

## Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, MTA)

**The internet language use of the communities of practice of Transcarpathian Hungarians (contact phenomena, identity factors, language change/language maintenance, educational issues)**

### Research plan

**Affiliation of the host PI researcher, leader of the research group:** Linguistics Institute, Hungarian Academy of Science, Research Center for Multilingualism, Dr. habil Csilla Bartha, Research Professor, Head of RCM

**Name of the Postdoctoral researcher:** Dr. Anita Márku The joint research plan in Hungary (in max. 10 thousand characters)

#### a. Purpose of proposed research

Systematically researching internet language use is a relatively new trend in linguistics. As the electronic communication first appeared in English speaking territories, thus the first literature dealing with it also connected to the English language. (Naomi Baron 1984, Denise E. Murray, Herring 2001, Rukehl-Schlobinski-Sierer 1998, David Crystal 2001/2004, Herring 2007, 2011, Androutsopoulos 2006, Siebenhaar 2008, Georgakopoulou 2011 ect.). It became one of the emerging fields of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics and communication studies that raised many questions focusing on computer-mediated conversation, digital media from conversational analytic, discourse and sociolinguistic perspectives. Researchers' attention increasingly turned to different (contact, pragmatic, social etc.) aspects of internet-based linguistic practices of multilingual communities (Callahan 2004, Paolillo 2011, Goldberg 2009, Vincze & Harwood 2011, 2012). Central concepts of multi-disciplinary approaches examining the relationship between migration, language, identity in the era of globalisation in hiperdiverse environments are mobility, multiplicity, superdiversity (Vertotec 2007, Blommaert and Rampton 2011).

Apart from a few sporadic work systematic analysis of internet language within bilingual (especially Slavonic-Hungarian) communities is still a disregarded research area in the Carpathian Basin. Up to now, bilingualism and contact phenomena that represent Transcarpathian Hungarians have mainly been examined via spoken and written discourse samples. In contrast, empirical base of the present research will be an electronic corpus of different computer mediated language genres and social activities. Internet language (see also computer-mediated communication – CMC, internet-based communication, digital media) is understood here as different types and genres of communicative activity supported by a heterogeneous collection of technologies.

In addition, the proposed project is innovative in terms of its theoretical framework and methods: Transcarpathian Hungarian community (a bilingual speech community) will be approached from a bottom-up, dynamic perspective of communities of practice, where besides the phenomena of language use, the questions of identity construction, language change and preservation, and educational issues could also be put into focus.

Communities of practice are voluntarily organized groups. People of similar interests and of similar experiences tend to join together and learn from each other – either by talking about a given topic, or by performing some activity together, ensuring the mutually constitutive nature of individual, group, activity, and meaning: „The value of the notion *communities of practice* (Lave and Wenger 1991) to Sociolinguistics and Linguistic Anthropology lies in the fact that it identifies a social grouping not in virtue of shared abstract characteristics (e.g. class, gender) or simple co-presence (e.g. neighbourhood, workplace), but in virtue of shared practice. In the course of regular joint activity, a community of practice develops ways of doing things, views, values, power relations, ways of talking. And the participants engage with these practices in virtue of their place in the community of practice, and of the place of the community of practice in the larger social order. The community of practice is thus a rich locus for the study of situated language use, of language change, and of the very process of conventionalization that underlies both” (Eckert 2006).”

Transcarpathian Hungarians use two/three languages during their everyday interactions (Hungarian which is in minority status, Ukrainian that is the state language and Russian, the non-official state language of the former Soviet Union, de jure another minority language). A Transcarpathian Hungarian person often gets into a situation where he/she has to choose two or more languages for communication and sometimes has to switch between languages (Márku 2011, Csernicskó ed. 2010). The (vernacular) language can be defined as the „po zakarpatski” contact variety, called so by the community of locals themselves, identified as the Transcarpathian dialect of Hungarian. Contact phenomena as lexical borrowings, interference in translation and codeswitching are integral parts of this language variant (see Bartha 2005), however, in everyday interactions of individual speakers they appear with different frequency (Márku 2011:12; 153).

To be able to describe the regularities and sociolinguistic patterns of this contact variant we needed plenty of language data gained watchfully, applying different methods. In the last decade numerous researches have been done

in this respect, profound analysis were made summarised in monographs, handbooks (Csernicskó ed. 2003, 2010, Márku 2008, etc.) and in a PhD Theses „*Po zúkárpátszki*” *The Socio- and Psycholinguistic aspects of Bilingualism, effects of Bilingualism and bilingual communicational strategies (language choice, codeswitching) in the Hungarian community of Transcarpathia* (Márku 2011). However, to date, studies on „technospeak”, new internet-based activities, the impact of the internet on the native language, bi-/multilingual competence and repertoire, language ideologies, ethnicity, social identities, and language vitality were completely missing.

The spread of internet-based communication and other forms of technology-mediated linguistic practices has had a significant impact not only on formerly preferred modes of interaction within the Transcarpathian Hungarian community but also on the concepts of private and public communication. „Through the internet one can engage in a range of communicative practices which provide privacy for the interlocutors, but which take place in public virtual spaces reaching a large number of people. Such communicative environments may constitute ‘safe’ places for young bilinguals in which to experiment with, use, or enhance their bilingual practices.” (Pauwels 2012)

#### **b. Proposed research plan with timetable**

The aim of the proposed research is to obtain a deep insight into the nature and functions of internet-based language activities of Hungarians in Transcarpathia. Besides focusing on the peculiarities of language use and the presence of contact phenomena in the electronic discourse of the communities of practice of Transcarpathian Hungarians, project is aimed at exploring ‘digital’ language and communicative practices and the actual as well as potential impact these have on Hungarian language maintenance, increase of language vitality, identity strengthening and stabilising and balancing bilingualism. As Harwood and Vincze argued, the „new spaces of media require for language planners to understand media as an integral part of all social activities rather than just one domain or a separate instance, measurable on its own right. Narrowing down media influence on linguistic vitality to output hours or audience numbers would not provide the whole picture of the linguistic situation in the media. The new relationship with media requires a new way to measure linguistic vitality, conscious that it permeates all spheres of social interaction. Increased space for multilingualism and support for linguistic variety across the media has to be part of any type of public broadcasting remit” (Harwood & Vincze 2011).

In this way, the present research project aims to examine bilingual linguistic practices of Transcarpathian Hungarians from a new perspective.

During the research process, the following concepts, theoretical questions will hopefully be clarified,thoroughly discussed and analysed:

- How communities of practice form themselves (linguistically) within the internet media, the community websites.
- How the internet may affect linguistic change in a well-defined community: the language use of speakers by age, education level, background of language socialisation, ethnicity, as well as the structure of language per se.
- What phenomena (abbreviations, lexical borrowings, interference) and communicative strategies, pragmatic characteristics (code switching, conversational-organizational -, discourse strategies), when, by whom and why are present or missing in different modes (internet, written, oral) of communication.
- What role the internet, digital media may have in language preservation, strengthening identity.
- How internet-based new technologies and non-traditional learning environments can support mother tongue education (in a minority context)
- How digital media influence ideologies and attitudes to vernacular language variable.

As internet linguistics and language use of mobile communication is a quite novel, dynamically developing research direction, its research methods and corpus building procedures, balance between quantitative and qualitative ways of analysis are far from being elaborated (Siebenhaar 2008, Márku 2011: 60). Social network theory provides an important point of departure in approaching existing or newly formed communities of practice. (Milroy–Milroy 1985; Barabási 2011, see also Szabó 2012a) Based on the tools of network analysis, strong and weak connections between members of the group can be revealed. Findings of group dynamics as well as sociolinguistic studies show that changes start from individuals connecting to the group loosely, those language users (innovators) who are in interaction with other groups too. Since superficial connections can have language consequences, identification of these network ties is of particular relevance.

*Fieldwork techniques to be applied:* continuous participant observation; permanent on-line and off-line data collection, interviews, on-line and tape-recorded questionnaires

*Methods of analysis:* quantitative and qualitative sociolinguistic, discourse analysis, CDA, contact linguistic. Special attention will be paid to internet discourse of Transcarpathian speakers (narrative, dialogic and contact linguistic data can come from chat-room conversations, public message boards of community forums, etc.) Expectedly, the current

research will also add to the clarification of methodological principles and ethical concerns (Márku 2012).

Research is planned for a period of 24 months:

Discussing the details of the research problem and organization questions with the consultant, leader of the research group:	1 <sup>st</sup> month
Collecting relevant literature:	2 <sup>nd</sup> - 3 <sup>rd</sup> month
Library work, literature review:	4 <sup>th</sup> -5 <sup>th</sup> month
Preparations for the field-work:	6 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup> month
The selection of the (statistical) methods:	7 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup> month
Fieldwork, continuous participant observation and data collection:	8 <sup>th</sup> -16 <sup>th</sup> month
Entering and analysis of the data:	10 <sup>th</sup> -18 <sup>th</sup> month
Discussing the results	16 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> month
Writing the study, presentation of the research results at conferences	17 <sup>th</sup> -24 <sup>th</sup> month

### c. Expected results and impacts

The proposed research represents a new direction within the existing fields of linguistics and even in sociolinguistics. In addition, it needs locally designed application of the methods and tools of linguistics, communication theory, computer science, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistic, discourse analysis and network study. The project is attempting to describe the effect of the internet on the language use of communities of practice of Transcarpathian Hungarians, at the same time focusing on broader social processes, identity, linguistic and social change, language maintenance, and educational issues. Results will provide strong empirical evidence for future scientific research, and, importantly enough, for the practical applicability: in education (eg. new ways of learning, effective development of reading and writing competences in Hungarian and the other languages in contact, inclusive, additive ways of identity strengthening, community building, as well as in strengthening language vitality and linguistic diversity at the same time in the Transcarpathian Hungarian community).

Combination of micro- and macro-level analyses of internet-based communication within a multidisciplinary theoretical and methodological framework as an innovative approach will inevitably lead to a holistic, dynamic and applicable interpretation of “linguaging” in cyberspace. Therefore, results may contribute to the existing knowledge in the fields of linguistics, minority studies, sociology, education research, as well as language policy.

The current research will be built into the research and policy agenda of the Mercator Network of Language Diversity Centres where Research Centres for Multilingualism of the host institution is the only partner from the Esat-Central European region. Based on its Annual report of 2010<sup>1</sup> the following goals can be formulated::

#### Research recommendations

- Linguistic preference studies in a variety of languages and language situations may provide extra information about how this decision-making process takes place.
- Use of internet peer-to-peer and social media still requires lengthier and more elaborated studies, which allow for models to be developed and linguistic situations to be evaluated and compared.
- Innovative ways of measuring linguistic impact of media output are deeply needed to understand in which ways these new tools can provide spaces for language maintenance and development.
- The corpus built via systematic occasions of data collection might be also useful for linguistic analyses with different foci. Besides, it can also be incorporated into the Termini Transborder Database, especially the lexical borrowing section of the corpus. In this way, might also contribute to strengthening the Hungarian-Hungarian relations, and to “deconstructing” borders as far as language is concerned.

#### Policy recommendations

- The new spaces of media require for language planners to understand media as an integral part of all social activities rather than just one domain or a separate instance, measurable on its own right.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.ciemen.org/mercator/pdf/Mercator%20Network\\_Annual%20Report%202010.pdf](http://www.ciemen.org/mercator/pdf/Mercator%20Network_Annual%20Report%202010.pdf)

- The results of the research might well be used in prospective steps taken in the process of educational planning. Thus, understanding the language use, way of thinking and visual conceptualization of children learning to be legible on the keyboard, and of those youngsters that socialize on the internet via community forums might help to work out more appropriate mother tongue education reforms (see Gonda 2011).
- The new relationship with media requires a new way to measure linguistic vitality, conscious that it permeates all spheres of social interaction.
- Increased space for multilingualism and support for linguistic variety across the media has to be part of any type of public broadcasting remit.
- The results of the present research might help in understanding better everyday interactions, as the internet affects our life, community forums affect our relations, in a similar vein, electronic discourse, i.e. internet communication affects our everyday language use and our spoken language, too.

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