



UNIUNEA EUROPEANĂ



Fondul Social European
POSDRU 2007-2013



Instrumente Structurale
2007-2013



MINISTERUL
EDUCAȚIEI ȘI
CERCETĂRII
ȘTIINȚIFICE

OIPOSDRU



ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ

Discourse Markers in Romanian Spoken in Moldova: Pragmatic and Sociolinguistic Approaches

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This paper is supported by the Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development (SOP HRD), financed from the European Social Fund and by the Romanian Government under the contract SOP HRD/159/1.5/S/136077.

Bucharest, 2015

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ABSTRACT

Discourse markers have been analysed as part of various linguistic domains: text linguistics, traditional semantics, conversational analysis, relevance theory, argumentation theory, grammaticalization theory, etc. (see Fischer 2006: 1). The present paper is a study of discourse markers from a new perspective: bilingual conversation analysis – a recent domain in the research of discourse markers which has arisen the interest of several scholars in the past decade (Maschler 2000, 2009; De Rooij 2000; Matras 2000; Goss & Salmons 2000; Torres & Potowski 2008; Andersen 2014).

Discourse markers make up a class of marginal linguistic elements which can hardly be accounted for in the traditional word classification: they have little or no propositional meaning, they occur extrasententially, thus they are optional units. Moreover, discourse markers are multifunctional elements that operate at several discourse levels. According to Jucker and Ziv (1998: 4), discourse markers have four basic functions: a) they function as discourse organizers by marking conversational openings or closings or transitions between those units; b) they indicate the speaker's attitude or opinion; c) they signal speaker - hearer intentions or relationships; and d) they give instructions on how a given utterance is to be processed.

The present research is based on a corpus made up of Romanian conversations (both spoken and written) recorded in the Republic of Moldova. I analyse a number of discourse markers borrowed from Russian into Romanian as a result of pragmatic interferences between the two languages in contact. The borrowed discourse markers have been analysed from a pragmatic and a sociolinguistic perspective, in contrast with the Romanian standard system of discourse marking.

The social context, as well as the pragmatic and the discursive domain to which the use of discourse markers relates, are taken into account in the analysis. Therefore, the present study adopts a complex theoretical approach based on pragmatic, discursive, and sociolinguistic principles.

The pragmatic perspective emphasizes the importance of the linguistic and extralinguistic context, by analysing the relation between a sentence and the uttering process or other sentences, as well as the relation between the uttering process and the interactional background. The pragmatic approach also investigates the relation between the information encoded and communicated, and the cognitive process of decoding, by which the meaning is inferred from the linguistic elements the context.

Discourse markers have been analysed in relation to the preceding or succeeding parts of discourse, as marking different types of structural and functional relationships, therefore a

discourse analysis approach in studying discourse markers is necessary. Discourse analysis takes into account the syntactic and sequential organization of sentences, the relationship between the meaning encoded and the context, and the ways in which a sentence may affect the propositional content of another sentence.

The term ‘discourse marker’ relates to a class of linguistic elements that function at the discourse level, where discourse is taken as a more-than-sentence unit, spoken or written, produced in interaction, in a certain context, as a result of verbal exchange among speakers with certain communicative intentions.

The contextual dimension in the study of discourse markers, as well as placing the sentence in a broader framework defined by speakers’ social and cultural identity, common knowledge background, the relations between speakers, ethnic affiliation, etc. require a sociolinguistic approach in the study of discourse markers. The sociolinguistic perspective used in the current study takes into account the bilingual framework of Romanian speakers from Moldova, pragmatic interferences with Russian, and bilingual speakers’ motivation to use the borrowed markers in their speech.

The analysis of the Russian discourse markers used in Romanian conversations yields the conclusion that they are not instances of idiosyncratic code-switching, but pragmatic borrowings already adopted in the language. Both code-switching and pragmatic borrowings should be seen as stages of a continuum, namely the process of linguistic interference between two languages in contact.

In an earlier stage, foreign elements enter the language through code-switching (Torres & Potowski 2008: 264). The code-switching process does not mean a bleaching boundary between languages, as the speaker inserts the foreign marker in his/her speech consciously. In a later stage, some elements inserted through code-switching become established borrowings, due to their high frequency in use. Andersen (2014) defines the pragmatic borrowing as the transfer of discourse markers and their pragmatic and discourse features from the source language to the recipient language. Discourse markers’ formal and functional features, such as heterogeneity, multifunctionality, optionality, peripheral status, high degree of adaptation, etc. facilitate the transfer of discourse markers from one language to another.

Moldavian speakers, regardless of their degree of bilingualism, don’t see borrowed and local markers as being part of different marking systems. They choose between markers according to the interactional situation, the speakers’ status and their communicative intentions.

The paper *Discourse markers in Romanian spoken in Moldova: pragmatic and sociolinguistic approaches* comprises five chapters. Chapter 1 contains the main descriptive and functional features of discourse markers. Chapter 2 is an overview of the basic principles of the discourse and pragmatic analysis applied in the study of discourse markers. Chapter 3 presents

the basic sociolinguistic concepts used in the language contact framework. Chapter 4 contains the inventory of the discourse markers arising from the Romanian – Russian linguistic interference. Chapter 5 is the proper analysis of the pragmatic borrowings in the Romanian language spoken in Moldova. Within it I consider the changes in the inventory and distribution of discourse markers under the influence of bilingualism, as well the causes underlying the phenomenon of pragmatic borrowing.

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