compulsory for everyone. Nevertheless the rules of orthography are not legally binding, they are recommendations made by the HAS, and accepted as normative (Nádasdy 2006: 923). From the point of view of our research it is important to mention that in the Hungarian language there are no codified rules regarding standard pronunciation (Sándor 2006: 962).

2.2. Linguistic norm and the tradition of monocentrism in Hungarian

The Hungarian scholarly literature includes several, conflicting conceptions of the linguistic norm. One approach considers it as a set of rules or a standard that needs to be followed. This normative variant includes the literary language (the written, codified language) and the common language (the spoken variant), which both infer tradition, unity, high standards, thus implying the knowledge of rules and the patterns of usage (Balázs 2000).

Several scholars argue with the above definition of linguistic norm. According to Tolcsvai Nagy Gábor, the linguistic norm is a sociocultural set of rules, which regulates language use in its concrete, unique realization (Tolcsvai Nagy quoted by Balázs 1993: 413). He refers to Bartsch's theory on norm, who distinguishes grammatical rules and sociocultural norms: grammatical rules determine how a well-formed sentence or phrase needs to be crafted, while the linguistic norm refers to social rules that determine the utterance, and as such can be identified in the interaction between the speaker and the listener (Tolcsvai Nagy 1998: 202).

There has been a heated argument between the adepts of the monocentric, normative and prescriptive approach to language and language variation and change (the so-called *language cultivators* or *nyelvművelők* in Hungarian), and the linguists promoting a pluricentric, non-normative, sociolinguistic approach of a descriptive nature. The language cultivators consider that linguistic norm must be protected by any means, and see language change as decay, deterioration and the corruption of a previous perfect state. The sociolinguistic scholarly literature on the other hand has been constantly trying to battle the so-called myths and superstitions about language and its use promoted by untrained, would-be language cultivators and in some cases even with their academician colleagues who support the first approach.

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The monocentric interpretation of Hungarian linguistic norm triggers the dimensions of prestige and stigmatized language variants, the normative being the most prestigious and most highly valued one, the other (regional, social) variants being considered to be inferior and in some cases even stigmatized. Such a regional variant is the Hungarian language in Transylvania.

3. The linguistic norm in the Romanian language

3.1. The process of the formation of Romanian linguistic norm

Şt. Munteanu and V.D. Ţâra distinguish two fundamental stages regarding this process: the old and the modern Romanian literary language, linked by a transition period (1780–1840). In the case of the **old Romanian literary language** there was no unified and standardized literary language proper, and it includes two major periods: the first started in the *15th century* and lasted until *1640*, being characterized by few original writings, translations and printings. They identify two literary variants: a northern one (Maramureş) and a southern (Wallachian and south-Transylvanian). The second period lasts from *1640* until the end of the *18th century* (1780), during which Slavonic was permanently removed as official language; Romanian literary language was still close to the vernacular. The evolution of **modern Romanian literary language** contains three periods: the first (1780–1840) "premodern" period, or that "of transition", the second period (1840–1880), the stage marked by searching for solutions to standardize the language, while the last period (1880–1900) being characterized by the unification of literary variants. In 1940 through the official decision of the Romanian Academy, the rules of the phonetic writing of the Romanian language were set up (Munteanu–Ţâra 1983).

In his work entitled *Istoria limbii române literare* Ion Gheţie considers that the standardization of the Romanian language can be divided into two large periods: 1. The Old Era (1532–1780) and 2. The Modern Era (1780–1960). 1532 is the year of the earliest mention of a literary Romanian text and implicitly of usage of the Romanian language to achieve a cultural act. 1780 is an important date, as it is the year the first printed Romanian grammar, *Elementa linguae daco-romanae sive valachicae*, was published. That was one of the first linguistic publications of the *Şcoala Ardeleană* [Transylvanian School]. In this work the principles of Romanian literary language cultivation are set, at the basis of present usage. The establishment of the Romanian literary language ended in the twentieth century, exactly in the years 1953–1960 with the publication of *Îndreptar ortografic, ortoepic şi de punctuaţie* and of *Gramatica Academiei* (Gheţie 1978).

3.2. The standard character of the literary language and the role of the Romanian Academy

The concept of *literary norm* is insufficiently approached in Romanian special literature, it has a general acceptance of a "linguistic convention which formulates rules of cultivated expression" (Şuteu 1976). Coteanu makes an additional distinction between *intrinsic norm*, regarding the structure of the language, with an abstract character, and *academic norm* that sets the correct norm "one of the optional combinations of the speech" (Coteanu 1973). E. Coşeriu operates with the distinction between *particular norms* (which

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may be phonetic, morphological, syntactic, lexical and stylistic) and *general norm* (which includes a system of particular norms) (Coşeriu 1967, quoted by Gheţie 1982).

A common feature of the linguistic and literary norm is their historical character "i.e. their variability in time" (Gheţie 1982). An essential feature of the literary norm is its coherence that results from its unitary character. As shown, norm prescribes a single form, although there are situations in which literary language admits several variants. The unitary character of the norm has shown fluctuations over time; before the unification of the literary language, when there were regional literary variants. One could not speak about one central norm, but about several regional norms. The degree of coherence of each norm varies depending on period and region. Thus, opposed to an ideal norm imposed by tradition, this seems to be a common norm, which is only the relationship between the ideal norm and the norm of the spoken language" (Gheţie 1982).

According to the law on the organization and functioning of the Romanian Academy no.752/2001, in Romania, the forum which "cares for the cultivation of Romanian language and lays down spelling rules" is the Romanian Academy. Presently the Romanian Academy has two essential publications regarding Romanian linguistic norm: the first one is *Dicţionarul ortografic, ortoepic şi morfologic al limbii române* [Orthographic, orthoepic and morphological dictionary of the Romanian language] and the other is *Gramatica Academiei Române* [Romanian Academic Grammar]. These two works fix the normative prescriptions regarding Romanian language norm.

In Romania the decisions of the Romanian Academy on orthography are introduced in the law of the country. One of the last such decisions was made in 1993, when the law regarding the usage of *â* and the *sunt* form of the verb 'to be' was introduced. This law was published in the *Monitorul Oficial al României* [The Official Journal of Romania] no. 51/1993.

4. The Hungarian language in Transylvania

4.1. Language contact and a regional standard

In the present paper we use the broader meaning of Transylvania, that is which includes the provinces of Banat, Crişana and Maramureş. The coexistence of the Romanian and Hungarian language communities in this area has a significantly long history, and as such, the two languages have had a significant impact on one another. The sociolinguistic scholarly literature uses the term *language contact* in describing such phenomena.

Based on the results of the 2011 census there are cca. 1.25 million Hungarian speakers in Transylvania on an area comprising 38,548 square miles. There is a high number of regional varieties as on the one hand four out of the ten dialects of the Hungarian language are spoken on this territory: the dialects of Northeast Hungary, that of the Transylvanian Plain, the Székely/Szekler dialect and the Moldavian/Csángó dialect[1]. On the other hand there is a high range of social varieties and professional languages which all have been influenced by the Romanian language.

The scholarly literature has also identified the existence of a Transylvanian regional standard Hungarian, which is a transition between the spoken standard and the dialects,

[1] http://geolingua.elte.hu/index_hu.html

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including elements from both. Another factor that influences the structure of this regional standard is the Romanian language, which has an impact on vocabulary, on pronunciation and even on some structural elements. The speakers generally realize that this is a standard variant, but one with dialectal elements. According to some scholars the existence of regional standards in minority contexts is a sign of linguistic divergence (e.g. Kiss 2006: 543).

In the following we present examples of the results of language contact the Romanian and the Hungarian languages had on each other on the different levels of language.

Examples for phonological phenomena: R. *clacă* > H. *kaláka;* R. *stână* > H. *esztena;* R. *fătărău* > H. *fataró;* H. *paprika* > R. *păpricǎ;* H. *gazda* > R. *gazdă;* H. *kapál* > R. *căpălui* etc. Morphological phenomena: H. *fakalán* > R. *făcăl**an*** → *făcăl**eț***; H. *tolvaj* > R. dialect. *tulu**oi*** → *tâlh**ar***. Some lexical contact elements include: H. *tó* > R. dial. *tău;* H. *csésze* > R. dial. *cesă*; H. *papír* > R. dial. *popir*. Examples for contact elements on the syntactic structure R. *lucrează la fabrică* > H. *a gyár**nál** dolgozik* ↔ H. standard. *a gyár**ban** dolgozik* (‘lucrează în fabrică’); R. *merge până acasă/până la poștă* > H. *elmegy hazá**ig**/postá**ig*** ↔ H.stand. *elmegy haza/postára* (examples from Benő 2008a).

4.2. Sociolinguistic aspects of language contact and prestige

The Hungarians living in Transylvania are mostly bilingual, and as such in communication between Hungarians and Romanians the common code is mainly Romanian, thus Hungarian-Romanian bilingualism is usually asymmetrical (Benő–Szilágyi N. 2005: 145). This asymmetry is further deepened by the fact that very often Hungarian speakers know and use their local variety of Hungarian but not standard Hungarian (or the normative variant), while they speak and use the standard variety of Romanian (used in the educational system), this being considered by many minority speakers as “a code of social success and prestige” (Benő–Szilágyi N. 2005: 145).

If we take into account the important distinction between social and cultural prestige of languages (Lanstyák quoted by Benő–Szilágyi N. 2005: 145), we can state that in general the social prestige of Romanian is quite high among the Hungarian speakers in Romania. The results of an important sociolinguistic survey (the Sociolinguistics of Hungarian Outside Hungary) show that in the perception of these speakers monolingual Romanians are more likely to be successful in Transylvania than monolingual Hungarians (see the detailed results in Benő–Szilágyi N. 2005: 145–146). Nevertheless the cultural prestige of Hungarian seems to be high among Hungarian speakers.

An interesting aspect of the question is that the cultural prestige of the Transylvanian variety of Hungarian is very high not only among the Hungarians in Romania, but mostly everywhere, where Hungarian is spoken, as it is the most commonly identified variant (31.3%) in answering the question “where is the most beautiful Hungarian spoken?”, even more frequently than the variant spoken in Budapest (26.4%). Nevertheless, the Hungarian language spoken in Transylvania or even the Transylvanian regional standard does not have the same prestige as the central standard or normative variety of the language. Very often the speakers of this regional standard face a strong stigma and even mockery when using a non-standard linguistic form (contact pronunciation, lexeme or syntactic structure).

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4.3. Attitudes towards pluricentrism and a new interpretation – "borderless" Hungarian

Based on the above it is a fact that the variety of Hungarian spoken in Romania differs from the Hungarian spoken in Hungary. This is mainly the result of Romanian-Hungarian language contact but also a consequence of the stronger dialectal characteristics of the regional variety. Benő and Szilágyi N.'s findings show, that "a strong dialectal background influences a subject's judgements about the standard character of certain grammatical structures and lexical items such that they tend to consider dialectal forms as standard" (Benő–Szilágyi N. 2005: 160).

There has been a heated debate about the overall status of the minority language variants and how these are connected to the Hungarian standard. One of the attitudes towards the regional standards and the codification of regional (mainly contact induced) differences considers that this would result in the divergence of the language and on the long run, and even in the loss of the unity of the Hungarian language overall. Many non-scholars express their opinion about such regional/minority varieties as being the results of language decay due to the impact of the majority language.

Nevertheless according to the sociolinguistic scholarly literature the contact between languages in bilingual contexts is a natural phenomenon, and it should not be considered decay. Still the minority regional varieties are usually excluded from central standardization and codification. This is one of the reasons why in 2001 the Hungarian Academy of Sciences promoted and supported the foundation of linguistic institutes with the aim to research the minority and regional varieties of the Hungarian language outside Hungary and to perform the much needed tasks of Hungarian language planning. Such an institute is the Szabó T. Attila Linguistic Institute in Cluj, which since its establishment has focused on the research of Hungarian language use in Transylvania and – among others – on publishing much needed Romanian-Hungarian bilingual dictionaries in the fields of education, administration and other fields of official language use (Benő 2008b). It is actively part of in one of the biggest linguistic projects called *határtalanítás* (making the language borderless), the major aim of which being the inclusion of the elements of the Hungarian language variants outside the borders of Hungary in the Hungarian lexicographical publications (dictionaries, orthographical dictionaries, spell-check software, grammars, handbooks on orthography, language use and stylistics) in order for these to become representative of the whole of the Hungarian language, and not only of that used in Hungary.

This project could be seen as a reinterpretation of pluricentrism: even if not explicitly, it considers the pluricentric nature of the Hungarian language to be *fact* as it works with specific elements present in minority/regional variants. Nevertheless it aims to include these elements in what is called a much more widely interpreted, much more flexible and open *general Hungarian standard*. In no way does it serve a divergent evolution of the language, but rather a convergent movement, a demand to expand linguistic codification: the elements from the minority language variants or regional standards are offered as possible synonyms through an additive approach.

This has also resulted in a heated debate between the adepts of the prescriptive tradition (in many cases the language cultivators), who refuse the codification of any "foreign" elements mainly because – as already stated above – many of them consider these

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as the signs of decay and the deterioration of what is seen as an ideal standard or norm (e.g. Balázs 2005). One of their strongest arguments (which is present in almost every speaker of Hungarian as a general attitude and ideology towards the normative variants of the language) is the fear of language loss and the determination to protect the language from any outside influences that endanger it. Others dismiss these fears and consider the insistent validation of the central linguistic norm in every possible context no more and no less than linguistic discrimination or linguicism sustained by almost every Hungarian speaker (see e.g. Kontra 2005, Péntek 2007).

5. Romanian linguistic norm and standard

In discussing the varieties of the Romanian language a similar question arises. There has been serious, mostly political debate on the name of the language variant spoken in the Republic of Moldova, as the Constitution of Moldova states that the Moldovan language is the official language of the country. According to the linguistic standpoint the identity of the two languages is undebatable, and that the promotion of a Moldovan language different from the Romanian language is from a strictly linguistic point of view either a naïve mistake or a scientific fraud (Eugen Coşeriu). From this point of view the differentiation of the Romanian language from the Moldovan language is purely political, which we do not wish to discuss in the present paper. However the monocentric nature of the Romanian linguistic norm is evident: although there are two academies (the Academy of Sciences of Moldova and the Romanian Academy) establishing the rules of standard language use, there are only a few minor differences in the orthography of the two variants. At the same time the linguistic scholarly literature promotes the unity of the two variants, and there is no need to consider pluricentrism in the case of the Romanian language.

Conclusions

Our study aimed to present the most important theories regarding monocentrism and pluricentrism in the determination of normative variants, applied to the case of the Romanian and the Hungarian language. One of our most important observations is that in the case of the Hungarian language one needs to consider the fact that several regional standards have evolved in the countries where Hungarian is spoken as a minority language, and that these variants need to be taken into account. However there are strong negative, stigmatizing attitudes towards non-normative variants throughout the whole society (even in the case of the speakers of such non-normative variants) considering these to be less valuable and less "pure" as opposed to the central norm. The project of "borderless" Hungarian has facilitated the surfacing of such negative attitudes towards the expansion of *general Hungarian standard*. The experience of the past decade has shown that the romantic ideal of a perfect language that needs to be protected against any foreign element is still very strongly alive among the speakers of Hungarian who tend to dismiss any other language variants besides the normative one.

Both of the discussed languages are considered monocentric from the point of view of linguistic norm, nevertheless it would be interesting to explore the attitudes of the speakers of the Romanian language towards non-standard or dialectal forms, which would help outline general social attitudes towards linguistic norm and standard/non-standard language variants.

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