

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN TRANSYLVANIA: ROMANIAN INTERFERENCES IN THE SPOKEN GERMAN LANGUAGE

IOANA NARCISA CREȚU

Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu

ioana.cretu@ulbsibiu.ro

ORCID: 0009-0009-6739-487X

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Abstract: This study examines aspects of contemporary German in Romania, which are shaped by features of the region's historical and cultural development. This includes interference patterns that can be explained by the influence of Romanian. The research investigates various interference phenomena with the aim of highlighting their significance in the contemporary language, particularly in the language used by students. The examples focus on German in Transylvania. The central question is to what extent one can speak of a regional language variety and what impact the discussed features have on language competence and intercultural communication.

Keywords: *interferences; intercultural communication; Transylvania; German language;*

Premises

Transylvania (Romanian: *Ardeal* or *Transilvania*, Hungarian: *Erdély*) is located in Romania, in the southern Carpathian region. The linguistic diversity found there can be explained by the region's eventful history. From 895 onwards, the Hungarians settled the Carpathian Basin and thus also the area of present-day Transylvania. The recruitment of German settlers began under the Hungarian King Géza II (1141–1162). The settlers were intended to secure Hungary's borders, and in return, they enjoyed rights and freedoms. Due to the Turkish advance, Hungary was divided into three parts. The part of Transylvania was placed under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Empire as a subordinate principality; later, in 1699, its affiliation with Austria was recognized. It joined Romania on December 1, 1918, after the defeat of Austria-Hungary in the First World War. The German-speaking population of Romania comprises various ethnic groups. This can be explained by their diverse origins, especially since the settlement spanned several centuries. The most important ethnic groups among the Romanian Germans are the so-called "Transylvanian Saxons" and the "Banat Swabians," the latter belonging to the larger ethnic group of the Danube Swabians. The names of these groups refer to their settlement region: Transylvania and Banat, respectively. The Transylvanian

Saxons arrived between the 12th and 14th centuries from various parts of Germany; in fact, only a few were from Saxony, most were from Franconia. Regarding the status of the German minority in Romania, it must be said that, unfortunately, their numbers have declined sharply, particularly due to the massive emigration of Romanian Germans after 1989. While in 1930 the Germans, with 750,000 inhabitants and 4% of the population, were the second-largest group (Gehl 1998, 19), they fell to third place (after the Hungarians and the Roma) by 1992, when their numbers had dwindled to only 119,462, representing a meager 0.5% of the population. The census from 2011 registered only 36,042 Germans, dropping this ethnic minority to fourth place, after the Hungarians, Roma, and Ukrainians from Romania. Today, the wave of emigration has subsided, but it is noted that the remaining, and increasingly elderly, German population continues to shrink.

German Language in Transylvania

The Transylvanian Saxon dialect is considered the largest and most enduring medieval German language island within the Carpathian arc (Haldenwang 1999, 11, Eichinger 1997, 166). However, communication based on the German dialect in Transylvania, which is concentrated around the towns of Sibiu, Braşov, and Bistriţa, is often difficult from village to village and hardly possible between border points – for example, Braşov and Bistriţa (cf. Crössmann-Osterloh 1985, 65). According to Haldenwang (1999, 12), the Transylvanian Saxon dialect is divided “according to dialect-geographical criteria into Northern Transylvanian and Southern Transylvanian, which themselves are not uniform.” The researcher refers to older works that attest to the fact that the linguistic characteristics identify the Transylvanian Saxon dialect as a “West Central German, more narrowly defined Middle Franconian dialect” which “during its development in Transylvania incorporated East Central German and Upper German elements” (Haldenwang 1999, 12). She shows that until the mid-19th century, the dialect was the oral form of everyday expression in all social classes and strata, while the standard language remained limited to written expression or, in spoken form, to specific areas (school, cultural events, church, etc.).

With regard to standard German, Romanian German is approaching the variety spoken in Austria. The reason for this lies in the historical background already mentioned in Chapter 2, as Transylvania belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the end of the First World War, and thus its elite studied at Austrian universities. However, another factor is that Transylvanian Saxon documents and chancery language were directly influenced by the Austrian imperial chancery, “especially after the introduction of the Theresian Reforms” (Lăzărescu 1980, 2.2.2). Even today, words like *Semmel* (bread roll), *Karfiol* (cauliflower), *Kipfel* (crescent roll), *kehren* (to sweep), *rechen* (to rake), *Mehlspeise* (pastry), and *Samstag* (Saturday) are common in Transylvania, although the situation has changed in recent years, as Austrian vocabulary is now rarely found in school textbooks (Lăzărescu 1980).

German Schools in Transylvania

The first documents attesting to Transylvanian Saxon schools date back to the first half of the 14th century. The German school system has been maintained and cultivated to this day. Even under communism, the right to education in one's mother tongue was guaranteed and financed by the state. After the fall of communism, the continued existence of German-language educational institutions is surprising, despite the massive emigration. Some even speak of a continuous increase in the number of students (Gehl 1998, 24 ff.). Today, the majority of students are children from Romanian families attending schools with German as the language of instruction, schools that are actually intended for instruction in the mother tongue. Official statistics for the 2000–2001 school year show that there are a total of 216 schools with 47,535 students in Sibiu County, 75 of which are German schools and departments, where 5,258 kindergarten children and students are taught by 427 teachers (106 native speakers). Interest in German language instruction remains strong: For the upcoming 2017–2018 school year, the number of places in the preparatory class in Sibiu was increased by 35 to accommodate all children who registered for a German school and passed the language test. Iunesch explains that the incentive to attend such schools stemmed even before the fall of communism from both “the elite character of these schools and their somewhat ‘freer spirit’.” She adds: “The sometimes difficult access to schools with German as the language of instruction may have led to an inflated perception of the quality of these schools and departments” (Iunesch 2012, 29). She also notes that for the few students of Romanian-German nationality, the fact “that the Romanian population expressed great interest in the continued existence of schools with German as the language of instruction was of vital importance” (Iunesch 2012, 33). In Romania, German is taught (as a first language and as a foreign language) in over 80 schools and approximately 150 kindergartens. Furthermore, Romanian universities offer 45 German-language degree programs.

One can also speak of a well-developed institutional framework that extends beyond schools, as German courses are offered at various institutions, such as the Goethe-Institut in Romania (there is the Goethe-Institut Bucharest and the Goethe-Zentrum in Iași), at the German cultural centers in the cities of Timișoara, Cluj-Napoca, Brașov, Sibiu, and Iași, as well as in many private organizations and companies that want to train their staff. There are also many branches of German companies in Romania. In the training programs offered by large international companies, it appears that 80% of the language courses are requested by the companies' human resources departments and are seen as necessary professional development (Pascari 2016). Furthermore, the German language is cultivated, especially in Transylvania, through various initiatives of the Evangelical Church (children's choir, youth group, summer camps, etc.), as well as through German-language media (newspapers, radio, and television programs). However, there is a shortage of German language teachers due to the emigration of the German population.

Interferences as Part of Intercultural Communication

Definition and Characteristics

Centuries of coexistence in Transylvania have had an impact on the languages spoken there. There is an influence of Romanian on the German spoken there, and vice versa. This phenomenon is called “interference” (meaning “superposition” in physics) and can be observed in both the German dialect and Standard German, especially in the usage of students attending German schools. After the fall of communism, the language situation changed due to the emigration of native speakers, so that the linguistic competence and maintenance of Standard German are now the focus of research.

Interference appears in foreign language learning as a “disruptive influence of structures from an already learned language on a language to be learned” (Lewandowski 1994, 477), but also in bilingualism. In this case, it is described as a “violation of the norms of one language system by another language system” (Lewandowski 1994, 477). Transference is “the result of a process of interference” (Lewandowski 1994, 1192), whereby, according to Lüllwitz (1972, 191), transference refers only to the state of affairs “which is characterized as an invariant by the fact that a concept has not yet been designated and thus a linguistic sign from a language system or language group system has been adopted to designate this new concept.” Although, as a result of bilingualism in Transylvania, the German language has in many cases been modified in utterance according to the pattern of the Romanian language, German vocabulary has also been adopted into Romanian. Transference, in the sense of “transfer” (Bechert / Wildgen 1991, 3), can be found in both standard Romanian and the colloquial language spoken in Transylvania: in standard German, words such as *rucsac* (backpack), *stofă* (fabrics), *cartof* (potato), *șnițel* (schnitzel), *crenvușt* (horseradish sausage), *șliț* (slit), and many from the technical field: *șurub* (from the German dialect “Schrube”, “Schraube”), *bliț* (lightning), *șpalt* (split), *fasung* (fitting), *boiler* (boiler), *gater* (gate), *șină* (rail), *matriță* (matrix), *rolă* (roll), *bormașină* (drill), *șaiță* (disc), *ștecăr* (plug). In spoken Romanian in Transylvania, several more words are added: *glajă* (glass, meaning ‘bottle’), *castăn* (box, ‘cupboard’), *apotecă* (pharmacy), *șorț/șurț* (apron), *șmag/șmac* (taste). Some words have a different, independent meaning in colloquial speech, such as: *șpil* (from ‘game’, but meaning ‘to know what’), *șmecher* (from ‘taster’, referring to a ‘clever person’, even a ‘cheeker’).

Interferences of Romanian in German Language of Students

Until 1989, schools with German as the language of instruction were primarily attended by children whose native language was German. Today, the majority of students come from Romanian-speaking families. Previous research discusses interference that occurs in secondary schools and lyceums with German as the language of instruction (Bottesch 1997, Crețu 2003 and 2006), often stemming from language acquisition in kindergarten or primary school (Iunesch 2012, Biriș 2011). Bottesch (1997, 8) notes that since 1989 the problem of language proficiency has

become acute because, for students from Romanian families, “the use of German remains limited to the classroom.” Attempts to force the use of German on these children, e.g., through language instruction, have proven problematic. Speaking Latin among students during breaks makes just as little sense as the 16th-century Transylvanian school regulations that required students to speak Latin among themselves during breaks (Bottesch 1997, 8). Consequently, interference phenomena at the level of pronunciation also occur in student language, primarily in grammar and vocabulary. In the lexical-semantic area, words or phrases are adopted from Romanian, e.g., *pix* for “Kuli” (ballpoint pen) or *ein Telefon geben* for “to call.” The latter example can also be explained by the fact that in Romanian, the expression *a da un telefon* (literally “to give a phone call”) is used much more frequently in colloquial speech and in general than the corresponding verb *a telefona* (to call).

Grammatical interferences are often observed in the use of different parts of speech; these include morphological and syntactic deviations from the norm, as well as errors in sentence structure. Speakers transfer elements from their native language into the other language. In the case of nouns, the article is often used incorrectly because the gender differs in many cases between the two languages: *death* - der Tod (m) – *moartea* (f), *the sun* - die Sonne (f) – *soarele* (m), or conversely, *the moon* - der Mond (m) – *luna* (f), but also *cheese* - der Käse (f) – *brânza* (f). Therefore, it is often: *the girl* - das Mädchen (Romanian: *fata* – feminine), or *the photo* - das Foto (Romanian: *fotografia* – feminine). The verb poses difficulties primarily because word order in Romanian does not dictate a fixed position for the verb. Structures such as “Morgen er kommt” (instead of “Morgen kommt er” - He’s coming tomorrow) or “Ich muss kommen nach Hause” (instead of “Ich muss nach Hause kommen” - I need to go home) occur in the main clause, or similar errors in the compound clause: “Er sagt, dass er kommt morgen” (He says he’s coming tomorrow). Many of the reflexive verbs from Romanian are also reflexive in German, so the exceptions are easily overlooked. Therefore, for example, *sich heiraten* (correct form: *heiraten*) - *to marry* is formed according to the Romanian pattern *a se căsători*.

Interference also appears in expressions that are not grammatical errors but do not semantically correspond to standard German. For example, the verbs *haben* and *machen* are used far too often because the corresponding Romanian verbs (*a avea* - to have, *a face* - to do) are among the oldest verbs in the Romanian language and therefore occur in many combinations that are not always common in German: *Er hat 10 Jahre* (for *Er ist 10 Jahre alt* - *He is 10 years old*), *Die Strecke hat 5 Kilometer* - *The route is 5 km long* (instead of *betrifft...*), *Filip macht seine Hausaufgaben* (Romanian *Filip își face temele* instead of *Filip schreibt die Hausaufgaben* - *Filip is doing the homework*, also with a possessive pronoun, following the Romanian pattern - *Filip is doing his homework*), *Die Henne macht ein Ei* (instead of *legt...* for *The hen lays an egg*). Uncertainty also arises in the use of modal verbs, as only 4 of the 7 modal verbs from German correspond to them in Romanian (*a trebui* – must, need, should; *a putea*, *a ști* –

can, may; *a vrea* – want, like). Therefore, formulations such as: Can I ... (instead of: May I ...) are common.

Pronouns pose a challenge when they differ from one's native language. Especially when learning German as a foreign language, errors occur, such as: "Wie geht es Sie?" (instead of "Wie geht es Ihnen?" - How are you?), in the equation with "Ich kenne Sie," - *I know you*, because the forms of the personal pronoun are the same in Romanian: "Cum vă merge?" (How are you?) vs. "Vă cunosc" (I know you). Similar errors arise in the use of prepositions and conjunctions, because these are not clearly correlated in German and Romanian: e.g., "Ich gehe zu Hause" (instead of "...nach Hause" - I go home), "Ich dachte, denn du bist krank" (instead of "...dass du krank bist" for *I thought you were sick*).

Conclusions

The German language in Transylvania is a result of the historical and political circumstances and the over 800-year history of the German population there. According to Haldenwang (1999, 12), it has undergone an independent and clearly discernible development, separate from the wider German-speaking area. The adoption of linguistic elements from the other language, as well as the Austrian-influenced standard German and other transfers, are by no means negative but rather the result of centuries of coexistence between the two peoples. The interferences in German spoken by students, however, must be assessed differently. Research speaks of a new status for German in schools where German is the language of instruction, namely that of a "higher level of foreign language proficiency" (Lăzărescu 2005, 178). This refers to the language competence of non-native speakers acquired in a school system designed for native speakers (also Gădeanu 1998 and Iunesch 2012). Speranța Stănescu also noted that a language variety has developed from German as a mother tongue (DaM) and German as a foreign language (DaF), "which, playfully referred to as DaMF, encourages new research approaches and a changed teaching methodology." (Stănescu, 2002)

Regarding the question of how far these interference phenomena define Romanian German as a regional variety of German, it can be stated that interference phenomena are a characteristic of the Romanian German language variety because they are not limited to the language spoken by students. While the level of education and whether the speaker is a native or non-native speaker play an important role, the fact that even the language spoken by teachers is not immune to interference demonstrates that language contact also characterizes the regional variety of Romanian German and is part of the intercultural communication. Today, the German-language school system continues to be maintained and cultivated, although one can hardly speak of native speakers in German schools anymore. Furthermore, this advanced proficiency in German can be considered a modern *lingua franca* in European communication.

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