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## **Contact Phenomena in Transylvanian Hungarian Slang Varieties**

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Cluj-Napoca  
2023

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The research examines the Transylvanian Hungarian young people's (high school students, university students) slang varieties from the perspective of contact phenomena, primarily aiming to answer the question of what regularities can be observed in slang regarding the processes of lexical borrowing and domestication. In addition to collecting linguistic data, I also accomplish an attitude survey to find out the speakers' attitudes towards slang and borrowings. A further yield of the research is the investigation of the young speakers' interpretation of slang due to the lack of the term's unequivocal definition. Furthermore, the results reveal the informant's linguistic norm consciousness. The research methods primarily include questionnaire surveys and focus group interviews, but I also review potential influencing factors on young individuals such as textbooks and online resources.

The topic is relevant and fills a gap not only from the perspective of contactology but also in slang research, as comprehensive investigations have not been conducted in either field. It is well known that slang is rapidly changing and innovative, and it readily incorporates borrowings. Due to these characteristics, the question of what contact phenomena exist in slang used in a bilingual community becomes intriguing, especially considering the heightened presence of borrowing in everyday contexts.

In summary, important results have been obtained during the research as we have gained insights into the usage of slang among young Transylvanian Hungarian speakers and the influencing factors behind it. Let's review the most significant findings and conclusions.

The initial challenge I encountered at the beginning of the research was the assumption that I knew what slang was. However, I soon realized that this concept is much more complex than I initially thought, and even in linguistic literature, there is no unified definition. In order to clarify this question, the second chapter of the thesis provides a detailed overview of the various approaches to studying slang in the literature, aiming to understand the complexity of the phenomenon from both linguistic and socio-psychological perspectives. The subsequent section of the chapter discusses the theoretical framework of bilingual environments, contact phenomena and motivations for borrowing, then finally explores the concept of attitude and the influencing factors, such as language ideologies and language myths.

As mentioned, the central issue that arises in the research is the definition of the key term, slang, as there is currently no unified definition or framework in the literature. This is because we are dealing with a complex phenomenon that goes beyond traditional approaches. Merely defining it from a linguistic standpoint is insufficient; an interdisciplinary approach (linguistic, sociological, socio-psychological) is necessary to fully describe it (JELISZTRATOV 1998; KIS 1997: 240).

Furthermore, it is important to note that the lay speaker's perception of slang differs from what we can read in linguistic texts. However, in both cases, we can identify certain stereotypes and thoughts based on different language ideologies that have influenced not only the lay speakers but also researchers studying slang. One such stereotype, for example, is that slang is predominantly used by young people, men, the uneducated, or even criminals. In the present study, we also encountered opinions suggesting that slang is a contemporary phenomenon associated with today's youth. These stereotypes and conceptualizations create a false and simplistic representation in the minds of speakers, as these conceptions restrict the phenomenon excessively.

Reviewing the literature on slang, we observed that it can be defined as a language variety, stylistic variety, sociolect, stratified language, or group language (KÖVECSES 1997: 7–8). However, each of these concepts narrows down the phenomenon and does not encompass all important aspects. In this thesis, I ultimately define slang as an informal, group-oriented mode of speech that assumes intensive speech interaction and directness among its users, while also reflecting attitudes (often cynicism and irony). Its "emotive word formation" is the most significant tool, as linguistic creativity plays a prominent role. An important aspect is norm-breaking, which manifests itself against the norms of the majority group, along with continuous renewal and creative language use. While less characteristic of common slang, in well-defined groups, slang builds on shared knowledge and contributes to group identity, expressing a sense of belonging (CRYSTAL 2003:74; KIS 2010; KLERK 2006: 407–409; SZILÁGYI N. 1999, 2006).

Regarding the context of the research, it is necessary to discuss bilingualism, but this concept also raises questions of interpretation. Most people consider bilingualism a rare phenomenon, yet practically in every country bilingual speakers live. A bilingual speaker should not be characterized by the language proficiency of two monolingual speakers, because they typically do not have equal proficiency in both languages. Laypeople consider someone a bilingual speaker if they have perfect knowledge of both languages, and until the end of the last century, linguists' definition was also close to this notion. However, considering the nature of language, we cannot accept this definition because language encompasses a collection of language variations, and an individual does not know all of them, only those he or she needs in their everyday life. The choice of which language varieties a speaker acquires is greatly influenced by factors such as their place of residence, occupation, or areas of interest. Bilingualism can also develop based on these circumstances. In this thesis, I interpret bilingualism as a speaker's ability to use two (or more) languages in their daily life (GROSJEAN 2001: 10–11; NAVRACSICS 2015: 12–13).

In communities where members use two languages in their everyday lives, societal bilingualism emerges. However, this does not imply that every member of the community is strictly bilingual. Firstly, those who only speak one of the languages are familiar with the rules of language use in both languages, so they know which language to use depending on the speech situation. Secondly, they have acquired the bilingual language variety as their native language (LANSTYÁK 1998: 77). Societal bilingualism is primarily characteristic of speakers in minority communities, such as the Hungarian-speaking population in Romania.

Chapter 3 presents the research methods, details of data collection, and the informants themselves. Regarding the data providers, I chose younger age group in the research plan because they are considered "typical slang users." Although this claim is not entirely accurate, it proved to be a good decision in hindsight because it is widely believed that slang usage is characteristic of or primarily associated with young people, which facilitated data collection. Among the research methods, I decided to use a questionnaire survey to examine multiple individuals and focus group interviews to gain a deeper understanding of the motivations and thoughts of the informants. This is complemented by a text corpus compiled from online sources, which I only utilized for attitude analysis due to methodological considerations, interpreting it as an environmental influence and context. The questionnaire data collection took place in five different linguistically diverse cities for high school students in Transylvania (Gheorgheni, Harghita country; Alba Iulia, Alba country; Cluj-Napoca, Cluj country; Târgu Mureș; Mureș country; Oradea, Bihor country) and three cities for university students (Cluj-Napoca, Cluj country; Târgu Mureș; Mureș country; Oradea, Bihor country), resulting in 384 completed questionnaires. The focus group interviews were conducted in groups of 3-5 participants, with 32 Hungarian-speaking young people studying in Cluj-Napoca participating in one of the eight groups.

At the beginning of Chapter 4, I discuss the language usage habits of young people in Transylvania based on the questionnaire survey and interviews. From these sources, we can learn about the self-reported proportions of Romanian and Hungarian language usage, the extent to which slang and borrowed elements are used, and their perceptions of the motivations behind their slang usage. The questionnaire included questions targeting language usage habits, while the interviews did not specifically focus on them, but they were touched upon to some extent during the conversations related to other questions.

Let's review some important data regarding the language proficiency and language usage habits of the informants. According to their self-assessment in the questionnaire survey, young Hungarian speakers from Transylvania excel in Romanian and English after their native

language. The level of language proficiency correlates with attitudes toward the respective languages. Individuals who speak a particular language at a higher level tend to have a more positive attitude toward that language compared to their peers with weaker language skills. However, an interesting difference emerged regarding *intermediate proficiency* in Romanian and English. The results suggest that *intermediate English proficiency* is more advantageous than *intermediate Romanian proficiency* in the sense that the former is considered sufficient for everyday use, while the latter is not. This could be due to the fact that reaching an *intermediate level* in Romanian is often associated with more challenging experiences. The interview conversations also shed light on the fact that although Romanian is the environmental language, English has a greater impact on the participants. This is attributed to its prestige and the daily exposure to the language through internet use and reading English literature. Some young individuals use English to a greater extent than Romanian in their daily lives, primarily among the informants from Hungarian-majority regions (Harghita and Covasna country). During the focus group interviews, it became apparent that one reason for this is the language education provided in schools. As Romanian language and literature courses primarily focus on literary analysis rather than everyday language use, students who lack opportunities to use the language outside of school have incomplete and asymmetrical language skills. They can write an essay about a literary work but struggle with using the language seamlessly in everyday circumstances. In contrast, English language teaching primarily emphasizes everyday communication skills.

Regarding the language usage habits of the informants, two important factors should be considered in the context of the research: 1. According to their self-assessment, they are conscious language users, therefore adapt their language usage to the speech situation. 2. Based on their self-assessment, the use of slang and borrowings is a daily characteristic for them. These two statements also apply to the participants in the focus group interviews. Through the results of the questionnaire survey, I also examined whether there are significant correlations among various variables. A significant difference was observed based on the gender of the informants, as the results indicate that boys tend to use more slang and borrowings than girls based on their self-assessment, especially when communicating with teachers and dealing with official matters. This may indicate a stronger adherence to norms among girls. Furthermore, a difference was found in the use of borrowings when communicating with teachers between high school students and university students: high school students use more contact phenomena in their speech, which may be explained by the nature of the institutions, where a more direct teacher-student relationship is predominant in schools compared to universities. Concerning

the use of slang and borrowings, it was observed that those informants who frequently use them in specific speech situations find it difficult to avoid them. This was supported by several significant correlations. The use of Romanian slang (in Romanian language communication) by young individuals is influenced by their level of proficiency in Romanian and their evaluation of the Romanian language. It is primarily characteristic of those who have a high level of language proficiency and hold a positive attitude toward the language, according to the results.

Regarding the motivations for using slang, the results of the self-assessment in the questionnaire show that the most common motivations are linguistic exposure and expressiveness. In terms of linguistic exposure, a significant difference was also observed based on the gender of the informants, as it is more prevalent among girls than boys. The examination of expressiveness yielded a significant result based on the permanent place of residence of the informants: it is more characteristic of urban youth than rural youth. The participants in the focus group interviews also mentioned linguistic exposure and expressiveness as primary motivations.

Due to the lack of a unified definition of slang in linguistic literature, I considered it important to ask young people how they interpret this concept. The absence of a definition had a consequence in that it allowed me to examine the informants' mindset in this manner. Prior to investigating the young individuals' perception of slang, I reviewed the information they might encounter regarding slang in textbooks and online resources. As we observed, the currently implemented Hungarian language and literature curricula for high school students are not aligned with the most recently published textbooks, as these textbooks were developed following the older curricula. However, in neither case do we find a modern approach to slang, nor even a conceptualization of the term itself. The high school textbooks contain references that presumably relate to slang as well, but these approaches are outdated and influenced by ideologies of linguistic standardization and conservatism. The information available on the internet is highly diverse, ranging from texts written by slang researchers to brief, imprecise, and non-professional definitions. It would also be important to consider the definitions provided by the students' teachers and what is discussed in the classroom, as these factors can greatly influence the young individuals' perception of slang and their attitudes. However, further research would be necessary to examine that aspect. It is necessary to note that the results of this investigation should be approached with caution and interpreted as potential influences, as we do not have precise information about the factors that actually affected Hungarian high school students and university students in Transylvania.



Examining the informants' perception of slang, I have determined that it only partially aligns with how slang phenomena are interpreted in this paper and the academic literature. Due to the complexity of slang, young individuals faced difficulty in defining and describing the phenomenon. Although the informants' representation indicates that many of them narrow down the concept of slang, they still suggest that the majority of young people, based on their language intuition, know what lexical items can be classified as slang word. The results of the research have highlighted that it is commonly believed that slang is primarily used by young people, and numerous participants identified slang speech patterns through the use of loanwords, abbreviations, and acronyms. In this case, this interpretation does not pose a significant problem as the investigation focuses on contact phenomena found in the slang varieties of young individuals. However, in other cases, this interpretation would not be negligible. Based on the results of the questionnaire survey and focus group interviews, we can conclude that there exists a prototypical representation of slang among young Hungarian individuals in Transylvania, indicating that prototypical slang is primarily characteristic of young people's language usage, adopting an informal style, and exclusively used in informal settings.

The discussion of the slang representation among young Hungarian individuals in Transylvania is followed by an attitudinal analysis, where I examine the informants' attitudes towards slang and loanwords. This investigation has yielded additional insights as it not only reveals attitudes related to slang and loan elements but also explores the informants' norm consciousness and their attitudes towards other language varieties. In the examination of slang representations and attitudes, it was important to map out the information and attitudes that young people encounter in their environment and the influences they may experience. For this purpose, I have utilized Hungarian language and literature textbooks and online sources used in Romania. However, this part should primarily be interpreted as an environmental influence. The attitudes and linguistic ideologies present in the texts likely influence the attitudes of Transylvanian high school students and university students. In this section, I analyzed the prevailing attitudes in the examined texts regarding the evaluation of slang-like natural or metalinguistic expressions, with particular emphasis on emerging linguistic ideologies. It is worth noting that the text corpus includes press articles, which have a greater impact due to the prestige of the press and a wider readership compared to other online texts, resulting in a greater influence on the speakers. Almost every press article exhibits linguistic purism and standard language ideologies that reinforce linguistic intolerance, thereby condemning the use of both slang and loanwords. It is a common phenomenon that speakers do not recognize the functions

of borrowing and that there are motivations beyond loanwords other than lexical gaps, leading them to classify foreign language borrowings as "unnecessary foreign words." In addition to linguistic purism and language standard ideology, there is often an indirect reference to the ideology of linguistic conservatism, which does not tolerate language change. The consequence of these three ideologies is that accepting diversity becomes problematic, and understanding towards the speakers' repertoire is lacking. However, exaggeration and generalization are common, and proponents of the aforementioned ideologies do not consider the fact that language is constantly evolving and every linguistic phenomenon is somehow necessary and motivated. Language correctness is evaluated concerning the standard, irrespective of the speech situation, with the standard serving as the model to be followed. In the text corpus, we also find cases where the speakers' mindset supports linguistic diversity pluralism, but there is significantly less data on this than on the previous three ideologies. While linguistic purism, standard language ideology, and conservatism typically appear in the articles, pluralism is usually found in the comments section, which has a lesser impact on the speakers compared to the articles.

In the questionnaire survey, I examined attitudinal questions related to the evaluation of provided statements and the opinions of two speakers based on their remarks. Regarding the evaluation of the statements, I found that the majority of informants disagree with the notion that using slang and loanwords is not desirable. However, they believe that in appropriate speech contexts, the use of slang and loanwords is not a negative phenomenon. In line with this, based on self-reports, it is not characteristic of young people to address their family members, friends, or acquaintances based on their language use. However, when it comes to the evaluation of slang and loanwords, a slight difference can be observed, as the results indicate that young people in Transylvania appear to be more tolerant of the use of contact phenomena compared to slang usage. However, these results are not consistent with the evaluation of slang speakers, as very few informants positively assessed the two individuals based on their remarks, despite stating that they do not generally stigmatize the use of slang and loan elements. One explanation for this inconsistency is that both remarks are intentionally exaggerated, which the majority of respondents either do not notice or do not take into account. Another explanation is that young people do not associate such language with the statements when evaluating them. However, the results of focus group interviews further nuance this issue and help understand underlying thoughts and motivations.

During the questionnaire-based attitudinal investigation, I also observed significant differences in the attitudes between boys and girls in two instances while evaluating statements.

In the statement "It's not nice to use slang words," boys disagreed to a lesser extent compared to girls. In the statement "We cannot use words borrowed from another language when speaking to just anyone, but it's not necessary to avoid them in every situation," girls agreed to a greater extent.

The conversations in the focus group interviews shed light on the fact that young people perceive the use of slang and loan elements as both positive and negative phenomena. They consider it positive when the speaker uses them in an appropriate, i.e., informal setting, when all slang and loanwords are understandable to the speech partner, and when moderation characterizes the mode of speech, meaning that the speaker does not overdo their usage. This likely explains the contradictory reactions of the informants in the questionnaire survey in the two situations, as the interview participants have a negative attitude toward these phenomena when the speaker uses them in an inappropriate setting, when the message is not clear, and when their usage is excessive.

During the interview conversations, young people highlighted certain positive aspects of slang, such as the promotion of the economy of expression and its role in community-building. They also considered loanwords to be "more lively" and phonetically expressive compared to their Hungarian counterparts, while also pointing out differences in meaning. The conversations also revealed that family and the environment in which they were raised have a significant influence on the linguistic attitude of young people. Overall, the interviewees can be characterized as evaluating everything based on speech situations and context. It is a common phenomenon for linguistic purism and standard language ideology to coexist with an ideology opposing them, namely pluralism. However, due to the consideration of speech situations and context, these ideologies are not contradictory but rather complementary in actual speech situations.

In the last section of Chapter 4, the analysis of contact phenomena is conducted based on three databases: the first containing data from the questionnaire collection, the second consisting of metalinguistic data from focus group interviews, and the third comprising spontaneously occurring data from the interview conversations. These three types of data are discussed separately because they cannot be compared due to their nature. In each case, I examine the transmitting languages, the ratio of earlier and recent borrowings, and then, based on the types of contact phenomena, the regularities and characteristics of borrowings.

Taking into account the results of all three databases, I observed that borrowing led to only minor phonetic changes. This can be attributed to the prominent role of expressiveness in slang, which is enhanced by foreign phonetic forms. Additionally, the majority of borrowed

words in the databases are recent, and significant changes require more time. Similarly, semantic changes occurred only in a few cases, typically when the change induced a shift in meaning distribution. The most common part of speech among loanwords is nouns, followed by adjectives and verbs, which correlates with the order in which speakers adopt loanwords from one language to another.

The participants in the focus group interviews reported borrowing most frequently from English, followed by Romanian, while other transmitting languages were rarely mentioned. Their claims are supported by the contact phenomena found in the databases. However, it is important to note that the metalinguistic data from the interviews are not relevant in this case, as the nature of loan elements was greatly influenced by the course of the conversation and association. Regarding the frequency of transmitting languages, we need to address why English loanwords dominate over Romanian. According to the accounts of the interviewees, despite not being an environmental language, English is highly exposed through internet usage, and some participants from scattered regions have limited knowledge of Romanian. Another contributing factor is that both the results of the interviews and the data from the questionnaire survey indicate that English has greater prestige in the eyes of young people and is considered a "prettier" language compared to Romanian.

Considering the motivations for borrowing, one of the most important factors is phonetic expressiveness within the context of slang usage among young people in Transylvania. However, borrowing lacking semantic categories also plays a significant role in the sense that borrowed elements often express different nuances or additional meanings compared to their Hungarian counterparts. This is why young people prefer to use them as they can more accurately express their thoughts and opinions. Furthermore, linguistic exposure is an important factor in the English and Romanian contact effects. As we have seen, these motivations are confirmed not only by the statements of the participants but also by the contact phenomena themselves.

During the research, it was possible to observe the regularities and characteristics of borrowing in slang. However, the study also presented several possibilities for further investigation. Firstly, certain details emerged that are worth examining in more detail, such as the phonetic phenomena observed in the slang usage of young people. In the vicinity of Cluj-Napoca, there is a dialectal phenomenon referred to as "Hungarian speech in Cluj-Napoca" by Hungarian speakers in Romania. Its main features include a shift in stress placement, where the first syllable is intensively emphasized, and neutralization, which refers to the shortening of long vowels. These phonetic phenomena are often accompanied by the frequent use of

Romanian loanwords, which the speakers view negatively. Among the participants of the focus group interviews, no speaker naturally exhibited this phenomenon in their language usage. However, according to the claims of one group of participants, they consciously use this linguistic style as a form of ironic expression and regularly joke about it within their circle of friends. Although they evaluate it negatively, they also find this phenomenon humorous, and when they imitate it, they reflect their attitude towards it. Therefore, in this particular context, the "Hungarian speech in Cluj-Napoca" becomes a slang phenomenon. However, the investigation of this requires a separate study, as it only arose as a topic in one of the interview groups.

Secondly, the data collection also yielded information that was not directly related to the research topic: elements of Transylvanian slang varieties that were not contact phenomena. In order to obtain a comprehensive picture of the slang used by young Hungarian speakers in Transylvania, it is necessary to examine these elements as well.

**Keywords:** slang, contact phenomena, Hungarian youth from Transylvania, attitude survey, linguistic norm, questionnaire, focus group interviews

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