

Romanian-Hungarian connections in Coltău, a multiethnic area in Maramureş county

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Abstract: The current paper discusses the Romanian-Hungarian connections that left a mark on the Christian names in Coltău, a commune in Maramureş county (Hungarian *Koltó*). Being a multicultural and multiethnic area that belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Maramureş has always been a favourable space for Romanian-Hungarian onomastic contact.

The present study is part of a CNCSIS research project called “Multiethnic Connections in the Anthroponymy of Maramureş, a Central European Area”, which aims at researching forenames given to children born in Maramureş from 1987 until today. The approach is interdisciplinary, having anthropological, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic components.

Keywords: bilingualism, multiculturalism, multiethnicity, questionnaire, anthroponymic investigation.

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The approach is interdisciplinary, having anthropologic, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic components, and it implies the selection from the existing names of those that are used in the area investigated, in this case the commune Coltău (Hungarian *Koltó*) and its adherent village Cătălina (Hungarian *Katalin*).

In this paper I have focused on the connections that are established between the giving of names by adults to their children and the potential a mother tongue has, i.e. Hungarian and Romanian. The linguistic contact is very significant in regions like Maramureş, which is situated in close proximity to Hungary.

Historical Background

Coltău (*Koltó*) is a commune in Maramureş County, Romania. It consists of two villages: Coltău and Cătălina. Formerly independent, the villages were part of the Săcălăşeni commune from 1968 to 2004, when they were split off to form separate localities.

At the Census of 1992, the commune had 1.583 inhabitants, of which 1.125 were Hungarians, 445 Gypsies and 13 Romanians. In percentages this means 71% Hungarians, 28.1% Gypsies and 0.8% Romanians. At the Census of 2004, there were 2.500 inhabitants from which 40% Gypsies, 1% Romanians and the rest of the people were Hungarians.¹

¹ Information taken from the statistical data provided by The National Census of 1992 and 2004.

Maramureş County, to which Coltău belongs, is situated in an area that neighbours Hungary, and in the past it belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire. One does not mistake to consider it a typical multicultural and multi-ethnic area, where different ethnic groups, with their own religions and customs can live together in harmony. Consequently, after living together for many centuries and sharing the same geographical area, Romanians and Hungarians have established mixed families. This fact is very well reflected in the anthroponymy of this region.

Multi-ethnicity, bilingualism and their imprint on anthroponymy

In the commune Coltău there are three ethnic groups that live together: Hungarians (the majority), Romanians and Roma (Gypsies). Only two languages are used, namely Hungarian and Romanian. In this bilingual society, people have the liberty to mix these two languages in different contexts, according to which their status varies.

Matras uses the term “dominant” language to refer to

a kind of wholesale attribute for languages that constitutes the default choice in a majority of interaction domains, especially in interaction in public and institutional domains” (2009:46)

He also refers to this “dominant language” as a “prestige” language which is often “the domestic language of the numerical majority within the state” (Matras 2009: 46). The “prestige” language in Koltó and Katalin is Hungarian, because it is spoken by the most of the people in the pilot area. It is spoken in institutions, including the city hall, as well as in domestic interactions.

Bilingual speakers who acquire two languages from birth may have certain preferences in using one language or another in different contexts of communication. This is called “simultaneous acquisition, were exposure to two languages begins immediately at birth” (Matras 2009: 61).

Many people may also acquire knowledge of a second language, as a result of intermarriage, or by frequent travel and culture exchange with foreigners, as well as due to the easy access to mass media communication. In Koltó there is constant contact between Hungarians and Romanians, which clearly leaves an imprint on the anthroponymy in this pilot area, as it proves conspicuously heterogeneous. Therefore, there is no unity in the onomastics of any of the pilot villages Koltó or Katalin.

The following first names are encountered in the families of Hungarians, but also in mixed ones: *Arpad, Cristian, Etelca, Judith, Mihaly, Tamas, Zoltan* etc. However, the most common are: *Attila, Csaba, Enikő, Gábor, Istvan, Zsolt*. All these first names coexist with traditional Romanian first names, such as: *Ana, Andrei, Aurica, Ioana, Maria, Nicolae, Ştefan*.

Simple first names have the tendency to be replaced by double or even triple Christian names: *Kinga – Katalin – Maria*. We have identified double Hungarian first names, such as *Árpád – Balázs, Csaba – Levente, Eva – Monika, Hajnal – Tünde, Ireny – Lenke, Jenő – Ede, Katalin – Kinga, Krisztina – Imola, Ludovic – Bandy, Maria – Jutka, Melánia – Noémi, Melinda – Krisztina, Monika – Karolina, Norbert – Szabolcs, Norbert – Micloş, Piroşka – Emeşe, Réka – Marghit* etc., and many mixed Romanian-Hungarians ones, such as: *Árpad – Nicolae, Attila – Alexandru, Attila – Ionel, Csaba – Valentin, Elizabeta – Gyöngyi, Etelca – Livia, Istvan – Gabriel*.

As one can notice, there is a wide variety of names, reflecting the diversity of people giving typically Romanian or Hungarian names, on the one hand, or foreign names, on the other hand, of which we mention: *Friedrich, John, Gerhart, Reimond, Richard, Vilhelm*. Such names exhibit a correct or mistaken spelling or hypocoristic variants:

The hypocoristic names that are the result of a format modification of an anthroponym, are used as secondary onomastic forms, they were produced via phonetic means (aphaeresis, apocope, syncope) and lexical methods in the Romanian sphere of influence (Felecan 2009: 106)

We identified the following hypocoristic first names: *Bobi* (from *Robert*), *Bözsi* (from *Érzsébet*), *Gabi* (from *Gabriel*), *Gyöngyi* (from *Gyöngyvér*), *Dia* (from *Diana*), *Romi* (from *Romulus*), *Rudi* (from *Rudolf*), *Tomi* (from *Támas* or *Toma*). These forms are rather intimate, a feature that is characteristic of the rustic denominative system. Besides these first names, there are also hagiographic ones, both in Romanian and Hungarian: *Ana, Istvan, Maria, Nicolae, Peter, Ștefan, Vasile* etc.

Another interesting feature of the Romanian-Hungarian contact in Coltău is marked by the spelling of the Hungarian first names. Several variants of spelling have been identified for the same name; some represent the correct usage of the Hungarian alphabet, while others are variants with linguistic mistakes. This phenomenon has several explanations. One of them could be that the people living in the pilot areas do not know very well either of the two languages that are spoken there, namely Romanian and Hungarian. Another explanation could be that even though they belong to the Hungarian ethnic group, living outside the borders of Hungary, they have lost the contact with the literary standards of the Hungarian language. This phenomenon is not unusual with people living in rural areas.

Living together with Romanians and sharing the same region, the Hungarians have taken several words from Romanian, as well as the usage of certain letters such as “ș” or “ț” that do not exist in the Hungarian alphabet. Therefore, in some cases the names are spelled the way they are pronounced:

- using the Romanian alphabet: *Akoș* (instead of *Ákos*), *Etelca* (instead of *Etelka*), *Gheza* (instead of *Géza*), *Ferenț* (instead of *Ferencz*), *Micloș* (instead of *Miklos*), *Tamaș* (instead of *Tamás*);

- with the wrong usage of “i” instead of “j” at the beginning of the name: *Ianos* (instead of *János*), *Iutka* (instead of *Jutka*);

- with the wrong usage of the accent or its absence: *Janos, Lorand/Lórand/Lóránd, Edita/Édita, Peter/Péter*.

The Romanians and Hungarians that live in Coltău and Katalin have established mixed families, and this also alienated the Hungarians from the linguistic “purity” that is typical for a single ethnic group.

The pilot area can be considered a typical multicultural area where several ethnic groups can live together in peace.

The anthroponymic questionnaire

In order to understand the relationship between forenames and the particular features of the individual human subjects who chose them, 79 people answered the questions of an anthroponymic questionnaire. It is not only first names that are being analyzed here, but

also the sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and ethno-linguistic profile of the families. The purpose of this anthroponymic investigation is to show the motivation that determined adults to choose certain “traditional” Hungarian and Romanian Christian names for their children.

The anthroponymic questionnaire is

a derivative variant of a sociolinguistic questionnaire, with an inventory of specific questions, posed in a methodological frame typical of a the study of anthroponymic variety. The aim is to observe and to explain the given anthroponymic reality, that is, to decode the psychological mechanism of choosing forenames, by means of direct investigations, and not by virtual, imagined suppositions (Felecan 2010:129).

The model of the questionnaire used during the investigation referred is:

Questionnaire of Socio- and Psycholinguistic Investigation

No..... from

CNCSIS Research Project no 251/2008

Project manager conf.univ.dr. (assoc. professor) Oliviu Felecan

North University of Baia Mare, Faculty of Letters

(Felecan 2010:132)

The questionnaire includes closed questions, which only allow a choice from two answers already established (Yes/No questions), and open questions (the majority). This type of survey is both administrative, dealing with facts and good for expressing opinions. From the point of view of its content the questionnaire aims at the quality of the information gathered. The questionnaire contains 28 questions. The first ten questions are for identification purpose. They aim at identifying the subject investigated and his/her family, as well as some aspects of his/her life: residence, occupation, schooling, ethnicity, religion. The other questions refer to more subjective data, such as the attitude and motivation involved in the choice of a Christian name. This second part of the questionnaire offers the subject the freedom to give personal answers.

In what the method of application is concerned, we opted for the variant which demanded that the investigator apply the questionnaire, because in the case of self-administered questionnaires, the subjects tend to be reluctant in answering the questions, especially open ones.

The processing of the data obtained followed after interviewing a sample of 79 subjects. From the point of view of ethnicity, of 79 subjects, 51 declared themselves Hungarians, 12 – Gypsies² and 16 – Romanians. These are the three ethnic groups that are present in the pilot area. In most cases, the ethnic group that the subject belongs to leaves a mark on the choice of first names given to children.

The question “What language do you use at home?” deals with the problems of bilingualism or linguistic interferences. 64 subjects admitted they use Hungarian and only 15 – Romanian. Many times in mixed families the domestic language may influence the choice of forenames chosen for children.

The most important question, the “key-question” of this anthroponymic questionnaire is “What is/are your child’s/children’s name/names?” Although almost all the subjects are

² I used the term “Gypsy” according to *The Encyclopedia Britannica*.

Hungarian, and more than half of them speak Hungarian at home, in 75 instances (of 162) they chose forenames of Hungarian origin, 9 mixed ones (one first name of Hungarian origin and the other of Romanian origin), 70 Romanian names and 8 names of foreign origin. We were able to come across situations when a child has a Hungarian surname and a Romanian first name and vice-versa: *Balázs Nicolae, Bencze Alexandru, Bencze Andrei, Bențe Bela-Mihai, Cendeș Ștefan-Ioan, Cendeș Viorica, Daroczi Daniel-Rudolf, Dumitraș Attila-Ionel, Kadar Ioan, Koncsar Dezideriu, Kovacs Iolanda-Crenguța, Körözsi Alexandru-Iuliu*.

Most of the time the choice of names is an agreement between the two parents. The parents who belong to the Hungarian ethnic group and baptized their children with Romanian names tried to make them fit in a linguistic community which geographically belongs to Romania, considering that a Hungarian name may, or may not bring prejudice in the future.

Double mixed names were given in multicultural families where the parents tried to make the child/children integrate more easily in two ethnic communities. There are situations when both forenames are used depending on the person addressing the child.

Some of the children's names were chosen by relatives (grandparents or godparents). Few of the subjects in the pilot area travelled abroad, and, subsequently, only 9 foreign names were encountered, of which we mention *Friedrich, Gerhart, Marie, Reimond, Richard, Rudolf, Wilhelm*. Therefore, "traditional" names prevail over the foreign ones. There is no unity in the field of onomastics in the pilot area and this fact may be the result of the multiculturalism that is typical of this particular area.

Conclusion

The fact that several nationalities share the same geographical area for many centuries it is reflected in the anthroponymy of both families that are "pure" from an ethnic point of view and in mixed families as well. The Romanian-Hungarian connection gains specific features based on the language spoken, and on the fact that Hungarian is taught in schools at all levels.

Taking into consideration Romania's integration into the European Union, crossing borders freely, the freedom to travel and to work abroad, we notice that all these represent factors that contribute to the connection between different ethnic groups, and their shared usage of the same anthroponyms.

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