

ROMANIAN-HUNGARIAN RELATIONS IN MIXED COMMUNITIES: A CASE STUDY OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION PATTERNS IN SFÂNTU GHEORGHE

Angela-Karina AVĂDĂNEI*, Adrian LESENCIUC**

*Doctoral School "Intelligence and National Security", "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy, Bucharest,
** Department of Fundamental Sciences, Faculty of Air Security Systems, "Henri Coandă" Air Force Academy,
Braşov, Romania/ Doctoral School "Intelligence and National Security", "Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence
Academy, Bucharest

Abstract: *his paper studies the patterns of intercultural communication between Romanians and Hungarians living in Sfântu Gheorghe, a city from Covasna County in Romania. It aims to identify the nature of the relations of these ethnic communities, revealed in their communicational behavior, as a basis for societal cohesion. The study is based on Dell Hymes's (1997; 2001) SPEAKING framework, operationalized in the autochthonous environment by the second author who previously studied the intercultural communication patterns in rural areas from Romania (2015), and on data collected by the first author through participant observation and interviews with both ethnic Romanians and Hungarians living in the city. The data collection took place in four different periods dedicated to the fieldwork, in the months of January, February and March 2024. The paper seeks to offer an emic perspective of Romanian – Hungarian intercultural relations, as the studies of these relations were rather developed on ethic coordinates. The results of the research show the non-conflictual nature of these relations, the formation of cohesion within the local community, which is not however lived homogenously by the participants, being still impacted by the historical memory and present-day developments which still maintain a suspicion on the non-acceptance by the "different other".*

Keywords: *SPEAKING; ethnography of communication; intercultural communication; cohesion*

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of intercultural relations in societies with a background of ethnic conflict is of great relevance in the contemporary European security environment, where ethnic nationalism and far right groups are gaining momentum, often exploiting the cultural and ethnic diversity of the states. In Romania, Hungarians form the most numerous ethnic minority, relatively encapsulated in different regions or counties, which often makes their interactions with the Romanian majority outside of these areas scarce. The lack of interactions impacts the perception of the "different other". Thus, the history of the relations, politics, information space representations and everyday ethnicity play a big role in shaping and understanding the current rapports between Hungarians and Romanians in these communities.

In general, the study of intercultural relations in Romania was developed on ethic coordinates, mainly describing the history of the conflicts, often

with a heavy focus on the primacy of the ethnicities on the territory that is nowadays shared by these communities. Interethnic tensions were not common since the very beginning of the cohabitation (dated before the 13th century, as shown by documents originating from those days), as ethnicity did not play such a preeminent role as other forms of identification, such as those tied to the economic status. The later "birth" of ethnic nationalism and people's increased attachment to their ethnic identity was a drive for interethnic animosities in this part of Europe. As Anthony D. Smith argued (1998, 1) nationalism had a great role in nation-state building, appearing at the end of the 18th century in Western Europe and America as an inclusive and liberating force that gave people the sovereignty and right to self-determination, forming states based on common popular will. The nationalistic ideology was then meant to maintain autonomy, unity and identity amongst the people identifying with the existent or potential nation (Smith, 2000:796). However, in

Eastern Europe, the nation formed in different circumstances, with the people living in polyethnic empires, dominated by three main ethnicities – Russian, Ottoman and Austrian. After the fall of empires, nationalistic factions fought for autonomy and independence, often through forced processes of transforming the “different other”, which led to strong resistance against the attempts of homogenizing cultures (Smith, 1986:131-145). The threats to which the ethnicities were subjected in Eastern Europe, including nowadays Romania, have enhanced their attachment to their ethnic identity, which set the foundation for interethnic conflicts.

The current identities of Romanians and Hungarians from Transylvania, influencing nowadays interactions was modelled by two events, as explained by the sociologist Irina Culic (2001:228-229). The first was Romania’s unification in 1918, followed by a nation-building process based on homogenization, and amalgamation, while the second was the communist regime with its imposed institutional modelling of nationality. One of the reactions of the Hungarian elites, to these modelling forces affecting the ethnic minority, was the creation of the “*Transylvanism*” ideology (Brubaker *et al.*, 2006:75), that differentiated the Transylvanian identity from the state imposed one.

The study of Romanian and Hungarian intercultural relations on emic coordinates was less explored in Romania. Several authors described these relations as asymmetrical. Brubaker *et al.* (2006:240-241) pointed the asymmetries regarding language use. While the majority of Hungarians are bilingual, that is rarely the case for Romanians. Such asymmetries set different expectations and norms, and nurture “language ideologies” (Tánczos, 2018). While the Romanians consider it natural for everybody to speak Romanian, the Hungarians perceive that naturality means passing their own language from one generation to another, beliefs which become part of the local culture. Brubaker *et al.* (2006:235) argued that ethnic Hungarians distinguish between Romanians in Transylvania and those leaving outside of the Carpathian arch, feeling closer to the first, whom they consider different. Similarly, some of the Romanians in Transylvania, participating in the authors’ research in Cluj-Napoca, stated that they feel closer to Hungarians in their vicinity than to Romanians living in the south, considering the latter somehow “behind” when it comes to living standards, culture and civilization.

Mixed Romanian-Hungarian communities in Romania are places where historically, ethnic

tensions and conflicts were lived more acutely. Thus, our inquiry seeks to understand the intercultural relations in these communities as a basis for societal cohesion and societal security, through an emic perspective, examining the patterns of intercultural communication in the ethnically mixed city Sfântu Gheorghe, from Covasna County, a place where the Hungarian inhabitants form the ethnic majority. Through our research, we seek to observe through unmediated means the interactions between Romanians and Hungarians following the intercultural communication patterns, which we believe to reveal predispositions that drive the behaviors of the interlocutors.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Theoretical approach and framework.

We believe that an appropriate demarche for the study of intercultural communication is offered by cultural anthropology. If in the past this field was rather focused on the study of exotic places, modern anthropologists, such as Marc Augé (1987), brought the field to the contemporary world. From the multiple objects of study of anthropology, we turned our attention to communication itself, choosing as a method the ethnography of communication proposed by Dell Hymes (1997/2001). Hymes supported the need for a theory of language focused on its use, different than the study of grammar, that studies the communication patterns adequate in different contexts. His theory is grounded in sociolinguistics through the attention given to the organization of verbal means and the ends to which they serve. The anthropologist believed that sociolinguistics does not bring its contributions to science or society without being materialized in a descriptive model (1997/2001:178). Hymes’ theory makes a connection between linguistic and psycho-social elements, and thus the way of speaking refers to knowing the communication behavior practiced within a community. In the theoreticians’ view a speech community is defined tautologically as a community that shares knowledge on language use and interpretation. In this community, the “fluent” speaker knows both what to say but also how to say it in different contexts of interaction (1997/2001:46-53, 123).

In our endeavor to explore the intercultural communication between Romanians and Hungarians, we followed Dell Hymes (1997/2001: 16-17) mnemonic schema “SPEAKING”, as operationalized by Lesenciuc (2015) in our

autochthonous environment, by studying the patterns of intercultural communication in Romania's multicultural rural areas. Hymes (1997/2001) proposed new components of communication, adding ethnographic taught to the classic processual communication schema. The components were further described and developed, by Lesenciuc in his previous research (2015), offering an applicable model of analysis for intercultural communication patterns. The SPEAKING schema, provides a suitable theoretical model for understanding communication in context, referring – by components, to the following:

a) “S” stands for “setting” – the time and place where the communication acts take place and the physical circumstances; and “scene” – refers to the psychological frame of a conversation, that could be either formal or informal.

b) “P” stands for “participants” – which do not resume only to sender and receiver but includes as well all those present to the conversation – including listeners and other audiences.

c) “E” refers to “ends” including both purpose-results or finalities and intended purposes of the communication.

d) “A” stands for act, understood as speech acts that contain the shape and content of the message. The shape in this case refers to the way that something is said, while the content refers to the topic and its change throughout the conversation.

e) “K” stands for “key” and its evaluation, from a *paloaltist* perspective, means delineating between analogical and digital communication, but also analyzing non-verbal elements of prosody (intonation, emphasis) and paralinguistic (tone, volume, speech speed and errors in pronunciation) (Lesenciuc 2015, 88-89).

f) “I” – the “instrumentalities” encompass the channels of communications, but also the organization of linguistic means, including dialects and variations of the language used. As pointed out in Lesenciuc's previous study (2015:89-90), when describing the instruments of communication it is important to follow the intelligibility of the interlocutors as well, while using the language or dialects, but also to look at individual variables of affective, cognitive and behavioral nature, when analyzing speech acts.

g) “N” - stands for “norms” of interaction and interpretation. The interaction norms refer to what is appropriate to do (or not) while communicating, while the interpretation rules encompass that which the participants perceive as habitual in the

communication overall, in terms of tone or distance between interlocutors. While analyzing norms, the following elements should also be assessed: the way in which speakers perceive interruptions in communication, active listening and active engagement in the communication.

h) “G” - the “genre” of communication is understood as the type of act speech (i.e. discussion, demonstration, conversation, explanation etc.). While Hymes explained briefly that the “genre” refers to a prescribed way of communication, Lesenciuc (2015:92-93) proposed establishing the genre by considering criteria such as: the status of the partners in communication, the time and place of the discussion, the textual organization and material support, but also the discursive ends.

2.2 Type of research and research design. As the aim of our research is to study the patterns of intercultural communication in a mixed Romanian-Hungarian community, we employed a qualitative approach with the purpose to explore in depth the nature of interactions, without seeking to generalize the results. The suitable method for such an endeavor is descriptive and interpretivist in nature, seeking to understand and increase the level of knowledge on the quality of intercultural relations in Romania. This imposed restraining the research to a limited space. Our choice was Sfântu Gheorghe city, from Covasna county in Romania, primarily because it is characterized by a mixed Romanian-Hungarian ethnic composition, with the latter being dominant. Secondary, the choice was due to the fact that the first author is a native from this area (who does not live there any longer) a condition which facilitated the fieldwork. Given the importance of the context in studying communication and our theoretical approach to the inquiry, the following questions guided our demarche:

Q1: What is the role of the cultural context on the predispositions and patterns of intercultural communication for the Romanian-Hungarian community in Sfântu Gheorghe?

Q2: How do the intercultural communication exchanges take place in the Romanian-Hungarian community from Sfântu Gheorghe?

Q3: Which are the patterns and limits of intercultural communication for the Romanian-Hungarian community in Sfântu Gheorghe?

The universe of our research is represented by mixed Romanian-Hungarian communities in Romania where the two ethnicities coexist, but especially those communities where the

Hungarians make up the ethnic majority. In such settlements the ethnic dominance allows for the Hungarians an encapsulation and the status of “unmarked” (Brubaker *et al.*, 2006:211-212) ethnicity, which, by Kiss (2018:229) explanation, does not need to get out of its own world in order to socialize.

Our approach to the study, characterized by an emic perspective, was transversal, as the data was collected through participant observation and interviews with representatives from both ethnicities, during the periods when the researcher planned these activities in the field. While the units of analysis and recording were the participants to the communication acts, the object of our analysis was the rapports established in intercultural communication. The procedure of our observations was peripheral, as we participated to the everyday life of the community through listening, watching, and recording the details of interactions, without seeking to obtain a role in communication.

The type of interviews we preferred were intensive – interviewing a small number of respondents, while preferring thematic depth; non-directive – orienting the conversation on open questions; unstructured in its application, but semi-structured in its projection (as we used as an instrument of research an interview guide); unique, personal, face-to-face and documentary. Such an interviewing procedure, informal and conversational, known also as “ethnographic interview”, bears according to Patton (2002, 342-349) advantages such as increasing the relevance of questions during the interview by constructing them as the conversations progress, but also of adapting the question to the respondent. Its disadvantages could consist of collecting different or incomplete answers, the time needed for getting the answers, but also a potential greater workload in collecting and analyzing the data. We mitigated these disadvantages by preparing thoroughly for each interview. The respondents were selected through a non-probabilistic and non-aleatory approach, ensuring adequate candidates for our research inquiry.

We applied the participatory observation procedure based on the SPEAKING observation sheet, and the interviews based on the SPEAKING interviewing guide, which were two instruments already operationalized by Lesenciuc in his previous study (2015), derived from Hymes SPEAKING schema, that we adapted to our research field and inquiry. The observation sheet contained the elements that Hymes proposed observing: Setting and scene (with its physical and

psychological facets), Participants (transmitter, receiver, third parties), Ends (considering the purposes-outcomes and purposes-goals), Acts, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms of interaction and interpretation and the Genre. The interview guide contained 8 topics of discussion corresponding to the SPEAKING observation sheet, 16 sub-topics and 40 questions, out of which 6 were dependent on responding to previous questions.

3. PATTERNS OF INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN SFÂNTU GHEORGHE

3.1 Sfântu Gheorghe local community – an overview. Nowadays intercultural communication between Romanians and Hungarians in Sfântu Gheorghe requires an understanding of the evolution of these interactions in the multicultural space inhabited by the ethnicities.

Sfântu Gheorghe is situated geographically in Covasna County, at the eastern side of Gurgău mountain peak (Baraolt mountains), in the depression of Braşov. The city in the current shape formed from the unification of two villages which developed on the Debren and Simeria streams, overflowing in the Olt River which crosses the city. One of the villages bore the name of today’s city, while the second – Simeria, is at present, one neighborhood in Sfântu Gheorghe. The habitation of the territory where the city is located dates from several centuries before our era, as the discovered archaeological sites reveal. Of those, we mention the inhumation tomb belonging to the Scythian population, believed to be dating from the sixth or fifth century BC, or archaeological materials – including silver coins belonging to the Dacian epoch, believed to be dating from the first century BC or first century AD (Lăcătuşu, 2021:37-39).

As we learn from the remarkable monographic paper of the city written by Pál Judith (1999), the first documentary mention of Sfântu Gheorghe dates from 1332, while reference to the settlement as *oppidum* (fair) from 1461. Certain factors had a significant role in the development of the *oppidum*. From an administrative perspective, the nowadays city was the center of the Sepsi seat, while from a military perspective – its location gave the settlement different military roles. The latter condition also represented a setback in the development of the city, which prevented the formation of a bourgeoisie. Certain other conditions and rivalries also slowed down its economic development, among which we

enumerate: the proximity of the city of Braşov that saw Sfântu Gheorghe *oppidum* as a competitor; the rivalries with other Seats, which did not want to recognize the settlement among those which had privileges; the instability of the decisions of the rulers, whom gave different statuses to the city in terms of independence in relation with the Seat, different tax policies, but also more or less military obligations. Then, in the second part of the 18th century, under Maria Theresa, the ruler of the Habsburg empire, the Szekler Seats were organized in border regiments, receiving duties that the inhabitants unsuccessfully opposed. This brief chronicle of the city's evolution shows that until the 19th century the major tensions from Sfântu Gheorghe were due to other factors than ethnicity, mainly of economic origin. In the second part of the 19th century the industrialization of the city begun, while also the educational system started developing.

Between 1920 and 1921, following the Great Union of 1918, the integration of the city and of the Treiscaune (Three seats) county in Romania from an administrative point of view, took place. After this integration, the dynamics of the political environment impacted both the ethnic composition of the city, but also the status of the ethnicities and their participation in public life. Initially, ethnic Romanians were also appointed in the public administration and education, but this changed shortly after the Vienna Dictate, when the city was once again part of Hungary (1940-1944). Under the Horthy administration, many rights of the Romanians were forbidden, coupled with a forced assimilation, while several discriminatory policies were applied (it included changes of Romanian denominations in the city and interdictions of language use in the public life). In 1944 for a short period (September to November) the city was once again under Romanian administration, which was changed for a Hungarian one, following claims of anti-Soviet positions of the national union government Sănătescu and Rădescu. The period that followed until the withdrawal of the Hungarian administration from Transylvania in 1947 was marked by violence between Romanians and Hungarians. From 1950 the city was part of the Stalin Region, later between 1952-1960 from the Autonomous Hungarian Region and between 1960 to 1968 from Braşov Region. In 1968, after a reform in the public administration which divided Romania by counties, Sfântu Gheorghe became the Seat of Covasna County (Lăcătuşu, 2021:55-93).

Similar to the trends at the national level, the industrialization of the city was pronounced

between 1968-1990. After the fall of communism, as in other cities in Romania, privatizations took place, but also many factories were closed. Only small industries continued functioning, especially in the textile and food industries. This meant for many of the inhabitants a need to change professions and emigrate for jobs.

When it comes to the city's ethnic composition, since its establishment Sfântu Gheorghe was characterized by multiculturality. The coexistence of Romanians and Hungarians is attested primarily through military chronicles, as the Szeklers and Romanians are mentioned to have fought together against Tatars and the Mongols as early as the 18th century. Later, the fluctuation of the ethnicities was determined by several factors, especially of an economic nature. Starting from the 19th century, the first testimonials on interethnic tensions were documented. Of those we mention Romanians' complaints in the 1850's, who claimed that the rights won in 1848 Revolution were not implemented. The beginning of animosities on ethnic grounds are believed to be dated from those times, when the Romanians were also gathered in the city's square and constrained to change their religious affiliation. The writings of the Orthodox Church in Sfântu Gheorghe also stand as testimony to specific interethnic conflicts. There are of course contrary perspectives, one belonging to the preeminent Hungarian historian, politician and promoter of the *Transylvanism* ideology, Kos Károly, according to whom in Ardeal, none of the ethnicities (including the Saxons) attempted to change „the other” (Pop, 2002:222). The existence of ethnic animosities before the 19th century cannot be however excluded.

Different processes contributed to shifts in the ethnic composition of the city. As documented by Romanian archivists (Ranca *et al.*, 2021: 233-235) in 1850, 457 Romanians lived in Sfântu Gheorghe (including Simeria), while the census showed there were 2302 inhabitants overall (Lăcătuşu, 2021:49). In 1931, particularly because of industrialization, the number of inhabitants grew to 10.181, out of which 6.664 Hungarians, 2.497 Romanians (Lăcătuşu, 2021:59). Until 1966 the numbers doubled, and later both due to Ceauşescu's policies who wanted to increase the number of Romanians in the region, but also due to the growing industrialization – which determined Hungarians as well to migrate to the city, the population grew to 68.359 inhabitants in 1992, out of which 16.092 Romanians and 51.073 Hungarians (Lăcătuşu, 2021:109). The dynamics of the inhabitants in the city after the 1989 Revolution showed a decrease

of both main ethnicities, for the Romanians being more pronounced in the immediate post-December '89 developments. Lăcătușu (2021, 101) speaks about the existence of a so-called „anti-Romanian” atmosphere in the city after the Revolution, which was not however confirmed during our interviews with the respondents, except for specific limited experiences, that some of the interviewees remembered. Currently, the results of the 2021 census (National Institute of Statistics 2021) show that the city has 50.080 inhabitants, out of which 9.480 Romanians (18,93%), 34.678 Hungarians (69,52%) and 0.50% other ethnicities, while there were no data for 11,29% of the inhabitants. By contrast to 2011 national census, the population shifts were not significant in the city.

In more recent times, several events that happened in the city, with a potential to generate inter-ethnic tensions can be listed:

a) Conflicts regarding the hoisting of the Hungarian flag, usually conducted at a political level, between the office of the mayor and the office of Covasna county's prefecture (Covasna Media 2018), (Rador 2021).

b) The conflict between Sfântu Gheorghe mayor's office and the Civic Forum of Romanians from Covasna, Harghita and Mureș counties, in the quest to have approved a flag for the city that bears Szekler symbols (Agerpres 2023).

c) The definitive decision of the Court following a lawsuit started by the Civic Association for Dignity in Europe in 2019, which imposed the mayor's office to modify the bilingual denomination from the façade of the Hungarian Theatre „Tamási Áron”, as the Hungarian writing „színház” (theatre), should have been written under the Romanian writing and not on the same row with it according to the law (We Radio 2023).

These events did not materialize in manifest tensions among the city's inhabitants. During our interviews, the respondents showed a general knowledge of these issues, while believing they are politicized, and that mutual respect should prevail.

3.2 Patterns of intercultural communication between Romanians and Hungarians in Sfântu Gheorghe. We conducted the participatory observation, by using the SPEAKING observation sheet, assisting intercultural exchanges manifested in public areas, ranging from shops, markets, cafeterias, restaurants, to beauty salons, cinemas, religious and cultural institutions (theatre, church, library). As the observation was limited to the available contexts of interaction, we made sure that the chosen interviewees were well acquainted with

the intercultural dialogue and relations in the city, being able to explain and refer to situations that might have not been otherwise noticed. We dedicated four periods for the observation and interviewing activities, as follows: 20-24.01.2024, 08-10.02.2024, 29.02-02.03.2024 and 07-09.03.2024.

We interviewed, based on the SPEAKING guide, four key respondents and then persons that they indicated, with various professions and occupations (i.e. police officer, photographer, network technician, lawyer, beauty worker, journalist, economist, student, cook, housewife). In total, 18 respondents (10 ethnic Romanians and 8 ethnic Hungarians) took part in our interviews, out of which 15 were part of a network, similarly to the approach used by Lesenciuc in his previous study (2015). The other three were interviewed outside of the network, which was not built due to the refusal of indicated persons to participate in the research or because they were less engaged in recommending somebody. The interviews were conducted after the interviewees signed a GDPR consent, recorded and then transcribed by using *Speechmatics* AI solution and manually corrected. We coded the responses by using MAXQDA qualitative analysis software. The interviews lasted on average 30 minutes. As there were variations in the respondents' options in terms of anonymity, we chose not to refer to their profession/initials/name while referring to the insights they provided.

Based on the gathered data, by following the SPEAKING framework, we will now turn to analyzing the patterns of intercultural communication between the Romanians and Hungarians in Sfântu Gheorghe:

a) **Setting and scene:** The cohabitation of ethnic Romanians and Hungarians in Sfântu Gheorghe is characterized by continuity for more than eight centuries. The ethnic composition and industrialization that took place starting the second part of the 19th century involved the construction of dwellings to accommodate the working class, which favored the ethnic *mélange*, determining the ethnicities to live in vicinity. The separation of the ethnicities in the city is partly realized through the institutions, which are created based on language use as an ethnic marker, sustaining a “Hungarian world” which is however incomplete (as there are institutions in the city known as “Romanian”, which require Hungarians to know the state language). It is less common for Romanians to frequent Hungarian institutions, mainly because of the linguistic asymmetry, but also given the option to frequent their own. From a spatial and temporal

perspective, the intercultural communication between the ethnicities is continuous, taking place most frequently in professional environments, public areas and between neighbors, while the dominant frames of interaction are informal. There are of course exceptions, as it resulted from the insights provided by our respondents, of inhabitants who do not want or avoid the interaction with the “different other”, which are however believed to be a minority. Considering the changing nature of the socio-professional environments, we remarked the existence of interethnic communication also between ethnic Hungarians from Sfântu Gheorghe and Romanians residing in other areas. They are favored by “work from home activities” or other types of collaborations with “the exterior” driven by the particularities of the workplaces. The psychological predispositions (scene in Hymes’ schema) of the ethnicities remain in various degrees impacted by transgenerational beliefs, but also daily situations. They sustain a certain level of suspicion on the non-acceptance by “the other”, and to a lesser extent variations of ethnic mistrust that are most likely dictated by the level of socialization at an individual level with the other ethnicities, as it resulted from the discussions with the respondents. Transylvania’s fate after the 1st World War and ethnic identity played throughout the time a great role in setting the psychological predispositions. The first is seen as a historical disadvantage for Hungarians, which should however be accepted as it is, while for Romanians it represents the materialization of the common will of the people. Self-identification plays for ethnic Hungarians in Sfântu Gheorghe a great role, being characterized by a mosaic of representations. Some see themselves as Szeklers – but the explanation for this identity is associated by most respondents with the territory inhabited by a certain group of Hungarians. Others believe however that it is an archaic identity which has transformed, or rather a group of Hungarians that underwent more hardships in their history which shaped their mentality differently, making them in some way more “clever”. Hungarians’ identity is also challenged by their rapports with the kin state and the host state, with some arguing that they are not entirely accepted by none. Respondents from both cultures pointed out that rather alien elements are trying to nurture inter-ethnic conflicts, but also that the situation from the Szekler area is seen and projected outside of the environment in a distorted and exacerbated way. For ethnic Hungarians, such perceptions are

experienced with feelings of alienation with the Romanians outside of their close environment. The daily, non-conflictual and frequent interactions between the ethnicities in Sfântu Gheorghe, as conditioned by the urban calendar, that are generally taking place normally (and less with frustration or embarrassment because of language barriers) favored an openness of the ethnicities towards each other, that was produced slowly but resulted in the formation of cohesion among the local community. Intimate relations of friendship and mixed families also impacted the scene, favoring a certain level of cultural openness. This openness is not ideal but seen with hope for the younger generations. Conservatory views of middle-aged and late adults – rather common among the Hungarian community was recognized by some of the respondents. However, the level of education and socialization outside of the Szekler area with the Romanian society is believed to be positive for improving intercultural dialogue, while there is also awareness on divisive elements (political projects, aspirations of certain groups and the mainstream media representations of the situation at the local level).

b) Participants: The intercultural communication between the Romanians and Hungarians in Sfântu Gheorghe is taking place with normality at the observable level, without attitudinal differences induced by the ethnicity of the interlocutor. The function of communication is dependent on the context. Thus, everyday interactions in vicinity, between acquaintances and even in professional environments are governed by the phatic function – people communicating for the sake of maintaining contact. In occasional encounters with an unknown interlocutor the dominant function is informational, the interactions being conducted in a transactional manner. From a processual perspective, communication is characterized by the model SaRa (active Sender, active Receiver), representatives of both ethnicities alternating in the role of one or the other. There are, however, situations when the receiver is passive because he cannot express himself in the other’s language. In such cases, the intervention of an intermediary to facilitate the conversation is common, if one is present. Given the dynamics of communication in the urban environment, such cases are frequent in Sfântu Gheorghe, language intermediation being asked for or accepted in order to reach effectiveness in communication. The “default” mode for greeting a client in Sfântu Gheorghe is oftentimes Hungarian, but if the client responds back in Romanian (a common practice in

Sfântu Gheorghe), the conversation continues in his language. Ethnic Romanians in Sfântu Gheorghe do not experience a cultural shock when being greeted in Hungarian, perceiving it as habitual, but it is probably lived by Romanians passing by Sfântu Gheorghe. However, if the communication code is not changed, even if the interlocutor knows the language of the other, it can lead to frustrations and sometimes understood as malice, but conflicts are generally avoided.

c) **Ends:** Intercultural communication is characterized by efficiency in day-to-day interactions meant to maintain contact, language barriers being overcome and intelligibility reached. In transactional communication, sometimes language barriers could affect in case of both ethnicities reaching the desired purposes. Such examples were given by respondents when referring to interactions with clerks of certain institutions who are not bilingual. In such cases, without the intermediation of a third party the requests may not be met. The intended purpose of communication may sometimes be to verify the openness and limits of “the other” when engaged.

d) **Acts:** The topics of intercultural communication do not bear the ethnic mark, but there are limits, as certain subjects are avoided if considered tabu or when generally known there is disagreement on some issues. Between friends and family such barriers are however surpassed, but also rather more among youth. Communication is characterized by an acceptable level of convergence; the thematic and linguistic limits being known and respected. While intercultural communication is conducted predominantly orally, digital communication is common as well, with the most popular platforms being Facebook and WhatsApp. In the case of the first, interethnic animosities can be observed, which are seen differently by respondents. While some argue they are not congruent with everyday oral interactions, others believe that they offer a place for those who don't have the courage to express what they believe. In digital communication, difficulties in using the other's language are common, and thus automated translations are said to be employed.

e) **Key:** Different non-verbal means of communication are not observable among the participants in the intercultural communication. Living together for so many centuries, the cultures have aligned elements of proxemics or kinesics. The tone of communication is rarely accompanied by ethnic lenses, and jokes are allowed if mutual respect prevails. Between friends or family ethnic jokes are also allowed. Seriousness is an expected

key in certain communication contexts, especially with middle and late adults of Hungarian ethnicity, who are perceived as more conservative, their attitudes being justified by resistance to assimilation and to cultural changes. In digital communication, offensive speech is sometimes used towards the other ethnicity, when sensitive topics are discussed, on which there's ethnic disagreement.

f) **Instrumentalities:** Given the linguistic asymmetry, most often interethnic communication is conducted in Romanian. It is more common for ethnic Hungarians to be bilingual, even if the language is spoken with grammatical errors by those who studied in Hungarian. The use of words from the other's language is also common, both in interethnic and intra-ethnic contexts, which is done because of the easiness of expressing certain ideas, or for not knowing the equivalent in one's own language – especially for ethnic Hungarians in professional contexts. Hungarians' bilingualism is favored by the fact that Romanian is taught in schools, but its learning through school only, is believed to be difficult. Otherwise, bilingualism is rather developed when entering professional life and in adulthood, when the communication with different interlocutors than those from one's own teenage bubble is diverse. For Romanians in Sfântu Gheorghe bilingualism is associated with one's origin (for instance some Romanians from Moldova region speak the Hungarian dialect known as *csángó* in Hungarian and *ceangăiesc* in Romanian), while others also learn it once integrated in their professional life, due to the need to address their colleagues/ customers. Most frequently, Hungarian is understood by Romanians living in the city, without being spoken. Both ethnicities oftentimes avoid speaking the other's language, given the embarrassment of not using it correctly. The expectations for knowing one's own language still exists. When it comes to communication styles, the consultative and occasional ones are most frequently employed, whereas in closer relationships, the intimate one. As the language remains a vehicle of ethnicity, the frictions on its use have sometimes stirred discussions among Sfântu Gheorghe inhabitants, which are occasionally continued more offensively in the digital environment or even mediatized.

g) **Norms of interaction and interpretation:** Interactions are characterized by active listening and engagement in daily informal conversations. In situations that require formality, respondents do not consider that ethnicity dictates one's treatment. There are still however instances when Romanians

consider that Hungarians do not want to speak with them, which were confirmed by ethnic Hungarian respondents, when referring to some acquaintances. They pointed however that they believe that certain biases about Hungarians also persist among Romanians. The interethnic communication was also impacted by social cognition processes, which have institutionalized through historical memory and collective mind a certain reluctance towards the other, which has however softened due to daily non-conflictual interactions, which have been changing the “script”.

h) **Genre:** The urban calendar impacts the discourse in intercultural communication. Most often the dominant discursive type is instructive, but between acquaintances the narrative and argumentative types are rather common.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The SPEAKING schema has allowed us to present a nuanced analysis of intercultural communication in one of the Romanian settlements where historically, ethnic tensions have lightened up more strongly its inhabitants, due to the ethnic make-up of Sfântu Gheorghe, social injustices on ethnic criteria dictated by certain evolutions in the post 18th century politics, but also due to the attachment towards the Hungarian identity of Szekler origins, with a distinct history and continuous desideratum for autonomy of certain groups. The latter still dominates public speech, while providing an incomplete and distorted image of intercultural relations in the area.

One of the limits of our research consists of the impossibility to generalize the results, as we preferred an in-depth exploration of the inquiry, which limited the study to the analysis of intercultural relations in Sfântu Gheorghe. The second limit is given by the fact that both authors are of Romanian ethnicity, but they have conducted the research from the position of cultural relativism. A third limit could result from the interpretativist nature of the research and by the fact that even if the first author collected the data during the periods dedicated to the fieldwork, some knowledge and observations were acquired during her childhood in Sfântu Gheorghe and subsequent visits of the city. Through our epistemological position we have acknowledged that the research is conditioned by the demarche of the researcher-interpreter, of observing reality and constructing meaning together with the informants and guided by the scientific body relevant for our field study.

The patterns of intercultural communication in Sfântu Gheorghe are characterized by the continuity of the interactions of the ethnicities in diverse contexts, the ethnic *mélange* bringing besides language barriers feelings of closeness to the other. Even if this closeness is not homogeneous, in Sfântu Gheorghe there is cohesion among the members of the local community, despite cultural differences, which are many times looking with criticism at external interventions which are seen as detrimental to the equilibrium formed among the inhabitants. We believe that this cohesion must not be seen as a form of attachment to the *Transylvaniam* identity proposed by its adherents, being rather driven by inevitable acculturation processes, mutual respect and understanding, and a greater openness to cultural diversity. Ethnic Romanians – being a minority in Sfântu Gheorghe, adapted to the way of life surrounded by Hungarians, appreciating and practicing some of their customs, without renouncing to their own Romanian identity.

The feeling of closeness to the other is not experienced symmetrically by the participants to the intercultural communication, as the relations remain marked by a suspicions of the other’s non-acceptance, which differs based on the level of socialization at an individual level, with the members of the other ethnic group. They vary among Sfântu Gheorghe inhabitants, from denying any remaining form of animosity, to its recognition and (more rarely) the refusal to interact with the other. While admitting the nuanced interactions we believe that the continuity of intercultural interactions for the city’s active population – which happens in most situations without conflicts, has contributed to harmonious relations between Romanians and Hungarians, characterized by accepting the other, blurring the ethnic limits, understanding what is to be said or not when communicating, reaching an acceptable level of communication convergence, but also a delineation from certain extremist projects based on ethnic grounds.

The cohesion formed between local community members, is not experienced as well with the greater Romanian society, as ethnic Hungarians feel they are not entirely known, accepted and integrated which favors their non-participation to the public sphere. As the patterns of intercultural communication at the local level are predominantly efficient, the absence of their replication in relation with the greater Romanian society should represent a concern from a societal security perspective. Throughout our research, the

respondents referred to distorted representations of the relations by the “exterior” or “mass-media”. As Lysaght (2009, 56) argued, the media could create a space for different groups to meet, but they can also emphasize cultural differences, creating a barrier in societal cohesion formation. We believe that further research should focus on the study of the media representations of these relations. Given the lack of frequent interactions, the media have the potential to shape the way in which they are understood and internalized, which is of great importance for societal security in Romania.

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