**BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY**

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**Faculty of Letters**

# *The Language of the Epitaphs from "The Merry Cemetery", Săpânța*

## *– (Ortho)graphy, Punctuation, Phonetics and Morphosyntax –*

**(Abstract)**

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# *The Language of the Epitaphs from "The Merry Cemetery", Săpânța – (Ortho)graphy, Punctuation, Phonetics and Morphosyntax –*

## (Abstract)

**Keywords**: *morphology, syntax, phonetics, orthography, punctuation, dialect, epitaph, Săpânța, Merry Cemetery*.

The present study follows the spelling, punctuation, phonetic and morphosyntactic peculiarities found in the funerary inscriptions of the two cemeteries in the locality of Săpânța (Maramureș), known, one more than the other, under the name of "The Merry Cemetery". Our intention was not to exhaustively inventory the opinions of the grammarians regarding certain more problematic morphosyntactic structures – which would have added our work to the critical studies on the ideas formulated so far – but especially to bring to light some facts of language recorded in writing and which most likely "mime" the oral pattern of expression of a rural community at the turn of the ages.

The present work was built around three sections, one with a more general character – *Description of the research. Overview of "The Merry Cemetery" and epitaphs* – and the other two having a pronounced applicative character and being much more extensive in number of pages – *Spelling, punctuation and phonetics of the epitaphs,* respectively *The morphosyntactic peculiarities of the epitaphs.*

The first section is structured in three chapters that deal, on the one hand, with the information regarding the manner of drawing up the corpus (Chapter I), the brief description of the locality of Săpânţa (Chapter II), the biography of the craftsman Stan Ioan Pătraș and the short but valuable history of the well-known cemetery, as well as the linguistic and cultural funereal imaginary built around it (Chapter III).

The second section, comprising two chapters, begins with a description of the general graphic aspects and phonetic peculiarities that characterize the epitaphs (Chapter I). Having their origin in the ritual texts of oral invoice (in *verșuri* or *bocete)* and following, broadly, a predetermined pattern, these funerary inscriptions testify to a much freer and more vivid relation

to the language than the "corset" of the standard language generally allows. Thus, for example, we have stated that the cancellation of the boundary between writing words in capital letters or lowercase is a general phenomenon. In addition to this fact, we also emphasize the functional cessation of punctuation and spelling signs or diacritic signs, a fact that often slows down the process of comprehension or makes difficult the morphosyntactic analysis. At the same time, in addition to those presented so far, the hyphenation at the end of the line no longer follows one and the same principle, but is rather dictated by the spatial limits imposed by the working material. Tangentially, it was also discussed at this point the issue of abbreviations, which are of the most diverse and cover all the main morphological classes: *maş.* = *maşină* (930), *dir. la sc.* = *director la şcoală* (529), *m. numesc* = *mă numesc* (720f), *C.P.L.-eu* (510f), *C.A.P-u* (21f), but also *ceapeu* (271v), ”Stan Grigor/*L D.M.* Turdoai” (MS4), ”Ileana *l. Dum. Duki*” (602f), *A. R. P.* = *a răposat* (16), etc.

From the perspective of phonetic peculiarities (Chapter II), the popular language of the inscriptions from the cemetery from Săpânța can be framed, in the largest part, in the subdialect of Maramures. Among the phonological phenomena that support this hypothesis and confirm it, we mention here only a few: the closure of *î* or *e* at *ă* before the harsh consonants *(r, s, s, t, t, t, z)*, as well as of *e* atonic, *ă* protonic passes to the stage of *a*, *u* final postconsonantic is preserved in words such as *optu*, *altu*, *cându*, *oa* passes to *ò* and *ea* at *a*/*ă*/opened *e*, *ia,*in postvocal position, turns into *ie,*but *a,*followed by *u,*diphthongs to *oa.* In addition, the consons *p, b, m* are palatalize and take the forms *(p)t', (b)d', (m)n'*, affricate *ğ* is fricativized to *j*, *ă* pass to *î*, labial *m* is palatalized at the stage of consonant group *mń*, the vibrant *r* is preserved within the noun *fărina*, *ct* passes to the stage of *ft* and *str* is reduced to *st*.

The relationship of equality between the language of Săpânţa and the one from Maramures, as a whole, "escapes" the preservation of the semivowel *u* unconsonantized: *văduuă* < lat. *vidua*. In addition to the phonetic phenomena, what distinguishes the Maramureş language and, implicitly, the epitaphs from "The Merry Cemetery" from the other subdialects is the recurrence of phonetic accidents such as apocopa, the most common, which is closely followed by syncope, apheresis, prosthesis, epensis, metathesis, assimilation (regressive or progressive), dissimilation, haplology or contamination. Despite the fact that we do not have at our disposal the oral version

of the texts, in their authentic form, the shift of the accent inside the words, a general feature of the Maramures language, can also be intuited in the epitaphs as an immediate effect of the metric constraints.

With the third section, which, moreover, represents the center of gravity of the work, the work acquires an applicative rather than theoretical character. With the gloves of a philologist and with the utensils put at hand that the traditionalist grammar and, in some places, the generativist-transformational, the structural or functional-discursive one, were selected, from the 1500 funerary texts, those structures that come out of the pattern of the standard language. Where the classical vision of interpretation does not present enough openness, we have tried to nuance a possible interpretative hypothesis by resorting to more modern visions, thus to more recent studies in this field. The nine subdivisions of this section are related to the nine morphological classes (in the order in which they are also presented in the GALR), to which the known grammatical categories are subordinated. The volume of information, as well as the number of peculiarities found in the corpus differs significantly from one class to another, depending on the typology of the examples extracted. The manner of work did not follow the path from theory to examples, but, on the contrary, we decided on the subclassification and built the skeleton of the work based precisely on the facts of language, to which, later, we attributed the appropriate theoretical support.

Chapter I of the third section concerned, first of all, the major categories of the noun and the way in which they are represented at the level of the language in the epitaphs. Among the specific endings, we note the singular masculine in *-ari (morari*, *cojocari*, *pădurari*, *polițari*, etc.*)*, the singular feminines in *-e (muștețe),*but also the plural of the feminines in *-ă (covoară, brață, oiță*, *pahară, gîză*, etc.) or *-uri (mînuri*, *căsuri).* To these are added, of course, isolated forms of atypical plural, with local or regional use: *lecrece, service, căsi*, *boale*, *lucri* (= *lucruri*), *ai* (= *ani*). For nouns that form their plural with the help of a postconsonantic ending, in epitaphs, it is often preferred to aphonize it and to maintain exclusively the palatalized form of the previous consonant: *cămeș*, *fraț*, *bărbaț*, *nepoț*, *păcătoș*, *nunț*, etc. The vowel alternations trained with the change in number are not always functional: *cămaș*, *taneri*.

Viewed from the perspective of the category of the nouns gender, the epitaphs reveal a series of forms that prove to be different from the model imposed by the norm of the standard language. Thus, despite the fact that gender is a fixed category, inherent in the noun, the question may arise, in certain terms, is that of a transfer of genders. For example, the female *gazdă,* meaning "rich man", "owner", is assigned regents or even determinants of male gender, giving rise to semantic agreement over the grammatical one. The same is the case of the masculine *metri,* which, in the epitaphs, as in the entire area of Maramures, acquires, in the plural, a feminine determinant (*două metere),* fact which forces us to take it as a neutral, if not a feminine. As a sub-point of the category of the gender, we have drawn up an inventory of defective nouns of plural or singular, an inventory that is not intended to be exhaustive: *lapte, lene, ruşine, cinste, zestre* or *câlți*, *zori*, etc.

As regards the case, the epitaphs retain features of the characteristics of the Maramureș language, as a whole. Thus, for the nominative of the toponyms, the epitaphs follow, in certain contexts, the specific model of the area north of the Tisa, namely that of rendering some non-articulated noun forms, such as *Hută*, *Baie Mare*, *Săpânță.* All this is doubled, of course, by the typical definite articulated variant. The same phenomenon of disarticulation can be noticed in the person's own names: *Mărie* or even *Mariă*, *Ileana*, *Pălagă*, etc.

The accusative is accompanied by the prepositions *de*, *în*, *cu*, *la*, *după*, but to these are added the regional version of the preposition composed *pe lângă*, namely *pângă*, or other prepositions, in double hypostasis: *pe - pă*, *către - cătă*, *printre - pântre*, *până - pân*, *peste - păste.* For the accusative case, the most discussed peculiarity, however, remains the morpheme *pe*, which distinguishes Romanian from the other Romance languages. Restricting the reference area only on the structures encountered in the epitaphs, we draw the following guidelines: the obligation to express it before the direct objects characterized by the trait [+ human] is stopped, as, moreover, the use of the morphem does not always require the doubling of the direct object by a clitic or, vice versa, the doubling of the clitic does not require the presence of the morpheme.

The genitive of nouns is most of the materialized in the synthetic inflectional version, a variant that is applied, sporadically, also to the male anthroponyms: *Alu Grigore Danciului.* The

use of synthetic inflection in epitaphs does not require the definite articulation of the regent term, but most of the time, in masculine or neutral singular, the determinative function is taken over by the connecting vowel *-u-*, in the absence of the definite article itself, *-l*. For the anthroponyms with ending *-ca* or even *-c (Duca, Dioca, Oleca, Vasâioc, Ferentoc)* we find special genitival flexion: *Duki*, *Diochii*, *Olechi*, *Văsîiuochi, Ferentoachi*. The analytical genitive, which often redundantly doubles the synthetic version, is marked in epitaphs by the following grammatical means: *lui*, with the regional version *lu*', *a/al/ai/ale* or by the prepositions-morphemes *la* or *de*. In the same terms, the situation of the dativa l flexion can be presented, with the mention that, for the analytical version, we keep only two prepositions: *la,* the most frequent, respectively *către*, with the regional variant *către.*

The vocative case is expressed by a series of specific desinences: *-e*, *-ule*, *-lor*, *-o*, *-ă*, *-î*, *-i*, or takes the form of the nominative, the address being made most of the times in relation to human referees. It is not strictly limited to this category, but also involves the animal kingdom or abstract, inanimate notions.

In terms of traditional grammar, the category of determination for nouns presents special forms at each paradigmatic level. Thus, masculine in the singular number can reduce the articulation defined strictly at the connecting vowel *-u* or they can completely deprive themselves of this peculiarity in contexts that, normally, in the standard language, the defined determination is mandatory, a fact also found in the feminine sphere. For the feminine, we notice that the transfer from the inarticulate to the articulate version does not sometimes involve any graphic modification, but it is felt only at the level of pronunciation (opened *-e* takes over the determinative function). The lack of a clear system of scoring diacritic signs makes it impossible for us to accurately establish the articulated or inarticulate status of some of the nouns in the female gender, the singular number. The indefinite determination offers a new opportunity to highlight the specificity of the speech used in the epitaphs, in that, in the masculine, for example, the forms *un*, *unu*, *on* or even *o* are used, and in the feminine, *o,* but also *una.* What, again, is worth mentioning is that although the analysis focuses on about 1500 funerary texts, the indefinite article *nişte* is found exclusively in the anteposition of the term *flori*, with both graphic variants: *nişte*, respectively, *neşte*.

As for the adjective (Chapter II), we find that agreement with a noun regent term does not always cover all three grammatical categories (gender, number and case). Also, regarding the relation of the adjective with other lexico-grammatical classes, we find that, most of the time, the line of demarcation between the adjective and the noun, respectively between the adjective and the participle is a very fine one, which led to the inventory of the main diagnostic contexts of each subclass.

Chapter III refers to pronouns or pronominal adjectives, in all its hypostases (personal, polite, demonstrative, possessive, indefinite, negative, interrogative, reflexive), except in the hypostasis of intensive pronouns/pronominal adjective, which does not find any correspondent in our corpus. Each of these subclasses brings with it a number of regional forms and particular syntactic uses.

Chapter IV considers the typology of the numeral and the graphic manner of its rendering, which proves, once more, that the epitaphs transcribe the spoken language into a subarea of the Maramureș language, from the simple ordinal numerals *doauă*, *tri*, *șăse, șepte, optu, noauă* or the compound ones, *patru spre zece*, *optusprăzece, optzeșidoi*, etc., up to ordinal numerals of the type *întâie, dintâie* or *a tria*/*a triea*.

Chapter V takes into account, in the foreground, the issue of verbal forms, in all its modal or temporal hypostases. As a personal way, the indicative is, in epitaphs, the best represented, starting with the variety of forms of expression of the present verb *a fi* (*to be*), to the transfer of certain verbs from one conjugation to another. In addition to atypical verbal suffixes or endings, epitaphs provide samples of authentic language in that they involve various consonant and vowel alternations, as well as lexical forms with strictly regional use. The compound perfect wears out various temporal auxiliaries, adding to the literary variant other uses, of the type *o* - *or* (instead of the third-person auxiliary, *a* - *au*).

However, we find that the obligation to express these auxiliaries is often stopped, which supports the orality and metric of the text. At the same time, the presence – very frequent, by the way – of the archaic form of auxiliary in some contexts with the singular should not be overlooked either. Beyond the peculiarities that closely concern the auxiliary, we also notice the possibility of amplifying the participle through a final -*u,* as a phonetic archaism (*so îngrijitu),*

through a postconsonantic ending (*am iubiti*) or even through a *-ă,* resembling, by this, the granted forms of the participle adjective, but clearly distinguishing itself from them by the presence of the verbal auxiliary, which keeps it, without a doubt, in the verb class (*ați fi vrută*). The relationship between the verb and the pronominal clitics attributed to it is not always congruent to the model of the standard language, which is why, for example, some intransitive verbs acquire from the context the valence of transitivity, and others are transferred to the category of reflexive verbs, even if, by definition, they do not present these peculiarities. The simple perfect and the imperfect involve regional phonetic variants both at the level of the verb root and in terms of the suffixes used. The literary future is preferred over the popular one, but it is also attributed the regional variants of auxiliary: *oi, îi (-i), a, o, om, îț (iț), or*. The infinitive in the structure of the literary future also presents particular forms, *vei avie*, *dei vre, a rugina, oi pute, oi vide,* or with the final diphthong *-ii*: *ne om hodihnii*, *ne-om grăii*, etc.

The subjunctive, conditional-optative and imperative moods also present atypical contexts, especially in relation to the topic, auxiliary or pronominal clitics assigned to them, being, at the same time, strongly influenced by the phenomenon of apocope.

As for non-personal moods, the most commonly used is the infinitive, but all four moods have distinct peculiarities, being valuable by their very heterogeneity.

In the sphere of adverbs (Chapter VI) are included, in the present work, various examples from the category of adverbs of manner, time, place, cause and purpose, the quantitative or the concessional and conditional ones. I lingered a little on the adverbs *mai* and *tare*, for their role in semantically nuanced the term regent that it determines. Despite the fact that it goes somewhat beyond the traditionalist view, we have also introduced semi-adverbs within this chapter, since we have found, following the analysis of the corpus, that it is precisely the components of this adverbial subclass that give specificity to the texts, through their double use: *prea - pre*, *tocmai - tuma*, *iar - iară*, *doar - doară*, etc.

From the perspective of the connectors used at the intra- or interpropositional level, Chapters VII and VIII represent a map of the most diverse variants or meanings that prepositions and conjunctions can acquire contextually. In addition, not infrequently, a connector that can be

formally framed to the prepositional class turns out to have the status of a propositional relation in certain syntactical contexts.

The last chapter of this section (Chapter IX) provides examples of presenting interjections (*iată, iaca, uite*), hortative (*hai, haida, ho*), interjections with emotive/expressive value (*of*, *vai*) or addressive interjections (*măi, hăi*), to which is added a secondary typology, whose exponents are the noun *Doamne* or the pronoun *tu*. Within the same subchapter, we discussed the vocative status of addressing interjections, as well as that of the pronoun *tu* with interjectional value.

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper was to propose a more comprehensive description of the language facts encountered in the epitaphs of "The Merry Cemetery" and, through this, to outline their specificity in relation to the other subdialects. Thus, our research confirms the belonging of the "language" of the funeral inscriptions to the subdialect of Maramureș, with very few exceptions. Obviously, the importance of such research goes beyond the linguistic sphere for which it was created, enriching, why not, the cultural heritage of the Romanian language by preserving in writing some living texts, which are in a slow but continuous process of change.

The language facts analyzed in this paper have given us the opportunity to rediscover the language and to reconsider it starting from concrete examples, without abandoning the ideas already formulated in the specialized literature. Where the linguistic material has gone beyond the methods of analysis already circulated, we have proposed an interpretation of our own, in an attempt to catch in the concepts the living vein of the non-standard language. If this conceptualization was not possible, rarely, we have the contentment to bring out from the dust of time a way of talking and writing.

The novelty that this work brings also consists in the inventory of the samples of authentic language known and existing at the time of the field research (more precisely, the summer of 2017) in the two cemeteries, as well as around the "Stan Ioan Pătraș" Memorial House or in the museums that are collaborating with it. By making this corpus in a more faithful manner, we offer an extremely consistent research support for many other levels of knowledge: beyond the other branches of linguistics, and for literature, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, ethnology, the list remaining, of course, open.

Therefore, a multitude of paths remain open on which you can go from *The corpus of texts – epitaphs and other inscriptions from "The Merry Cemetery", Săpânța (Maramureș)* and we encourage those who will dare to go on these still unsuspected roads to keep unaltered the simple or willfully simplified language in which the life stories of the people of Săpânța were written. True chronicles of the last decades, epitaphs turn out to be an authentic dialectal catalog, a mirror of the manner in which language, although subject to the waves of history or politics of the time, managed to preserve its vitality.