

ON A STRANGE FASHION OF RUMANIAN ACCENTUATION ABROAD.  
A CONTRASTIVE SKETCH WITH GERMAN AND ENGLISH

ANA TĂTARU

Heidelberg, FRG

ABSTRACT

Each language has its own, particular ways of accentuation, which must be observed in emphatic speech too. Thus, according to their prosodic specificity, an additional first-syllable accent is frequently allowed in German and English but not in Rumanian emphasized polysyllabic words.

Our paper presents a recent extreme development of an erroneous first-syllable accent in Rumanian words, affecting all prosodic features. It usually occurs in some western broadcasting programs, as a strange, deliberate speech fashion.

1. Introduction

1.1. A language is constantly undergoing change. But this change can hardly affect the specific physiognomy of the language, in general, thanks to its inner conservative tendencies and to the feeling for correct idiom of the native speakers. An excellent example offers us the Rumanian language, which could preserve its Romanic character for almost two thousand years, in spite of having been cut off from the main part of the Romanic world, developing among foreign languages of other groups, e.g., Slavic, Germanic, Ugric etc. There seems no doubt that also in our times of immense change in the life of mankind, languages will keep on maintaining their particular characters, even if this becomes more and more complicated.

1.2. We must admit that our bright technical period, making possible most accurate research in many fields of human activity casts its shadows, by the constant decrease of respect for and appreciation of everlasting human cultural achievements, deterioration of moral standards and of the sense of harmony and beauty (to consider just what is accepted for music and dance nowadays).

1.3. The positive and negative sides of our era have unavoidably touched the field of language as well: while sophisticated technical devices facilitate minute language research and language teaching/learning, quite shocking negative tendencies - far from being grounded on deeper scientific research, rather disregarding language specificity - are developing in many countries; e.g., strange speech fashions, adoption of unnecessary foreign terms, frequent use of wrong grammatical forms etc. As a rule, they are also far from being the result of natural interference of languages in contact. Most likely, the native speakers sustaining them are similar to the superficial "enfants terribles" of our days, who seek publicity for their extravagant originality at any price.

1.4. Undoubtedly, improper alterations of everyday speech have occurred in the past too, without influencing standard speech at all, as fashions come and go. But about that time mass-media possibilities of spreading such speech fashions were not at hand. Now they are and language misuse can influence the speech of millions of listeners and

can become a danger to the specificity of any language.

1.5. Let us concede that we, phoneticians, also deserve unfavourable criticism, as we have not at all done our best for the extension of useful pronunciation knowledge to the masses of language speakers. In general, even school and university handbooks still lack quite important information on the specificity of language, mainly in the field of pronunciation. Phonetics continues to be underestimated in the study and practice of language.

1.6. Under the circumstances, it seems to be high time for linguists and especially for phoneticians, joined in international associations, to unite their efforts, at least, to protect standard speech from deliberate alterations, chiefly in programs to be broadcast for radio or television all over the world. Our paper is meant to draw attention to this apparently overlooked problem of our days.

## 2. Main Features of German, English and Rumanian Accent in Contrast

2.1. For space restriction, we shall pick out just a few main word/vs. sentence accentual characteristics of these languages.

### 2.2. Similarities

2.2.1. The accentual pattern of these languages is free, in the sense that the accent is not constantly placed on the same syllable in all words. But it is also fixed, as their accent has a fixed position in the lexical pronunciation of each word; e.g., G. <sup>1</sup>Väter, getän, <sup>2</sup>E. Abbot, abóve, R. pasáj, pásáre.

2.2.2. They have a dynamic or intensity stress, but it is usually associated with pitch variation. More often, the stressed syllable is higher in pitch than the unstressed syllables. Thus, the term "accent" can be used to define the correlation of stress and pitch (the same in this paper); e.g., G. Gáttin, <sup>3</sup>E. wóman, R. cárte

2.2.3. Their accent can have a distinctive

function, a trait which increases the importance of learning each word of these languages with its proper accent; e.g., G. zumáchen, zumachen, E. forecast, forecast, R. copii, copi.

### 2.3. Differences

2.3.1. a) Most G. and E. words have their accent on their initial part - as the Germanic tendency is to place the accent to the beginning, not to the end of words; b) whereas most R. words have their accent on the final part (the penult) - because the Romanic tendency is just the reverse.

2.3.2. a) G. and E. polysyllabic words often have a primary and a secondary accent; b) but this is a mere exception in Rumanian, where words normally contain a single accent. Compare the: G. Scheinwerfer and E. photograph with the R. fotograf.

2.3.3. a) Certain G. and E. compounds can have two primary accents (a double accent) but b) this is a rare case in R. compounds; e.g. G. háarscharf, E. ill-advised, R. reáua-voíntá but reá-voíntá.

2.3.4. a) Although in all three languages form words are generally unaccented in the sentence, the G. and E. prepositions are frequently stressed and get a considerable high pitch. b) Since almost all R. prepositions are unaccented, even in emphatic speech, they are never given the high pitch of main words. Compare: G. Bleibe bei mir, E. Come with me, R. Vino cu mine.

2.3.5. a) Variation of pitch, length and vowel quality are frequent in G. and E. unstressed syllables. Thus, their unstressed syllables are often shorter or even elided and sometimes undergo a vowel quality change; e.g., E. he, heis, dictionary, G. méine, méinen. b) But nothing similar happens in Rumanian: it does not have long and short vowels - like G. and E. - and the relative medium length of its vowels is not perceptibly shortened by the absence of stress. Moreover, unaccented vowels are not elided or replaced by other vowels

in Standard pronunciation.

### 3. About Common and Different Means of Emphasis in G., E., R. Standard Speech

3.1. When addressing large audiences, especially over the radio, not only correct but also distinct speech is required to support intelligibility. For that aim, several means of emphasis can be used, provided that they correspond with the prosodic specificity of the given language.

3.2. It is quite incorrect to simply transfer any means of emphasis from one language to another, because some of them occur in many languages - e.g., to pronounce the most important words of the sentence slower, clearly, distinctly and with a stronger stress - while others are usual in one language but unusual in another language. It is thus common in R., but uncommon in G. and E., to pronounce the emphasized words not only slower and more distinctly, but also by loosening the junction of the pretonic syllables without raising their low pitch level; e.g., in-gri-jo-réazá

b) In accordance with their specificity, it is possible in G. and E. to add an emphatic first-syllable secondary accent on certain polysyllabic words; e.g., G. die individuelle Opposition can be: die individuelle Opposition, likewise E. the inferiority complex, can be: inferiority complex. c) But the same units can be in R. only: opoziția individuálă, compléxul de inferiorităte. If emphasized, the beginning of words can be uttered somewhat louder, but without a higher pitch. Otherwise we adopt the main error of the new speech fashion and would say: opoziția individuálă, compléxul de inferiorităte, what is quite opposed to the particular tune of the R. speech flow. As an exception, a secondary accent is possible in R. standard speech: 1) when emphasizing the contrast between two terms, e.g., Am zis: pre-zoziție nu postzoziție; or 2) on very few prefixes of negation and repetition; e.g.,

nănceput but necăz, a ré-cită (to cite again), but a recită (to declaim).

### 4. On the Development of the Word-initial Erroneous Accent of Rumanian Abroad

4.1. The foregoing contrastive analyses allow us to conclude that it is as bad to impose one's native stress and pitch shapes on the words of a foreign language, as to adopt foreign shapes for the native speech pattern. But it seems to be even worse to deliberately develop the adopted foreign prosodic shapes beyond any boundary, led by an extravagant originality.

4.2. To avoid misinterpretation, it must be underlined that no animosity against persons or broadcasting programs, just respect for my native language determined me to research and present this topic. Moreover, I located the registered examples in time only and the negative examples on the recording tape are confronted with some positive examples of an older western radio speaker not yet "infected" with that dangerous "virus".

4.3. The new speech-fashion, adopted at present by most R. broadcasting speakers from abroad, has developed approximately during the last six years. Unfortunately it is not only more and more imitated, but - having reached its extreme degrees - it also alters all other R. prosodic features. Let us briefly examine its development: Phase 1. A couple of western R. radio speakers occasionally began to add a first syllable secondary accent on some long R. words, e.g., continuității for continuității. Phase 2. Meanwhile, the relatively rare emphasis accent becomes more frequent, being adopted by some more of their colleagues. It is now used on shorter words as well; e.g., cotităra, for cotităra.

Phase 3. The added secondary accent is intensified and becomes also primary. The words are thus double-stressed, with two similar high pitch levels. A very strange tune in R. indeed! e.g., liberăli, combină-

ție, stabilitate, soliditate (II.87).

Phase 4. The unfortunate development reaches its first extreme point, namely, the word initial accent is added even on such words which have their original accent on the second syllable. A sequence of two accented syllables is the result. Quite an absurd situation in R., where even at sentence level the succession of two accents is avoided, e.g., pătrile. But this change determines some other important change: two successive accents cannot be uttered within joined syllables, they must be disjoined, even separated. Thus the meaning of words is altered, e.g. reacție (I.87) f. reacțiile

Phase 5. The strong intensity of the added accent causes the decrease of the original primary accent, which becomes secondary and its pitch is lowered, e.g., combativitate, speriți, f. combativitate, speriți (II,87)

Phase 6. The original accent is dropped out while the added, word-initial accent is maintained. This second extreme point of the development is the cause of the low pitch level of the previously accented syllable; e.g., conferința, probleme, dănez (II.87) for conferința, probleme, dănez. As a consequence, the intonation contours together with the rhythm are considerably changed. Even vowel change and reduction of syllables are resulting; e.g., soție (so-ție) becomes sotie (6.86), reacție (re-ăc-ție) becomes reacție (II.87).

Phase 7. The accentuation fashion has now reached its third extreme point: because of the tendency to stress any word-initial syllable, even form words, which are almost never stressed, become accented, being given a high pitch level. By this drastic change two wrong ways are open: either to introduce a pause between the accented form word and the following content word - if the accented syllables follow each other - or to maintain the strong accent on the form word and to make the content word unaccented, with a low pitch level, e.g.,

vorcîntinua (6.86) f. vorcîntinua, o realista for o realista, la revedere f. la revedere (II.87).

4.2. Our division into seven phases of development is certainly subjective as their characteristics are co-existing and interchanging. But it helps us to briefly follow the negative influence of this prosodic error on all other prosodic features. Namely, it leads towards a new tune, opposed to the R. specificity. Thus, the relatively smooth speech flow, with harmoniously rising and falling pitch of voice and being more joined than disjoined, turns into a rather abrupt speech with many high pitch levels, sounding sometimes irritated or commanding.

4.3. No use to add that the radio speakers committing these prosodic errors pretend to be or even are Rumanians, who are thus very likely to be imitated by their fan-listeners. As a rule, a native is more often imitated by other natives than a foreigner and his unusual speech is not perceived as mistaken, even if it is so.

#### Remarks

- 1.\* The terms: German, English, Rumanian occur very often in the text, so we use them abbreviated: G., E., R.
- 2.\* The accent is marked right above the stressed vowel letter.
- 3.\* Signs: ' = primary accent, ` = secondary accent, | = pause, ∪ = junction, ▮ = high pitch, ▬ = low pitch.

#### Reference

1. Tătaru, A. (1981), "A prosodic contrastive analysis of prepositions in Rumanian, German and English connected speech" in the Study of Sounds, XIX, Tokyo; likewise: Tătaru, A. (1983), Româna: Pronunțarea (Rumanian Pronunciation), Heidelberg, pp. 128-157.