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Hungarian Dialect Islands in Romania

PHD THESIS
SUMMARY

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2024

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KEY WORDS: typological dialect island, intra-type dialect island, dialectology, geolinguistics, dialectometry, linguistics, Hungarian dialects

SUMMARY

The issue of dialect enclaves has been an important topic in Hungarian dialect research for a long time. János Péntek (2005) published a general summary, a kind of list, based mainly on the map sheets of the Atlas of Hungarian Dialects in Romania (*Romániai Magyar Nyelvjárások Atlasza*). The main aim of the present thesis, entitled *Hungarian Dialect Islands in Romania*, is to subject the research points presented by the above-mentioned author to a thorough examination within an interdisciplinary interpretative framework, whose main cornerstones are geolinguistics, quantitative analysis of linguistic data, systematic linguistics, and the history of settlements and population.

First and foremost, it was necessary to place the research in a context of the history of science and research. In response to this need, the thesis outlines a periodization of the history of research which, while focusing directly on the history of the study of Hungarian dialect island, also enriches the history of Hungarian dialectology as a whole with important aspects; its specificity lies in the fact that it approaches the problem from a Transylvanian perspective, while placing it in an international context.

As the thesis shows, interest in geographically distinct language varieties was awakened in the age of humanism and the Reformation, when questions about the origins of different peoples began to arise. During this period, the Transylvanian Saxons also became important to German intellectuals, and different opinions about their origins emerged. The work of Johannes Honterus was influential in this area and one of the first significant results of dialect research can be attributed to him, as he established that the ancestral homeland of the Transylvanian Germans (Saxons) was the Rhine region and Saxony. Münster was the first to confirm this position with concrete linguistic data. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz broke new ground in scientific linguistic research at the beginning of the 18th century when he set a new direction in dialect research. Leibniz's attention also extended to the Transylvanian Saxons and he initiated a collection of living language in the area. Martin Felmer proved that the mother tongue of the Transylvanian Saxons was German and that their dialect was related to the German dialect in the Lower Germanic area.

In researching German dialects, German researchers also became interested in their own dialects and expanded into new areas using the direct method. Jacob Grimm's historical grammar ushered in a new era, and Johann Wolff introduced new aspects to the study of the phonology of Transylvanian Saxon dialects. Hugo Schuchardt doubted the existence of transitional dialects, while others, such as Paul Meyer, took a completely negative position. Georg Wenker was the first to incorporate cartography into dialect research, using maps to investigate the distribution of linguistic phenomena and creating the Atlas of the German Language.

In addition to linguistic geography, phonogram archives were created and sound recordings of dialects were made, the first attempts to collect and store living linguistic material. Geopolitical reasons also influenced the interest in linguistic geography, as the ideology of nationalism became stronger and the approach to dialects became geopolitically important. Research in the German and French linguistic areas played the biggest role in the development of Hungarian dialect research and provided methodological guidelines for later work.

The history of Eastern Hungarian dialect island research – and this actually applies to the history of Hungarian dialectological research up to around 1948 – can be divided into three major periods, and within these into smaller time periods delimited by significant events. In the first period, which covers about 300 years and which in my periodisation I have called "old" dialectology, we can witness how, from the moment individual scholars touch upon dialectological issues in their generally descriptive linguistic discussions, we reach the establishment of the first important professional forums, the institutionalization of linguistics takes place, and by the end of the period the first Hungarian dialect typologies based on linguistic and ethnographic observations are born. The year 1945 marks an important turning point, when the institutional-political structure was reorganised and the Cluj School was left on its own, more or less isolated from Hungarian developments, and for about seventy years it had to maintain a minority position, without any significant support and often struggling with obstacles, in order to keep its high professional position. The most important investment of resources during this period was devoted to mapping the Hungarian dialects in Romania, collecting a huge amount of living linguistic material, elaborating various linguistic atlases and analytical and interpretative research.

The 1990s brought a major change, marking the beginning of the third phase of my periodization, the era of modern dialectology. On the one hand, it is characterised by the fact

that there was a reopening of borders in the academic world in general, which brought Hungarian scholarship in Romania closer to that in Hungary and, more specifically, brought about the spread of computerised methods in dialectological research, which significantly changed the way we can approach linguistic material as researchers today. The research history chapter shows how the research presented in this thesis fits organically into the process of exploring Hungarian dialects.

The research hypotheses presented in this paper have been formulated at two levels. The first, and most important hypothesis is methodological: "Dialectometry, as a research method, can be properly used in dialect research. With this approach, Hungarian dialect islands in Romania can be mapped and described in a systematic way, thus completing the scientific picture of the subject". The methodological chapter focuses on dialectometry as a means of quantitative analysis of linguistic data. We have seen that this has crystallised along the lines of several research methods and attempts, using mathematical and statistical algorithms to eliminate possible researcher subjectivity and very difficult to understand isoglossic systems. The method is used and experimented with by researchers of geographically distinct language varieties all over the world (from America to Japan). Based on the study carried out, it can be said that the hypothesis can be considered validated and can indeed be used to map the relationships between local dialects in different research locations and thus identify dialect islands. However, the method alone cannot show in detail the phenomena along which different dialects are isolated in linguistic reality.

In my research, I applied the method to two major Hungarian dialect databases, the Atlas of Hungarian Dialects in Romania (*Romániai Magyar Nyelvjárások Atlasza*) and the Atlas of Csángó Dialects in Moldova (*Moldvai Csángó Nyelvjárások Atlasza*), first separately and then integrated. In this context, a second methodological hypothesis was formulated. It was important to investigate whether the integration of two dialect databases would lead to significant changes in the research results. Based on the studies conducted, we concluded that the use of integrated databases is not recommended for detecting dialect islands. If it is possible to examine the databases separately, it is worth doing so. The integrated analysis does not in itself change the expected results of the research, but it significantly diminishes the picture, sometimes failing to detect more important phenomena for the reason that integration always implies ignoring a substantial amount of data.

However, the above method made it possible to formulate research hypotheses at a second level. On the basis of dialectometric analyses of dialects in eleven Transylvanian Hungarian settlements and six Moldovan Hungarian settlements (research points) it became possible to formulate the idea that they are dialect islands. These are Araci (Covasna county), Cristur (Hunedoara county), Dămăcușeni (Maramureș county), Hălmeag (Brasov county), Băița (Cluj county), Jeledinți (Hunedoara county), Cireșoiaia (Bistrița-Năsăud county), Lopadea Nouă (Alba county), Săcădate (Sibiu county), Sărata (Bistrița-Năsăud county) and Tărlungeni (Brașov county) in Transylvania, and Călugăreni (Bacău county), Chetriș (Bacău county), Lespezi (Bacău county), Cădărești (Bacău county), Ploscuțeni (Bacău county) and Sascut (Bacău county) in Moldova. However, the dialectometry method cannot provide additional help in confirming or refuting these hypotheses and other methods must be used. We have used methods that are also based on mathematical-statistical principles to eliminate researcher subjectivity.

It is already scientifically proven that the condition of mutual intelligibility between the Hungarian dialects is always met, but sometimes the differences and peculiarities of the lexicology of the language can be an obstacle. At the same time, it is also obvious that typological studies (whether of language types, language family affiliations or contact phenomena) should be carried out at those levels of the language which are most difficult to modify, primarily at the phonetic-phonological level. To this end, we have consistently applied two methods involving the phonetic level to test the hypotheses: relative vowel frequency statistics per word unit and statistical analysis of the functional demand of vowel phonemes. It was also indicated that occasional investigations should be carried out at the morphological level. However, the conclusion of my research is that the phonetic-phonological level itself is perfectly adequate for the study of dialect linkages, so, in the end, no morphological analyses were carried out.

Throughout the study, I faced a terminological obstacle: traditionally, dialectology divides dialect islands into external dialect islands and internal dialectal islands, the former being later called language island. However, this conceptual framework has not allowed us to discuss these research points in a meaningful way; it is fundamentally simplistic when, although dialectometric measurements clearly show that they are islands, they cannot be considered language islands in the traditional interpretative framework because they are an integral part of the linguistic area, and they cannot be considered peripheral dialects because they are not

located at the edge of the linguistic area, nor are they an internal dialect islands in the classical sense, the latter being defined as the insertion of a dialect as an island into another dialect (dialectal region). In most of the research points examined in the thesis, it turned out that, although they belonged to the same dialect region, they nevertheless showed more similarities to more distant settlements than to their immediate neighbours.

It seems that a satisfactory solution could be the introduction of two concepts in the classification of dialect islands: Typological dialect island, which we have defined as a dialect islands (internal dialect island) according to the classical definition of dialect island, and intra-type dialect island, defined as a dialect which typologically shares the characteristics of the major dialectal region, but which is not organically integrated into its environment geographically and in terms of the continuum of dialectal phenomena. The research revealed that the dialects in each of the seventeen research points/settlements have an island character according to the above classifications.

On the basis of the research carried out, we can see that the methods used are all suitable for the purpose of the research and we can also see that the dialect islands addressed in this thesis are separated from the surrounding linguistic continuum (if we are not talking about language islands, of course) mainly by phenomena related to vowel pronunciation. The research has shown that the most common features that break the dialectal continuum are related the pronunciation characteristics of open and open-mid vowels, mostly illabial vowels (*a, á, e, é*) and the diphthongation phenomena associated with open-mid and mid-close vowels (*é, ó, ő*).

The research carried out and the present thesis contribute significantly to Hungarian dialectology on several levels. On the one hand, it provides a well-established and elaborated methodology for researchers interested in geographically distinct language varieties that can be applied to any other linguistic data set and context, and on the other hand, it provides a detailed analysis of dialectal phenomena that may lead to changes in the language varieties used by migrating groups of peoples, thus separating their dialect from the surrounding linguistic continuum, and this does not seem to depend on the period or time from which the linguistic data originate. The linguistic material collected in the early to mid-20th century represents a comprehensive picture of the linguistic state of the Hungarian dialects in Romania at that time. The study can thus serve as a contribution to the history of the language in a longer perspective.

However, like any scientific research, it has its limitations: on the one hand, as mentioned above, it does not deal with the current state of the language, but looks back over a period of about 70-80 years and therefore cannot be considered research on contemporary linguistic material. At the same time, it provides the basis for a study which, along the lines of a more recent survey of dialect data, could act as a follow-up study to explore what has happened to the dialect islands identified here over nearly a century and to what extent they show signs of convergence or divergence. In the case of the Hungarian communities in Romania, of course (especially in the case of settlements outside the counties of Mures, Harghita and Covasna), there is an ongoing process of linguistic assimilation, emigration and its consequences. It can be said that in a few decades there will be no Hungarian speakers in any of the settlements discussed here.

On the other hand, due to the limitations of the data repertoire, it was not possible to identify and describe all the Hungarian dialect islands in Romania, and some research points that had already been previously identified as dialect islands could not be included in the research. Thus, the present thesis cannot claim to be a monographic description of Hungarian dialect enclaves in Romania.

The limitations described above also point to possible further research on this topic: future tasks include exploring dialect islands in the Valley of Fekete-Körös (Crişul Negru), Banat and around Carei, as well as follow-up studies, creating new contemporary living language databases and conducting comparative research.

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