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FACEBOOKLAND: THE BIZARRO-LINGUISTIC WORLD

FACEBOOKLAND: O MUNDO BIZARRO-LINGUÍSTICO

Monica Bors*

ORCID 0000-0001-7412-4063

Anca Ignat*

ORCID 0000-0003-0786-9967

*Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu
Sibiu, România

Abstract

This article investigates the dynamics of contemporary Romanian, focusing on various linguistic structures typically used on social network sites, through which the specific content and interaction strategies are being deployed in virtual communities. The article is part of a larger project devoted to the study of linguistic impoverishment (affecting both the vocabulary and the grammatical structure of the language), social networks being only one of the areas where these “uglified” linguistic structures come from: the mass-media (both print and broadcast), advertising (outdoor, indoor, television commercials), Internet forums, corporate jargon, etc. The structures under scrutiny are mostly loan translations (*i.e.* calques) from English, false friends, hybrid constructions and, generally, lexical and grammatical oddities (sometimes even in the source language), which, nevertheless, due to frequent use, have entered the active vocabulary of a large category of speakers and are therefore becoming pervasive in everyday conversation. The proliferation of these ‘mongrel’ structures in common parlance is also the result of their migration, on the principle of communicating vessels, to other areas of interpersonal and public communication, that of advertising in particular. Moreover, their oddity and inappropriateness are now beginning to pass unnoticed, as more and more speakers are treating them as legitimate linguistic forms, which often end up being recorded in dictionaries. Our approach combines theoretical insights with practical solutions and the pragma-linguistic perspective with the translator’s corrective input.

Keywords: linguistic impoverishment, social networks, linguistic structures, translation, bastardization, circulation, dictionaries.

Résumé

L'article étudie la dynamique du roumain contemporain à partir de plusieurs structures linguistiques typiquement utilisées sur les sites de réseaux sociaux, où les communautés virtuelles développent un contenu spécifique et des stratégies d'interaction. Ce travail fait partie d'un projet plus vaste sur l'appauvrissement de la langue qui affecte à la fois le lexique et la structure grammaticale, avec les réseaux sociaux comme l'un des domaines d'action de ces structures linguistiques "enlaidies": la presse écrite et parlée, les chaînes de télévision, la publicité (média, extérieur ou intérieur), les forums en ligne, le domaine du langage d'entreprise. Les structures examinées sont principalement des traductions d'emprunts (c.-à-d. des calques) en anglais, de faux amis, des constructions hybrides et, en général, des bizarreries lexicales et grammaticales (parfois même dans la langue source), qui, en raison de leur utilisation fréquente, sont entrées dans le vocabulaire actif d'une grande catégorie de locuteurs et donc devenues omniprésentes dans les conversations quotidiennes. La prolifération de ces structures hybrides en langage commun est aussi le résultat de leur migration, sur le principe des vases communicants, vers d'autres domaines de communication interpersonnelle et publique, dont celle de la publicité en particulier. En outre, leur singularité et leur inadéquation commencent à passer inaperçues, car de plus en plus de locuteurs les traitent comme des formes linguistiques légitimes, qui finissent souvent par être enregistrées dans des dictionnaires. Notre approche allie des idées théoriques à des solutions pratiques et la perspective pragmatique-linguistique à l'apport correctif du traducteur.

Mots-clés: appauvrissement de la langue, réseaux sociaux, structures linguistiques, traduction, circulation, bâtarde, dictionnaires.

Resumo

O presente artigo investiga a dinâmica do romeno contemporâneo centrado-se em várias estruturas linguísticas utilizadas em sites de social media, nos quais conteúdos específicos e estratégias de interação particulares se fazem presentes. O artigo é parte de um projeto mais amplo dedicado ao estudo do empobrecimento linguístico (que afeta tanto o vocabulário quanto a estrutura gramatical da língua), e que tem nas mídias sociais apenas uma das áreas que promovem estruturas linguísticas "enfeidadas"; dentre outras valeria mencionar a comunicação de massa (tanto impressa quanto radiofônica), propaganda (externa e interna, comerciais televisivos), os fóruns de internet, o jargão corporativo etc. A estruturas sob escrutínio são em sua maioria traduções emprestadas (*i.e.* calques) do inglês, falsos cognatos, construções híbridas e, geralmente, esquisitices lexicais e gramaticais (por vezes mesmo na língua de origem), que, no entanto, devido ao uso frequente, entraram no vocabulário ativo de uma vasta gama de falantes, tornando-se recorrentes na conversação cotidiana. A proliferação de tais estruturas híbridas na fala comum é também resultado de sua migração, sob o princípio dos vasos comunicantes, a outras áreas de comunicação interpessoal e pública, em particular a da propaganda. Em um passo além, suas esquisitices e falta de propriedade estão começando a passar despercebidas, à medida que um número cada vez maior de falantes as tratam como formas linguísticas legítimas, o que culmina com sua inclusão em dicionários. Nossa abordagem combina ideias teóricas com soluções práticas e uma perspectiva pragma-linguística com um input corretor da tradução.

Palavras-chave: empobrecimento linguístico, redes sociais, estruturas linguísticas, tradução, bastardização, circulação, dicionários.

You think, I dare say, that our chief job is inventing new words. But not a bit of it! We're destroying words – scores of them, hundreds of them, every day. We're cutting the language down to the bone. [...] Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it.

George Orwell, 1984

Our paper sets out to investigate various linguistic structures in Romanian typically used on social network sites (SNSs), within the larger context of the relations between various language registers and common, everyday speech. While we cannot deny incontrovertible facts pertaining to language dynamics and permanent linguistic change, to what has already become a commonplace – *i.e.* the truism that language must reflect social, economic, political changes – it is our contention that the insidious way in which these forms are making their way into common parlance, affecting the grammatical structure of our language excludes such “acquisitions” from the category of vocabulary enrichment strategies, placing them at the opposite end of the spectrum, where they can safely be assimilated to a process of linguistic impoverishment. In previous articles¹ we have discussed this phenomenon with reference to other channels through which these words and structures are insinuating themselves into common language: via the mass-media (both print and broadcast media, television being their most direct route to the speakers’ consciousness), via advertising (both outdoor and indoor, as well as television commercials), via Internet forums, via corporate jargon, etc.

These channels, by virtue of their popular appeal, open the way for the legitimation of numerous incorrect linguistic forms, trends or tendencies, some of which remain within the safe boundaries of isolated linguistic facts, while others gain prominence due to frequent use. It seemed propitious to us to preface our discussion with a brief comment on what is no longer

¹ Borș, Monica. “Unități și structuri lexicale în dinamica limbii române contemporane” in *Annales Universitatis Apulensis. Series Philologica*, 11/2010, tom 1, p. 207-218; “Cuvinte pestrice” in *Transilvania*, 7-8/2010; p. 83-86; “Îmi plac desenele animate” in *Transilvania*, 8/2013, p. 60-64; “Din limba română de azi: despre un lexic și o structură gramaticală...animate” in the proceedings volume of the International Conference *Integrarea europeană-între tradiție și modernitate, IETM 2013*, Târgu Mureș, p. 343-350; “Nume proprii și creativitate lexicală” in *Transilvania*, 9/2014; p. 75-79; “Greșeli, tendințe și influențe în limba română de azi” in the proceedings volume of the International Conference *Literature, Discourse And Multicultural Dialogue, LDMD 5*, Târgu Mureș, 2017; “Configurări lexicale și gramaticale, trenduri și un nou limbaj” in *Transilvania*, 11/2018, p. 142-147.

just an intangible, abstract notion, namely the sovereignty of the principle of frequency in language. Recent campaigns against the “uglification,” the “simplification,” the “traumatization”² of language – terms which aptly describe the phenomenon of linguistic impoverishment – are clear signs that we are now at the critical juncture where the concept has become more and more relative and, therefore, debunking ingrained beliefs about the power of habit, we start questioning current linguistic practices which seem to proliferate in the name of the above-mentioned sovereignty. In Romanian linguistics, the earliest term (dating from more than a century ago) for the impoverishment of language was “*scăpătarea cuvintelor*”³ (i.e. “the ruination of words”), first used by the Romanian philologist Lazăr Șăineanu, who, in 1887 was deploring the fact that “indigenous words are embellished so that they can brazenly insinuate themselves into the respectable world of writing; this embellishment, however, is merely superficial, because there is usually an inherent pessimistic overtone lingering underneath, which betrays their ignoble origins” (ȘĂINEANU, 1999, p. 341).

At a time when the English language is becoming more and more influential, the main source of language errors seems to be rough, hasty translation, as well as, increasingly in the past decade, automatic (or machine) translation. The examples we analyze in the following are lexical units that have taken on aberrant inflectional forms, the use of word forms that do not exist in Romanian, attesting to a general penchant for neologisms, trends pertaining to the misuse of a word’s figurative meanings, neological phrases, hybrid constructions, etc. Changes in meaning are usually accompanied by changes in the grammatical structure or function of a word: conversion and the adoption of the morphological characteristics of a different part of speech, semantic mutations concurrent with changes in the morphemic structure of words. A new language is taking shape, running parallel to common, everyday language as we know it, and chances are they will soon contend for supremacy. The story of a fellow academic who, trying to join a discussion group on an Internet forum, was almost instantly excluded because of his impeccable, unabbreviated spelling is a relevant example of how each community has its own linguistic laws and attests to the fact that in the world of computer-mediated communication, speed overrides grammar and

2 “One doesn’t have to be a linguist to realize that the Romanian language has turned ugly or, rather, is being uglified, simplified, traumatized by speakers lacking in both education and manners.” (Eugen Simion, Preface to the *Orthographic, Orthoepic and Morphological Dictionary of Romanian*. Bucharest: Editura Univers, 2007, p. x)

3 The term was introduced (with this particular meaning) by Lazăr Șăineanu, in his book, *Încercare asupra semasiologiei limbii române*, poorly received at the time of its publication, ten years before Michel Breal’s *Essai de Semantique* (1897).

spelling, mastery of Internet shorthand being a prerequisite for membership in virtual communities.

In the English-speaking world, where all these words and phrases come from, experts' reactions to the pervasive influence of this relatively new medium of communication, with its own terminology and set of rules, range from fairly enthusiastic – David Crystal, for example, speaks of a “linguistic revolution” (*Language and the Internet*, 12) – to utterly desperate, some of them expressing deep concern about the “deterioration” and “contamination” of spoken, as well as written English, and even imagining apocalyptic scenarios in which all languages will eventually disappear under the ubiquitous tyranny (or the tyrannical ubiquity) of “Netspeak,” “Cyberspeak,” “Webspeak” or “Chatspeak”. In her study *Always On: Language in an Online and Mobile World* (2008), Naomi S. Baron takes a more comprehensive approach to the phenomenon, showing that language degradation (or what she calls “linguistic entropy”) has more to do with a certain kind of attitude – which is growing more and more pervasive among the younger generations – which she suggestively calls “linguistic whateverism.” This would translate as carelessness or indifference about rules of grammar, pronunciation, punctuation, spelling – succinctly put, indifference about correctness in language – and its sources are older and more deeply ingrained than the relatively recent social media:

A convergence of forces is engendering a new attitude toward both speech and writing. We might dub this attitude “linguistic whateverism.” Its primary manifestation is a marked indifference to the need for consistency in linguistic usage. At issue is not whether to say *who* or *whom*, or whether *none* as the subject of a sentence takes a singular or plural verb, but whether it really matters which form you use. This challenge to the fundamental principle of language as rule-governed behavior is less a display of linguistic defiance than a natural reflection of changing educational policies, shifts in social agendas, a move in academia toward philosophical relativism, and a commitment to life on the clock. (BARON, 2008, p. 169)

Thus, a general tendency towards informality – in behaviour, dress, forms of address, social interaction and, most importantly, in education (with “increasingly informal, student-centered, and non-normative” methods), – “the shifting social agenda,” with its celebration of differences, its advocacy of multiculturalism, diversity, and of tolerant, non-judgmental attitudes, the radical relativism of contemporary academic discourse, and – last, but not least – the haste with which modern “life on the clock” is forcing us to perform most of our daily activities, including writing, are the “culprits” that, according to Baron, have led to the current indifference to linguistic norms. (BARON, 2008, p. 170)

Nevertheless, quite apart from all these factors, whose impact on the way we use language is undeniable, the World Wide Web, computer-mediated communication and social media have been fostering a brand new “type of language displaying features that are unique to the Internet [...], arising out of its character as a medium which is electronic, global, and interactive” (CRYSTAL, 2001, p. 20). Quick to posit its existence – variously describing it as “an emerging language centaur, part speech, part writing” (BARON, 2008) or as “a genuine third medium combining spoken, written, and electronic properties” (CRYSTAL, 2001) – linguists have not failed to perceive that “other varieties of language are being affected by it,” that “salient features of Netspeak [...] have already begun to be used outside the situation of computer- mediated communication”.

According to David Crystal, “its influence is mainly on vocabulary” (CRYSTAL, 2001, p. 21) – with an ever-growing number of words and phrases seeping into everyday speech and writing - but there are clearly many other ways in which “Netspeak”/“Chatspeak” is shaping language (punctuation, spelling, grammar, graphology). While within the source language, these “intrusions” may creatively and playfully add to the already enviable variety of the English vocabulary (with an impressive number of coinages, terms that have taken on new meanings, and acronyms permeating conversational and even standard English), when it comes to rendering these terms and the syntactic structures in which they appear into other languages – since most social media platforms are now accessible in over 100 languages, including dialects and minority languages – we can hardly speak of creative innovation, as many of these coinages are simply “borrowed” from the source language, becoming, therefore, loan words, while the translation of most structures produces artificial syntactic patterns and, implicitly, changes in the grammatical structure of the Romanian language. Due to frequent use, these calques (i.e. loan translations from English), false friends, hybrid constructions and, generally, lexical and grammatical oddities have entered the active vocabulary of a large category of speakers and are therefore becoming pervasive in everyday conversation. Moreover, their oddity and inappropriateness are now beginning to pass unnoticed, as more and more speakers are treating them as legitimate linguistic forms.

The immediate cause of this is undoubtedly the way in which the translation of social media platforms into other languages is being done, as part of an “internationalization” campaign that started, in the case of Facebook, in 2008 (by which time the site had only been available in English). Instead of employing professional translators, Facebook, Inc. developed an “application that enables users to translate the site themselves” (LENIHAN, 2011, p. 41) simply by adding it to their personal profile:

Once a Facebook user adds the translations application to their profile, they automatically become a de facto translator and join the community of translators for the language they have chosen. Individual translators submit translations via the application, which the rest of the community must approve via a voting system. (LENIHAN, 2011, p. 52)

The application then works using a 3-step method, which involves 1) the translation of the glossary (*i.e.* the “core *Facebook* terminology”), 2) the translation of *Facebook* content (*i.e.* “all the language strings of the site”), and 3) “voting and verification”, which entails further translation, along with reviewing and further voting of the translations submitted in Steps 1 and 2” (LENIHAN, 2011, p. 49). Thus, the translations application works via a collaborative system of contributions similar to that used by *Wikipedia*. Although most often than not contributing users are passionate about displaying their “linguistic expertise” and genuinely committed to their self-assigned task, there are major drawbacks to this “collaborative community” method: the self-appointed translators are “ordinary users of many ages and backgrounds” whose “linguistic competence [...] is not tested,” since “no experience or qualifications are required and no one is vetted based on any grounds” (LENIHAN, 2011, p. 53). It is little wonder, therefore, that errors often occur – sometimes even in the translation of the core *Facebook* terminology, but most frequently and most disturbingly in the translation of syntactic structures in which these terms appear.

The translation errors that make the object of the present article include faulty inflections – *e.g.* the use of a prepositional accusative (“*a răspuns la un comentariu*,” “*X te așteaptă să-i răspunzi la cererea de prietenie*”) instead of the dative (“*a răspuns unui comentariu*,” “*să-i răspunzi cererii de prietenie*”) or instead of the genitive (“*actualizări de grup*” instead of “*actualizări ale grupului*”). Also, quite disturbingly, an apparently inconsequential cultural difference – *i.e.* the fact that in Romanian the “first name” is one’s surname, not one’s given name – generates the ludicrous inflection of the patronymic, if the user has registered with his or her full name the Romanian way (*i.e.* surname + given name) and not the English way (*i.e.* given name + surname). Many words were simply borrowed from the source language, with no attempt at providing Romanian equivalents, which has led to the bastardization of the target language not only within the confines of SNS communication, but, more generally, of the vernacular, as social networks keep attracting more and more Romanian users, who access these sites on a daily basis, enabling the traffic of words between the online and the offline environments. Thus, words like “link,” “story,” “selfie,” “share,” “like,” “hashtag,” etc. have not just permeated everyday conversation (both on- and offline), but have

entered odd combinations, forming hybrid structures such as “*a da like*,” “*a da share*,” and some English verbs have even been forced into receiving Romanian inflections (e.g. “*a sharui*,” “*a tagui*”) or into adding Romanian suffixes (e.g. “*facebookist*”).

The aim of this article is to diagnose, to point out deviations, defective linguistic means used on social networking sites, and to propose alternative translations of the original (*i.e.* English) structures they are supposed to render, but end up mimicking. Apart from these, our paper sets out to analyze words that have been mistranslated – such as “followers” – *urmăritori* (and its LinkedIn variant, *adepti*), “poke” – *ciupitură*, “timeline” – *cronologie*, “cover photo” – *fotografie de copertă*, “notification” – *notificare* – as well as the unnatural structures they form, which are, we believe, even more problematic than the inappropriateness of the Romanian equivalents of some words.

Notificare (for “notification”) – in the context of SNS communication – is an unfortunate semantic calque: the user receives “notifications” every time he or she needs to be informed of something – e.g. that someone “has updated his or her status,” “has posted a photo,” “has added a comment” or “has been invited to an event.” The definitions provided by authoritative Romanian dictionaries (e.g. DEX) – “written message sent to a person by the authorities informing them that legal action has been or is about to be taken against them” or “official notification issued by a state to other states, in a diplomatic note, concerning its stance on a certain international issue” – rule out any connection to the meaning the word is supposed to carry in the context of Facebook interaction. Moreover, the structure “*notificări pe care le-ai ratat*” (*i.e.* “missed notifications”), which belongs to a more colloquial register, is further proof that the word is used inappropriately.

The superstar in this bizarro-linguistic world of Facebook communication is the word “post” (both a verb and a noun in English) – which has undergone semantic change (*i.e.* extension of meaning), from “display (a notice) in a public place,” “announce or publish (something, especially a financial result)” to “publish a piece of writing, image, or other item of content published online, typically on a blog or social media website or application” (*OED Online*) – has been rendered into Romanian as “*a posta*” – a similar-sounding Romanian verb, which, by the 2016 edition of the Romanian DEX⁴, was defined as “*a (se) așeza, a (se) instala, a (se) plasa undeva pentru a supraveghea, a urmări, a păzi*” (DEX, 2016, p. 942) (*i.e.* “to put, place, position something or oneself somewhere so as to monitor, watch, keep an eye on something/someone”),

⁴ *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române (The Monolingual Dictionary of Romanian)*, Academia Română, Institutul de Lingvistică “Iorgu Iordan-Al. Rosetti, 2nd ed., Bucharest: Univers Enciclopedic Gold, 2016, p. 942.

a French borrowing which was used in both its reflexive and its transitive forms. Having been borrowed from French, the verb retained the meanings it carried in the original/source language at the moment it was adopted: “*poster* – 1. *mettre a la poste*; 2. *placer a une poste, dans un endroit determine pour guetter, surveiller, etc.; se poster* – *se placer quelque part pour une action determinee*” (Larousse, online). In the latest edition of the Romanian DEX, the verb has acquired an extra meaning – “*a pune un mesaj sau un document pe internet, pentru a-l face public*” – the same meaning that the English verb “post” has recently taken on by semantic shift. Its nominal cognate – *postare* (“*acțiunea de a (se) posta și rezultatul ei*”) – has also taken on the new meaning, recorded in the dictionary in consequence of its immense frequency on social networking sites and the increasing popularity it enjoys.

We have called it the “superstar” of this bizarro world of Facebook terminology because it features in the most frequently used structures, it forms an impressive number of phrases, it is the “staple” of Facebook interaction, which spells out the very rationale behind social networking. Given that the term (with the newly acquired meaning) has been included in the latest edition of the Romanian DEX, certain structures may be counted as acceptable (e.g. *crează o postare*/create a post, *a distribui postarea*/to share a post, *74 de persoane ți-au apreciat postarea*/74 people liked your post, *a posta pe perete*/to post on the wall), while others are simply unacceptable: *postare publicată*, for example, is highly redundant (i.e. “published post”/ “a post made public”) and, therefore, tautological, since the word “post” refers precisely to a message that is being or has been made public. Likewise, the structure *postare sugerată* (“recommended post”) – which refers to a text, message, picture that is being offered up based on the user’s interests, the pages he/she has liked, the groups he/she has joined, etc. – sounds unnatural to the Romanian ear. *A posta o noutate* (i.e. “to post a piece of news”) – is an approximate translation of the phrase “to post an update,” since “news” and “update” are not really synonyms: an “update” being the latest information about a news event or “breaking news”, which would translate into Romanian as “*actualizare, aducere la zi*.”

Conjoined with the term *cronologie* – another approximate translation of the word “timeline” – the said verb gives rise to the faulty structure “*a posta în cronologia cuiva*” (for the phrase “to post on someone’s timeline,” but, literally, “in someone’s chronology”). In any Facebook context, the definitions provided by the Romanian DEX – i.e. “linear succession of events” or “chronological narrative” or “list featuring a chronological sequence”) – have nothing to do with the meaning it has acquired on Facebook, i.e. the place, in someone’s Facebook account, where events are displayed in reverse chronological order, a digital avatar of the obsolete diary or journal, a more legitimate translation of which would, therefore, be “*a posta în jurnalul/in*

calendarul cuiva.” The mistranslated word forms several other frequently used structures, such as “*fotografii din cronologie*” (i.e. “timeline photos”), which refers to all the pictures someone has posted, shared, or has been tagged in and for which a more apposite Romanian equivalent would be “*fotografii din jurnal/calendar.*”

A Facebook term apt to frighten Romanian users is the word “tag” – translated into Romanian as *a eticheta* – especially in its participial form, “tagged,” given the (basic) meaning of its literal Romanian equivalent - i.e. to apply a label to something or someone, as befits (or is thought to befit) them – as well as its synonymic set, *a califica* (i.e. “to qualify/describe someone/something as”), *a categorisi* (i.e. “to classify, to categorize”) (DEX, 2016, p. 395). In the world of social media, the fear of being or having been labeled vanishes into thin air, because the word suddenly loses its pejorative meaning. The feeling one gets when s/he reads, for the first time, sentences such as: “*te-a etichetat într-o postare*” (for “X has tagged you in a post,” but, literally, “X has labeled you in a post”), “*te-a etichetat într-un link*” (for “X has tagged you in a link,” but, literally, “X has labeled you in a link”), “*o fotografie în care ești etichetat*” (for “a photo you were tagged in,” but, literally, “a photo in which you have been labeled”) is “bizarro-worldly,” because it stems from the incongruity between the user’s linguistic competence (i.e. his familiarity with the usual, offline meanings of the word) and the new, online meaning (the sentences merely inform the user that a Facebook friend has added his/her name to some digital content, that his/her name has appeared in someone’s post or has been traced to a certain digital content, whether this is a picture, a text, or a video).

Apart from this deviation from its usual meaning, the structures in which this word appears, such as “*un comentariu la un link în care ai fost etichetat*” (for “a comment to a link you were tagged in”), pose comprehension difficulties to the Romanian user. Even if we replace *a eticheta* with *a identifica*, which comes a lot closer to the contextual meaning of “tag”, the structure still remains misleading, because the user cannot possibly be identified anywhere in the link, the purport of the sentence being that the user’s name has been associated with a certain digital content – for example, with a link to a song for Women’s Day, which a Facebook user dedicates to the friends s/he has “tagged.” One of them is likely to make a “comment” on the digital content her name has been associated with or, even more so, to make a wish, in which case it is inaccurate to say that she has “commented on the link,” not to mention that, unlike the French, who have been using their own *lien* for a long while, we have yet to find a proper Romanian equivalent for “link.”

The word *comentariu* (“comment”) may combine with other frequently used phrases, such as *a-și actualiza starea* (for “update status”). The dictionary

definition of the word *a actualiza* is “to make (something) up to date, to bring into the present, to make (something) meet the standards, demands or tastes of the present; by extension, to revive something.” *Starea*, which translates the English word “status” (derived from Latin) from the phrase “to update one’s status,” refers to the situation, condition or disposition that someone finds himself/herself in at a particular moment. By semantic extension, the English word “status” – as used on social media – means “a posting on a social networking website that indicates a user’s current situation, state of mind, or opinion about something” (OED, online). If we bring together the meanings of the two words, the result is artificial. Therefore, maintaining the original term “status” – as the German translators have done (*X hat seinen Status aktualisiert*) – is a more felicitous solution for the translation of this phrase, all the more so since in Romanian, the word (i.e. *status*) is used as a slightly more technical synonym for *statut* (i.e. an individual’s relative position within a social group or system at a particular time; social standing) and carries the additional meaning of “behaviour that someone may expect from others” (DEX, online).

The word also enters syntactically odd combinations, such as: “*X a adăugat un comentariu la starea publicată de Y*” (literally, “X has added a comment to the status published by Y”). An alternative and, we believe, more appropriate translation would be: “*X a comentat/a făcut un comentariu despre/cu privire la starea/statusul lui Y*” (literally, “X has commented/made a comment on Y’s status”). On Facebook, one may “add a comment” to one’s own or someone else’s “status,” one may mention someone’s name in a comment, reply or react to a comment that someone else has made, although, in most cases, the referent is not at all a comment, but, rather, a wish, a message of congratulation or appreciation, a word of thanks, etc. A status update is sometimes accompanied by a comment explaining the post, but our friends’ input usually consists of birthday wishes, words of congratulation, questions, sometimes discussions, but rarely comments. Thus, the word *comentariu* (i.e. “comment”) has become an umbrella term for anything from monosyllabic interjections to questions, wishes, discussions, etc. When someone shares a memory, he or she may receive as many as, say, 30 comments from friends, but, if we checked their content, we would probably find that most of them say nothing more than “Happy birthday!”.

The Romanian verb *a distribui* (i.e. “share”) forms various structures such as: “*a distribui postarea publicată de...*” (for “share somebody’s post”), “*a distribui un link*” (for “share a link”), “*a distribui o amintire*” (for “share a memory”), “*a distribui clipul video/fotografia postată de*” (for “share someone’s video/photo”), etc. This verb – which, in Romanian, means: “to divide something into parts and distribute those parts to several people or places”

(DEX online) and is synonymous with *a repartiza* (i.e. distribute, allot, apportion) – collocates to different degrees with the words in the numerous structures it enters, which makes some of them acceptable, while others are utterly wrong. The contextual meaning of the verb is “to make something – a photo, a link, a video, a message, a memory, etc. – known to other people.” For the more complex structure: “*X a distribuit un link în cronologia ta*” (i.e. “X shared a link on your timeline”), which sounds awkward, a more appropriate translation would be: “*X ți-a recomandat un link, repostându-l în calendarul/jurnalul tău*” (i.e. “X has recommended a link, re-posting it on your timeline”).

The verb *a sugera* (i.e. to suggest) and some of its derivatives are forced into inappropriate combinations. Apart from the fairly acceptable structure: “*X ți-a sugerat să adaugi un prieten*” (for “X has made a friend suggestion”) and the somewhat acceptable phrase “*îți sugerează noi prieteni*” (literally, “X suggests new friends”) – an elliptical structure which obviously implies “X suggests that you make new friends” (i.e. *îți sugerează să îți faci noi prieteni*) – we find utterly unacceptable structures such as: “*ai o sugestie de prieten*” (for “you have a new friend suggestion”) or, the LinkedIn variant, “*ai un contact nou sugerat de analizat*” (for “you have a new suggested connection to review”). For these, “*ai o sugestie de adăugare a unui nou prieten*” and “*ai de evaluat o sugestie de noi contacte*,” respectively, seem to us more adequate solutions.

The Romanian verb “*a da*” (i.e. “give”) has a long history and, therefore, wide circulation and frequency in everyday communication, forming numerous verb phrases and expressions. The relativisation of the concept of “phrase” has given rise, in current Romanian, to various combinations with Anglicisms, making up hybrid structures such as “*a da like*,” “*a da check in*,” “*a da share*,” “*a da unfriend*,” “*a da tag*” to describe Facebook activities for which the English language has words that function as both nouns and verbs (‘like’, ‘check in’, ‘share’, ‘tag’, etc.). The greatest danger is that these structures have already entered the active vocabulary of any speaker who uses social networking sites, so that they are not even perceived as unnatural when they occur in everyday conversation. A recent seminar experiment with several groups of students – most of whom were familiar with both the English words and the hybrid structures they form in Romanian, but to whom it had never occurred that these structures sound unnatural, that they, indeed, do violence to the nature of the Romanian language – bears out this fact. We soon realized that comprehension and acquisition had taken place due to something similar to the process at work in learning a foreign language without the help of an intermediary (first or second) language, but only by “showing” and “doing.” These structures belong to a parallel language that coexists with everyday language and “travel” back and forth between the two, on the principle

of communicating vessels. Thus, the most frequently used phrase – now firmly established in the public consciousness of Romanian users – “*a da like*” has made a very successful career, having been effectively appropriated by the advertising industry and fully exploited in many commercials and advertisements. It features, for example, in “*Nu e panică, man! La KFC ai like... cea mai tare ofertă*” (i.e. “No need to panic, man! You get like... the best offer at KFC”):

În ceea ce privește proiectele inovatoare de comunicare ale anului 2014, am început în forță cu “Nu e panică, man!”, una din cele mai populare campanii KFC de până acum. Campania a avut un asemenea success, încât a introdus expresia “Nu e panică, man!” în folclorul urban, fiind folosită chiar și la radio acum. A fost o campanie de promovare a ofertelor value pentru Crispy Sandwich și Hot Wings, ce a inclus un spot TV, materiale in-store, PR, comunicare online și, pentru prima oară în România, promovare în cadrul aplicației Shazam. “Nu e panică, man!” a generat un real buzz în rândul fanilor, mesajul campaniei viralizându-se puternic. (STANCU, 2014, our emphasis)⁵

The quoted text is rife with barbarisms – in bold type for emphasis – glorifying the popularity of an artificial structure, adopted via a loan translation from English, such as “*nu e panică*” and, ironically, manages to recast the whole thing as an “innovative communication project.” The campaign unfolds under the heading “*Nu e panică, man!*” and nobody seems to be bothered by the linguistic inappropriateness of the phrase. Another example of word migration from the language of social networks to everyday conversation is the phrase “*a da tag*” (i.e. to tag), which has been used in a Coca-Cola commercial: “*Brățara care transformă fiecare ‘Mi-a dat mama tag într-o poză’ într-un festival*” (i.e. “The bracelet which turns every ‘Mom has tagged me in a photo’ into a festival”).

It has been argued and amply demonstrated that changes in language are imperceptible, that speakers are unaware of the changes taking place almost every minute, that the evolution of a language is so slow that “linguistic contact between generations of speakers using this slice of the Romanian language is ensured” (IORDAN; ROBU, 1978, p. 27). In the case under discussion, however, we cannot really speak of “linguistic contact between generations

⁵ “As regards the innovative communication projects of 2014, we started out in full gear, with “No panic, man!”, one of the most popular KFC campaigns so far. The campaign was so successful that it introduced the expression “No panic, man!” into urban folklore, so that it is now aired even on the radio. The campaign was meant to promote the value offers for Crispy Sandwich and Hot Wings, which included a TV spot, in-store materials, PR, online communication and, for the first time in Romania, promotion with the Shazam application. “No panic, man!” has generated a real buzz among fans, as the message of the campaign has become strongly viral.” (Stancu, Iulia. “Diferit nu înseamnă inovator” in *Forbes Magazine* 11.06. 2014, Forbes Online).

of speakers”: communication (is hardly conceivable between generations of speakers and sometimes even between coeval speakers (for example, between a very “active” user of his/her social network account and someone who is unacquainted with the “arcana” of *Netspeak*, *Cyberspeak* or *Chatspeak*). Thus, the structures we have analyzed are condensed combinations or associations of words resulting from translations which ignore the overall meaning of the structure, slavishly following the syntactic pattern of the source language.⁶

Moreover, though inadequate and flawed, these structures are, paradoxically, the linguistic means through which various persuasion strategies are being effectively deployed in the world of social media. From a pragma-linguistic perspective, we may conclude that the perlocutionary act (which, in speech act theory, is synonymous with the effect that a speech act produces on the listener – “perlocutionary objective,” “perlocutionary consequence”) is performed through deficient, inappropriate or incorrect linguistic means (and therefore, in philosophical terms, language ceases to be a “kratophany”⁷), that despite the faultiness of the medium, these manipulation strategies are always effective in “ensnaring” the interlocutor.

For example, the purpose of many interrogative structures such as “*ai văzut comentariul adăugat de X la starea lui Y?*” (“Have you seen X’s comment on Y’s status?”) is to prompt the user’s immediate reaction, to draw the user into conversation, *i.e.* to trigger action – the user’s participation in the conversation – rather than an answer to the question (BĂLĂNESCU, 2001, p. 138). The sentence follows the pattern of a question, but it is actually a directive. Directive verbs are also used to the same effect in imperative structures such as: “*Creează o postare!*” (“Create a post!”) or “*X te-a invitat să participi la strângerea de fonduri. Arată-ți sprijinul!*” (“X has invited you to participate in a fundraising campaign. Show him/her your support!”) or “*Astăzi este ziua lui X. Spune-i că te gândești la el astăzi, de ziua lui!*” (“Today is X’s birthday. Tell him/her you’re thinking of him/her today, on his/her birthday!”). In this case, pronominalisation (*i.e.* the substitution of a pronoun for a name) would have been sufficient. However, in order to persuade the user to join in, the unambiguous description “*ziua lui*” (“his birthday”) is

⁶ Rodica Zafiu, a prominent Romanian linguist, discusses this phenomenon and its negative impact on Romanian syntax in several articles and interviews: “Loanwords from English – which are eventually absorbed and adapted – do not bother me as much as those loan translations (calques) – imitations of English structures – which come up where there is no real need for them and which alter the structure of our language.” One of the examples she discusses is the phrase “*probleme adresate*” (“problems addressed”), where both words already existed in the language, but their combination (following the syntactic pattern of the English phrase) sounds unnatural in Romanian, where the verb “to address” does not collocate with “problems”.

⁷ Andrei Pleșu on Plato’s view of language as “kratophany” – “The Language of Birds. Notes on One of Plato’s Dialogues” in *Secolul XX* 1-2-3/1988

used with the deictic adverb “*astăzi*” (“today”), effectively anticipating and nuancing the directive in the second sentence, “*Urează-i ‘la mulți ani!’*” (“Wish him a happy birthday!”). In sentences such as “*X vrea să vă împrietenîți*” (X would like to be your friend), “*X îți sugerează să adaugi un prieten*” (X suggests that you add a friend), “*X te invită să apreciezi o pagină*” (X invited you to like a page) we are dealing with propositions with persuasive intent, belonging to the same category of directive speech acts, which are meant to make an impact on the addressee. The sole purpose of these sentences (featuring verbs whose purport is evident – “want”, “would like”, “suggest”, “invite”) is to make an impression on the interlocutor and to prompt him to act accordingly (BĂLĂNESCU, 2001, p. 142).

Inadequate translation methods have generated a world governed by its own (arbitrary) linguistic laws, an artificially constructed language that does not resemble common language, but intrudes into everyday speech (via commercials, advertisements or conversation among “conlangers”). From intrusion to institutionalization (on the principle of frequency in language) there is only one step, which, big as it may seem, is neither far ahead nor impossible. The recent registration of the word “post” (*a posta*), with all its paradigmatic variants, in the Romanian DEX (2016) supports our prediction. Such words and structures that “brazenly insinuate themselves into the respectable world of writing” are definitely not isolated linguistic occurrences; their current popularity and pervasiveness in everyday speech are sufficient arguments for their being recorded in dictionaries in the not so distant future. The greatest danger is posed by changes in the grammatical structure of the language under the influence of syntactical oddities such as those discussed above, given that grammatical structure is the most stable part of a language, which determines its physiognomy. All these linguistic forms come under the general umbrella of a language dynamics deeply at odds with the very nature and fundamental characteristics of the Romanian language and, therefore, can safely be classified as “linguistic fads”.

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Monica Borș. Professora do *Department of Romance Studies*, da *Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu*, România.

E-mail: monica.bors@ulbsibiu.ro

Anca Ignat. Professora do *Department of Anglo-American and German Studies* da *Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu*, România.

E-mail: anca.tomus@gmail.com

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