Subculture versus Macro Culture:
Hipster Language*

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Abstract:
New words are the carriers of new realities that circumscribe as many worlds, universes or realities. The word hipster (i.e. a relatively popular, familiar youth worldwide), opens a number of issues related to addressing the phenomenon from a linguistic, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and economic perspective. Thus, we are faced with a phenomenon, a product of subculture, which makes its presence felt through the macro culture by aspects of lexis, mentalities, attitudes and behaviour. In terms of linguistics, hipster language itself may present interest (because it generates a certain mentality), and so do the terms designating hipster speak, i.e. loans from English, entering the Romanian language, and other languages, their adaptation to the language system, their productivity and any stylistic values. This linguistic fashion indicates a social pattern that requires an analysis of the phenomenon from a cultural, linguistic and, last but not least, an economic point of view.

Keywords: langue, parole, lexical borrowing, mentalities, social code, language code

In the Romanian language, hipster indicates a person who admires and adopts the latest trends in fashion, technology and style etc. ♦ a superficial person – From Engl. Hipster; Source: dlexonline.

The word hipster, Anglicism or rather, recent Americanism, is not recorded in academic dictionaries of the Romanian language. The above definition was found only in dlexonline, which updates the database with recent records. In English, the situation is different. The Urban Dictionary states:

Hipsters are a subculture of men and women typically in their 20s and 30s that value independent thinking, counter-culture, progressive politics, an appreciation of art and indie-rock, creativity, intelligence, and witty banter [...].

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Also, *Webster Dictionary* states about it: a person who is unusually aware of and interested in new and unconventional patterns (as in jazz or fashion). It is significant for us to know the first mention of the word in English: *Webster Dictionary* indicates: First Known Use: 1940.

*Oxford Dictionary* brings the same specifications – i.e. a person who follows the latest trends and fashions, especially those regarded as being outside the cultural mainstream – along with an indication of its origin; 1940s (used originally as an equivalent term to *hepcat*): from *hip* + -ster and of the series of derivates: *hipsterish, hipsterism*.

*Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2010: Douglas Harper (1941) explains the origin of *hipster* as: “one who is hip”; from *hip* (adj.) + -ster. Meaning “low-rise” in reference to pants or skirt is from 1962; so called because they ride on the hips rather than the waist (cf. *hiphuggers*).

The term *hipster* was first used in the late ’40s, with reference to a member of the African-American community. A decade later, *hipster* was white, but still fascinated by everything related to “colour”: from the exotic and otherness of the black culture (sexuality, violence and so on), to the jazz created by Afro-Americans. In both cases, knowledge was the point of resistance. By information obtained beforehand, a *hipster* distanced himself from the majority, and he was able to oppose a culture of racial problems (on http://muzica.metropotam.ro/articole-despre-muzica/Ce-e-hipsterul-de-ce-folosim-termenul-la-tot-pasul-si-de-ce-ne-efrica-de-el-art6071091996/).

Turning to the Romanian language, although unregistered in dictionaries (not even in Marele Dictionar de Neologisme – *Great Dictionary of Neologisms*, 2006), the word *hipster* is part of the active vocabulary of the young (teenagers, students) from the urban environment and it is used in the audiovisual and written media. That is why it may be viewed as a phenomenon that cannot be neglected, taking into account at least the economic impact of *hipster fashion*. We can find the term in the Romanian written press, in a series of derivates, like: *hipsterism, hipsterelă, hipsteriță, hipsteresc*, three of them formed with the help of Romanian suffixes (*-elă, -esc and -iță*), the other one created by derivation from an English word formation pattern, with the suffix *-ism*. As it is also mentioned in dictionaries of the English language, the term *hipster* belongs to a subculture, indicating a form of resistance, of opposition to all that represents the mainstream or macro culture. Yet, paradoxically, the *hipster social pattern* that defies all rules, has conspicuously established itself in the urban areas and, therefore, in the vocabulary of urban environment, including the press. The written as well as the audiovisual press carry the word towards the
literary language, hipster tending to leave the level of parole, as it is shown by our various press articles:

**Hipster? Hipsterală? Hipsterese?** Trântește o talpă groasă cu colanți colorați și o justă de tul și gata, ești hipster! Asculță câteva piese hipsterestră, de genul Nouvelle Vague – și ești de-al lor! Barbă, fular, păr vâlvoi și privire pierdută semn că te dor ochii de la citit prin ochelari model wayfarer (obligatoriu!) și ești fix în peisaj... dacă mai și menționezi că umblă în locuri cu nume ca “tricicleta”, “tutunerie” sau “percheziție”...ești pe val.¹ (http://metropotam.ro/La-zi/Ce-e-hipsterul-in-viziunea-bucurestenilor-art3283708855/)

Or:

Ca să revin la începutul articolului, ideea că atitudinea hipsterescă ar însemna o lipsă de implicare socială e absurdă.²

(http://muzica.metropotam.ro/articole-despre-muzica/Ce-e-hipsterul-de-ce-folesim-terenul-la-tot-pasul-si-de-ce-e-africa-de-el-art6071091996/)

In Romanian, *hipster* is a most-recent word; in fact, it is the word of 2014, just as *selfie* was decreed that of 2013. Although it appeared in the America of the 40s, *hipster* has resurfaced in the past decade not only in America, but it was hence borrowed not only by the Romanian language, but also by other Romance languages, as well as by German.

Conversely, the Denglish trend, i.e. the penetration of words from German into English, surprised linguists and English-language press observers. Heine comments an excerpt from the *New York Times* (**Uber-cool Hipsters Embrace the German Language** on http://www.kwintessential.co.uk/culture-vulture.html), where German words are used:

*In Blended Adam Sandler once again proclaims himself both uber-doofus and ultimate mensch.*

The sentence contains three words from German. According to Heine, the *hipsters*, who are native speakers of English, use borrowings

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¹ Here is a translation of an excerpt from the Romanian press, where we identified new words created by derivation from the Eng. *Hipster + România* suffixes like: -er, -ală, -esc.

² To return to the beginning of the article, it is absurd to imagine that a hipsterescă attitude would mean a lack of social involvement.
from German. Some argue that the phenomenon is transient and that it is due to the Germans in the World Cup 2014 victory.

The new generation, which is struggling with a deep identity crisis, imposes its new vocabulary, giving itself individuality even on the level of language:

...in Romania, the word hipster has made its presence in the last year within demonstrations against RMGC, but it is often used in a pejorative sense, Teodor Tita, content manager of digi24.ro., states in an interview (http://www.digi24.ro/Stiri/Digi24/).

Thus, hipsters speak, or hipster language, represents not only a language, but a matter of attitude and a state of spirit. This attitude, like the term itself, proves to be difficult to define, because the essence of the hipster phenomenon is not to be caught in patterns, nor to accept the rigidity of any intellectual pre-established frame. Being a hipster means to be fluid, not to be captive to any form of social or spiritual, or even artistic pattern.

An elitist spirit, an anti-kitsch attitude, aesthetics along one’s entire behaviour, peculiar tastes in music, in fashion, an attention for details, for everything they consume, would probably direct our attention towards the dandy typology. Still, the hipster typology assumes a sort of social activism and an implication in everything that means damage or alteration of nature. Beyond the alleged snobbery, a hipster shows contempt for material values, defying a consumer society that transforms individuals into slaves of objects or of material goods. The hipster makes no effort to integrate into society. The present-day hipster is accused of a lack of ideology, but in truth he carries a mix of anarchism, of punk and anti-capitalism, of environmentalism and, sometimes, a post-racial attitude (http://muzica.metropotam.ro/articole-despre-muzica/Ce-e-hipsterul-de-cc-folosim-termenul-la-tot-pasul-si-de-ce-nee-e-frica-de-el-art6071091996/).

He is also accused of creating nothing. In fact, the only thing he can do in a consumerist society is to embrace a hipster attitude.

A history of the hipster typology is configured: it begins with the American hipster of 40s, then the hipster of 90s and the hipster of 2000. In Romania, only the last one is present, because the hipster of 2000 was born in the middle of contemporary society struggles.

According to this typology, hipster speak is designed as a language of generalities, focused basically on expressing emotional states, not rational ideas. Hipster vocabulary includes English words or terms with changeable meaning, depending on intonation. The meaning of the same words, like freak or cool, depends on the context. So, hipster language is mainly an emotional language, a sort of code of emotions or of
nuanced perceptions. Among the well-known hipster words, cool– uncool are already considered a cliché. Like most social groups, hipsters have their own specific way of communication. They converse using certain terms and being abreast with the latest news in slang is a basic condition of being a hipster.

Obsedăți de cool, am putea adăuga. Cumpără ce e cool, ascultă ce e cool, citesc ce e cool și apoi dezprobă tot ce a fost până atunci cool. (Ghidul hipsterițelor on http://www.gq.ro/radar/10268086-ghidul-hipsteritelor)\(^3\).

The new concept of eco, meaning “clean” (“organic”), is familiar to hipsters and it is a source of new terms, like eco-friendly or eco-chic. Eco living means being in harmony with nature but, more than that, it means a healthy lifestyle.

A hipster is purchasing clothes, good music (on old vinyl), books etc. as a way to secure his social and cultural status. He is always trendy; he is a biker because it is much cooler to ride a bike than drive an expensive car; that, apart from being a factor of pollution, it is also a sign of material arrogance. If the hipster is male, he will probably wear a beard and an old wool jacket; if she is a female, she may wear vintage clothes, and grandmother’s old broche. They drink green tea and eat organic food, they pretend they listen to good music and are interested in Literature or Art.

On the linguistic level, concerning Romanian vocabulary, words that are part of a hipster’s universe (biker, cool, clean, eco, eco-friendly, eco-chic, fake, freak, fresh, trendy, uncool etc.) strengthen the English element by a high rate of frequency; they can be new borrowings or lexical creations.

So, hipster language, just like the term itself, proves to be prolific both in English and in other languages that borrow from it. In the Romanian language, it shows its productivity and it also gets stylistic values present in the audiovisual and the print media. On the lexical level, it is obvious that Romanian gains a word which will prove its vitality in time, even though it is used especially by students and teenagers from the urban environment; in a way, its vitality is partially proved by the process of morphological adaptation it undergoes (we have mentioned the forms articulated with the definite article, hipsterul, and the feminine noun form obtained with the Romanian suffix –îtă: hipsteriță, that has diminutive value). It creates a social pattern and a

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\(^3\) Obsessed by cool, we may ad. They buy what is cool, they listen to what is cool, they read what is cool and after that they disapprove everything was cool until then. (Hipsterițelor Guide on http://www.gq.ro/radar/10268086-ghidul-hipsteritelor).
phenomenon that implies fashion, food, entertainment, music, literature, all of them triggering a terminological stock that generates a specific language. And, as any language creates a way of thinking, a representation of reality, *hipster language* means a certain affectivity, a certain emotion and vision of the world.

On the social level, the *hipster attitude* and the *hipster language* indicate a form of opposition, of resistance against the Western world that is in free fall because of the rush for riches. The *hipster* option is for what could remain authentic in such a world, where even the concept of *hipster* may represent a source of money in itself.

The contemporary world crisis means reconsidering the system of values. It is a world seeking a new identity. The features of a subculture will always influence the macro culture; in this sense, we should pay attention to the *hipster phenomenon* both on the social and the linguistic level, considering it a symptom of a sick world where spiritual roots and authenticity are in danger due to the failure of the concept of *material paradise*.

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