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“Walking Downwards?” Connective Speech Acts at Lespezi¹. To the Ethnography of Speaking in the Moldavian Csángó Communities

It is more than three decades since the epoch-making work of Gumperz and Hymes, *Sociolinguistics: the Ethnography of Communication* (1972), was first published. Although the Hungarian research immediately registered it and translated some fragments of it (Hymes 1975, 1979), we cannot say that the “ethnography of speaking” had a real impact on Hungarian linguistics, ethnography or anthropology.² Writing about Hungarian sociolinguistics in general, János Péntek has the right to say like twenty years ago, that “neither Hungarian ethnographic nor linguistic research took in consideration the customs of speaking, except some peripheral questions like the study of greeting and addressing formulas” (Péntek 1988a: 104), therefore “we need more and more descriptions, professional descriptions” (Péntek 1988b: 62).

Probably the only topic of “ethnography of speaking” in the case of linguistics and ethnography is the greeting and addressing formulas mentioned by Péntek and the related ritualised attitudes. Among the works of linguistic approach, the ones written by Ladó (1959) and Kiss (1993) are the most profound, but they present no sociolinguistic points of view, their major aim being the collection of all formulas in the case of a village (Kiss) and of the whole Hungarian-speaking area (Ladó). Works of semiotics and theory of communication (Hidasi 1975, Papp 1980) are more interested in the theoretic approach than in the context, the situation of the speech acts and the variety of speech acts and events³.

The topic is not entirely unknown in social ethnography either, but except one profound study, only two synthesizing works help us in this question. The *Ethnographical Encyclopaedia* discusses this question under the term *greeting*. I quote: “an expression or gesture of politeness which at the meeting of two people signals the willingness to get connected and to continue the communication. In more isolated communities it is

¹ The fieldwork was carried out between April 18–17 and July 10–20. 2003, within the programme *Contemporary Research in Moldavian Csángó Villages* lead by Ferenc Pozsony. Besides him, I would like to thank all those who helped me with my work, namely: Péter Berta, Vilmos Keszeg and Andrea Szalai.

² For the Hungarian ethnography of speech and sociolinguistics see Péntek 1988a and 1988b; Pap–Szépe 1975; Kiss 1996; Szalai 1999; For international literature translated to Hungarian see Wardhaugh 1995; Hymes 1975 and 1979, and – partially – Crystal 1998.

³ I took in consideration only the Hungarian material. For the formulas used by the Gypsies from Hungary see for example Bódi 1995.

a request, expressing the belonging to the community. Besides all these, it can relate to wealth, age, sex, making clear the status of the people involved. [...] It can contain the following components: a) some traditional greeting formula, b) a gesture, c) *a text referring to the momentary activity of the two parts* [emphasis added – V. G.]. About the latter, the aspect that is the focus of the present study, we learn, “Although it refers to momentary activity, traditional formulas also developed differently from region to region and these often became stereotypes. This is supported by the fact that in many regions people do not answer to orienting questions. These formulas rarely match with the others; usually they stand on their own.” (Jávor–Morvay 1982: 437)

The other work, the eighth volume of *Hungarian Ethnography*, deals with issues of social ethnography. In the parts called “The Verbal Dimension of Social Relations” and “Forms of Showing Respect in Verbal Communication. Greeting” of the chapter *The Morals and Attitudes of the Hungarian Peasant* author Kata Jávor has an interesting starting point: “speech in the traditional peasant society was different from what it is today. Primarily it was not the tool for self-expression, but of keeping relations on a friendly level without revealing too much information” (Jávor 2000: 680). She also mentions that, in general, the younger used to greet the older and women used to greet men, but this is changing in our days. Another general rule is that “walking people greet those who are standing, as visitors greet the host. Passers-by greet those »who are sitting under the window«. Solitary walkers greet the group.” (Jávor 2000: 681) Concerning the lack or non-reception of greetings, it is obviously the expression of a *negative* message, of anger, of personal bad relationship, of social accusation (for example in the case of pregnant girls) (Jávor 2000: 683).

About the parts of the greeting, the author states: “The verbal part of the greeting besides the concrete greeting had a specific *formula*, too, mostly a friendly remark about the situation. People used to consider that only the greeting is not enough to express proper respect and friendliness, so an unimportant extra question has to follow: »Good morning, Uncle Steve. Lookin’ around?«” We have specific data from the beginning of the 19th century related to this fact (Jávor 2000: 681).

The conclusions of the author: “this extra part of the greeting, besides the manifestation of friendliness, had a hidden function, *the gathering of information*. And it was up to every individual how much this part could be explored. This ritual phrase gave space to the individual’s ingenuity. Often the greeted person wanted to avoid inquiries. [...] therefore greeting was not only an innocent question of policy, but a communicational tool that influenced lots of things. But this role is disappearing in rural areas, because more and more people do not even know each other, and among younger generations greeting takes on different functions (Jávor 2000: 682–683).

Further interesting data is provided by Attila Paládi-Kovács, who presents the custom of “calling” based on the writings of Árpád Lajos: “In the rural societies of several regions we can discover the *calling* which replaces the greeting. Instead of *How are you? Good morning!* people greet each other with short questions and answers, showing that they noticed the other inhabitant (for example: *Wondering around? Going away? Chatting?*). This cus-

tom had different variants and rules according to the social status of the people who met. Some of these customs survived until the 1950s or 1960s (Paládi-Kovács 2000: 165).

These summaries reveal many important questions. First of all, they make it obvious that *forms of greeting can take up different forms (“calling”) from what we usually know in our urban culture, and these forms, as a part of verbal culture, are closely related to certain phenomena known from folklore: they exist as stereotypes between the frames of tradition, they survive from generation to generation in several variants and are transmitted through socialization.* The mentioned sources also lighten the deficiencies: this topic is only known on the level of mentioning in Hungarian ethnographic research, so Kata Jávör had to work only with fragments of information, because there are hardly any profound descriptions, especially regarding functionality. Anyway, descriptions lead to the conclusion that, like other phenomena of culture, these acts present variants in time and space, which are mostly unknown. And finally, descriptions which contain the presentation of the contexts as well are ever so rare.

As a refreshing exception, we can quote one single study: the researchers from KAM Miercurea Ciuc analysed “one type of greeting from the whole system of formulas used in rural societies, and that is the *greetings used during agrarian works*” and the transformation of the related verbal and gesture stereotypes.⁴ I shall return to the question of conclusions at the end of the study. But now I want to conclude that if we consider ethnography, as Goodenough said, the description of a culture determining “what a foreign person has to know in order to be able to play any role in any scene set out by the local society” (Goodenough 1957: 167 quoted by Frake 1979: 267), then we can say that Hungarian ethnography and anthropology are far away from this “ethnography”: we could hardly play the role of a local inhabitant on the scene of greetings.

The birth of this present study is partly motivated by the circumstances mentioned above. With the title of my study and with the occasional outlining I signalled that I want to focus on the custom named by Attila Paládi-Kovács – based on the local use – “calling” and compiled by Kata Jávör under point c): I will analyse all connective formulas used by the Moldavian Csángós as the so-called extra phrase of the greeting or as a replacement for it. First I would like to present several speech acts of one speech event with the possible outlining of the context of interaction, and at the end I will try to step beyond concrete examples and to place the analysed phenomenon in a more general, larger social and linguistic context.

⁴ Oláh Csíki–Oláh 1987: 109.

After I finished the present study, Laura Iancu and Katalin Benedek drew my attention to the following writings: Jenő Bilibók *A köszönés Pusztinán* and Péter Trunchi *Köszönésformák*, which were published in the periodicals *Moldvai Magyarság* and *Csángó Tükör*. These works, in spite of the fact that they were produced without too much scientific demand, complete my work with interesting data and show an increasing interest for this topic.

“The medium of the event: a Sunday afternoon in a village. A time when everything is different as compared to the weekdays or major feasts. The streets are not empty, not even for a second, but not crowded either. It is the same in the case of public spaces. This time everybody goes somewhere, comes from somewhere, alone, with the family or neighbours or friends. People visiting neighbours, newly married couples visiting parents, people chatting at the confectioner’s or in a pub, watching a movie in the local club – these are the main forms of activity. Everybody walks slowly, almost waiting to meet and chat with someone. Conversations do not have their pragmatic nature as during weekdays. »How are you?«, »What are you doing?«, »Where are you going?« – these and similar questions and answers can be heard at every step. Beside these maybe already happened things are revealed. The meeting, the talking, the whole communication shows a kind of “prodigal” character, rarely submitted to concrete, practical aims. It just serves for – and this seems very important – the formulation of the existence of communal rules, roles and communicational attitudes by the simple presence in the public space of the village and by seemingly occasional and superficial communication.” (Bíró 1997: 120–121)

The description of the “everyday humour” from the Village Corund, which serves as an introduction for the following, shows many resemblances with the next situation. On the Easter Monday of 2003 I was heading to the 11 o’clock mass together with my host, Anna Puskás. I noticed that she had a word for everyone we met, no matter if they were standing before their portals as a group, if they were walking in the opposite direction, or we just passed them. Almost without looking at them, without waiting for an answer, she just threw a few words to them more with an affirmative rather than interrogative intonation: “Sitting there”, “Talking”, “You’re heading, too” or just “You too”. It was obvious that the speech act did not request an answer. It was already included the meaning “I know what you are doing” and “let me guess what you are doing”, just as the answers included meanings like “whatever you say, you know it, anyway” or “the same as you, you know it anyway”. According to the actual context, the “calling” had different forms. If people were coming facing us: “You’re back” or “Walking down/up” meaning “you’re coming from church” or “you were somewhere else”; and sometimes – turning out to be people not too close to her – she added “Praise”.

I observed this phenomenon during our walk. Then, on our way back home – lead by a sudden thought – I recorded all formulas used by her, partly with the context of their use. However, all formulas mentioned in this paper are material recorded “in function”, and with the exception of a short escapade to Gârlenii de Sus⁵, were heard during a half hour walk from the church to the house.

The circumstances of data collection limited my possibilities. All happened during our walk, and my informant had no idea (at least at the beginning) what was happening.

⁵ Gârlenii de Sus: a part of Lespezi, once an independent village.

Therefore she continued her walk all the way, without waiting for me to write down all I heard, or to ask questions related to what I was doing. I wrote down the used formulas, but by the time I caught up with her, she was a few metres ahead, and sometimes another speech act took place which I could not get. In these cases my colleague from Cluj-Napoca, Albert Zsolt Jakab, memorized all that I lost, and dictated it to me as soon as it was possible.⁶ I still managed to ask my informant a few interpreting questions on the way and also to briefly talk about these formulas.

Anyway, my notes are far from being profound or complete; they show all the difficulties of a starting fieldwork. At this stage I did not pay attention to many things, for example to the accents used by speakers, to the variety of gestures, I rarely noted the answers like “yes” or “yo” (“há”) and not knowing the inhabitants of the village, I could not reveal if the speakers were relatives, friends, acquaintances or else. Even though I think that my notes reflect the forms, the occurrence and the frequency of these speech acts, thus the context itself. In the following I shall present the speech acts in the order of their appearance, reconstructing a virtual recording.

We were heading to Gârlenii de Sus to visit Anna Jánó, the famous informant of ethnographer Zoltán Kallós. First my informant spoke to a woman sitting on a bench: “Sitting outside”. Without waiting for (or having received) an answer, we continued our way. Next we met a group of people, and she remarked “Talking”.⁷ When we arrived to our destination, we “shouted in”⁸ from the door like “Are you home”. After a short visit and chat we returned home. Once in a while I stopped to take some pictures. On one occasion, my informant caught a group of women in her way and at the same time a woman coming from the opposite direction hailed, “Don’t take long steps, because it will turn out bad!” (meaning that it is more elegant to use short steps). In this remark there is more than simple contact, it is also a humorous call to keep the communal norms and attitudes with the approximate meaning: “Watch out, they are taking a picture of you, behave as expected!”

The next group was greeted with the formula “Gathered”, and a walking group of youngsters with “What are you doing?” Aunt Anna explained the use of this modern form of greeting by the fact that the younger people “use only this”, reflecting the change related to age groups. Next there was a “Chatting” and a “Walking down”. When we met a group of girls, she called upon them with the formula “Walking”, explaining it by saying that young people usually *walk*, while the elders *go somewhere*, because they have things to do.

A coming man, a relative, greeted her with “God bless (you)”, and her answer was the same “God bless you”. Then we stopped at an ice-cream man. “Eating, aren’t you” – said to us an older woman, seeing that we were all enjoying the product.

⁶ I use this occasion to thank him for his help given during the fieldwork.

⁷ Because these formulas were pronounced as statements as much as questions, I will not use any punctuation marks.

⁸ In these villages the correct thing to do is to wait for permission of the owner to enter the yard and the house. That is why people “shout in” when they visit someone. As an independent speech event, this would also be worth a separate analysis.

After we finished our ice-cream, we continued our way. “Sunbath” – continued the row of her remarks talking to a group sitting on the bench. A “Were you” followed, referring to the fact that the person was also at the church. Then a woman called on us by “Where’re you heading?” Shortly we met Aunt Anna’s grandson walking in the middle of a group and wearing untraditional sunglasses. “Outer jump out, inner stay in” – she said to him, probably with a reference to the communal norms and values that should be kept. After this we arrived to the grocer’s. “Watching” – hailed Aunt Anna the shopkeeper. As I found out, this formula is used also in Lespezi and Pustiana only in the situation when someone is staying after the fence or in the shop, watching passers by from *the inside*.

Another passer-by greeted us with “Praise”, and the answer sounded like: “Forever. You’re going, too” (to the church). They did not know each other too well, that is why they used the more formal greeting – she explained to me. She could hardly finish her explanations, because an old man spoke to us: “You’ve been down”. Then another person said “Coming home, aren’t you”. “Yes, you’re going, too” – was the answer.

We were standing on the last corner before home, and Aunt Anna turned to her shopping relative: “You’re buying, right” Then she went on and spoke to one of the neighbours who was feeding her chicken: “Feeding”. And when we were in front of the house, she stated: “Let’s go inside, because our neck got longer”, meaning that we were hungry. This is how our trip ended.

After lunch we went out again. Aunt Anna started her automatic “calling”. “You’re not cold, right” – she said to those sitting on the bench. On the next one there was a woman sitting alone being addressed with: “Alone? Here we go again”, because we already met her earlier. Then other formulas followed: “Talking, right” and “Sit out, right”. A very surprising remark was addressed to her coming grandson, who was wearing an earring: “Ugly you”. When I asked for an explanation, she said “what else can I say, when his father said the same thing?”

“Coming?” – said someone coming up on opposite side of the road. “Yes, we go up” – answered Aunt Anna. Another step further there was a mother with her baby in a pram. I wondered what Aunt Anna could say to this situation, and the answer came – for our amusement – in a few seconds: “You’re pushing”. In front of an old house there was a group of people. “You’re having a meeting?” – Aunt Anna asked them. “We came to the neighbours” – was the answer. We entered a house and stayed until the evening. On our way home it was already dark, we met a few people but I could not make a note of the answers. But the existing data – in my opinion – is quite relevant. Let us try to draw some conclusions based on the collected material!

During our way home from the church (which can be considered as a *speech situation* or even more a *speech event* – see Hymes 1979: 243–245) 21 speech acts took place, then during a 10 minute walk another 8. Calculating an average, we can say that usually there was one speech act every minute! From one event to the next one there was very little time, therefore permanent “attention” was needed: in the public space of the village the individual has to observe everything and everybody, and has to state this in a verbal formula according to the communal norms.

This very high number of speech acts was probably also a consequence of the “festival season”: during this period, going to the Easter mass or coming from it, almost the whole village is in motion and “calling” in front of their houses. During these occasions, when presence in the public sphere is practically obligatory, the people – or in the local use: the “world” – get in touch with each other more often than usual. Thus we can get a more concentrated, ideal model of the characteristic attitudes and different “sayings”. It is obvious that on usual Sundays or on week-days relations are not this mobile, motion is not this high, but the latent rules of ritualised forms and relations are clearer.

Analysing the verbal manifestations, the speech acts several things occur to us. First of all, it is clear that the act usually refers to the other person’s *momentary action*, recording and fixing it at the same time: “You’re pushing”, “Feeding”, “You’re buying, right”, “Sunbath”, “Eating, aren’t you”, “Chatting”, “Sit out, right”. This is definitely no direct or indirect search for information, but much more like *consolidating* information received in another way. It also signals that “yes, I see you, I know who you are and what you are doing” and “I am doing the same thing”. The most simplified formulas like “You, too” show the same, because they include the unsaid meaning “I am doing this and this, and I see, that you are doing the same”. Therefore by these formulas people who know each other and know communal life, strengthen their everyday relations. That is why in most cases no answer is requested (except the occasional “yo”) and the “question” is said at least as much in an affirmative intonation as in an interrogative one. This also explains why among the collected material only one or two contain real information or real question formulating and answer giving. One of these was “Where’re you heading?” followed by no answer, and – if I really stretch it – “You’re having a meeting?” followed by the answer “We came to the neighbours”, the latter can be considered a affirmation, “yes”, because there is no new information in there.

Besides the recreation of the common world, these speech acts occasionally contain some kind of – not always hidden – positioning towards certain values. The most illustrative example must be the judging of the grandson who was wearing earrings (“Ugly you”), of the youngsters wearing sun glasses (“Outer jump out, inner stay in!”) or the warning directed to the women who were being photographed (“don’t take long steps, because it will turn out bad!”). So everything that happens in the closed local society happens in front of the village’s approving or disapproving eye. Therefore the speech act is not only some kind of “innocent” recording of all that happens, but the reminder for the characters involved that *whatever they do, it is done in front of the community*, and they must obey the communal norms – unless they want to be talked about in the village. Even so, the formulas with a *direct positioning* are very few in number.

Finally, it is also obvious that the “real” greetings like “Praise!” or “God bless (you)!” are much less frequent than the other “calling” formulas. The two quoted ones were heard only once, and that results in a 10 to 1 ratio. And this refers to the absolute importance of the callings related to greetings, as formulated by Tinka Nyisztor as well: *You have to greet everyone, but calling is a kind of reward. [...] I consider him/her a more important person. [...] Then, the very person is automatically a close relative or acquaintance.*

We arrived to the second part of this study. As I already mentioned, I was not able to continue my fieldwork, therefore I asked for the help of two Csángó ethnographers who are currently staying in Budapest – Tinka Nyisztor (in the following NyT) and Laura Iancu (IL) – to complete and to valuate my material.⁹ For the following I have to thank them for their help and attention.

First of all, according to both of them, the name of this action is “speaking instead of greeting” (IL), but the term is used more like a verb than a noun: “speaking to somebody”, “speaking to him” or “they went and they spoke to”¹⁰. The fact that greeting (in fact speaking) is requested appeared several times and in several forms during our conversation: “If I pass someone and I don’t speak, he/she would say that »she is so proud that she won’t speak to people on the way«”. (IL) “Do you speak to people when you pass them?” – parents used to ask their children. “I saw your daughter and she spoke very nicely to us” – people might say to the parents. “I met Anna’s son [everyone knows that he has been living in the city for five years and rarely visits the village] yesterday and he spoke so very nicely”. (IL)

People who do not speak to the others showing a very rude attitude, are corrected right away or spoken about in the community. With children and young persons the correction takes place immediately, while with adults gossip is more common. Or maybe the husband would say to his wife at home, that: “teach your child to speak” (IL).

The last example raises the question of *learning* in the case of “speaking” as a genre of folklore or a cultural attitude. “One thing they will teach you: you have to speak to people in the village” – IL formulates the most general rule. Teaching, as we could see above, refers to the obligation of speaking, while the concrete forms and formulas – as any other folklore genre – are learnt by socialization. An interesting story is revealed in this respect by NyT, whose sister got married and moved to Sfântu Gheorghe. When her nephews visited her in Pustiana, she instructed them like “Listen here, this is a village. You have to greet everyone here, like: »Praise the sacred name of Jesus Christ!«” But after a short time they returned quite confused: “Tinka, people do not wait until we greet them, they just ask us: »whose are you«, »who is your grandma«” – which shows the function of this gesture along with one possible meaning: the search for information and the positioning of the very person in the local society. It is not accidental that NyT finished her instructing work with the following advice: “If you want them to buy you some ice cream (to accept them as close relatives who need attention), you must say »Of Dani-Péter-Magdó«”.

⁹ Actually Tinka Nyisztor is writing her PhD thesis, while Laura Iancu is a student in the second year at the Department of Ethnography of the University of Szeged. My consultation with Tinka Nyisztor took place on the 28th of February 2005, and with Laura Iancu on the 5th of March 2005, in both cases the place being the Research Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

¹⁰ Péter Trunchi stated the same in the case of Răcăciuni (see Trunchi 2005: 15).

In this context the absence of this gesture is a rude, impolite action: “Not speaking to a person means clear conflict” (NyT). In other cases it reflects communal judgment or at least confusion. Another interesting story reflects the same thing. NyT had been living in Sfântu Gheorghe for some years and she got accustomed to some things that in her native village were still impolite gestures, like wearing short pants during agricultural works in the summer. Once she was helping her mother back in Pustiana, wearing short pants of course, when the men passing by did not greet them as usual, just lowered their eyes and went by. “My mother noticed them all and observed that »this man did not say a word, that man did not greet us« – because it was something immoral. They were ashamed of my shame”. But this was more the sign of confusion than judgment: “They were acting as if they did not see me, although the distance was not a problem, so they would have to greet us. Anyway, women did speak to us. But men did not.” This led her to the conclusion that they were confused and they expressed it in the mentioned way.

Speaking of the context of calling, it is obvious that the precondition of the speech event – as it was underlined by both NyT and IL – was the presence in the village, the knowledge of everyone and every custom and norm down to the last detail. “I know about every person where he/she lives, who he/she is related to, how old he/she is, what his/her name is. I know that he/she comes from home, and I can see in which direction he/she is walking, so *I can place her in space*. If he/she is walking away from home, I ask him/her: »where are you going«, »coming«, »where are you heading«” (IL). “You have to know the members of your community really well to use these formulas in an appropriate way. For example, we are going to church, so we are going in the same direction, and we know each other. Then I say »You are coming«, »you are going«?” (NyT). “Whoever is greeting, calling has to know [the other person and the situation], so he/she can throw a word or two. If I go out to the field and others are coming back, I know, I can see the empty bag, the tools, and I say »home«. It might be not true, but it is the most probable. Or I say »that’s it for today«. If I meet my neighbour, I will say »you’ve made it, aunt Mary«, »where were you«, »where did you go«” (IL).

Exactly because of this preliminary knowledge the calling with strangers does not work – cannot work. We shall get back to Frake’s quotation: can a stranger play the role of a local inhabitant on the stage of everyday life of greetings? “If I know where a person lives, I can say »where have you been«. But if I am a stranger, no matter how direct I try to be, I will fail. In these cases the addressed is lowering his/her eyes, does not know what to do!” (NyT) If there is a stranger in the village, it will be a stranger forever for some people, and in their case the code is different, they will greet and be greeted like “good morning”, “good afternoon”. “If he/she says something else, he/she will be stopped immediately: »who are you, who is your father«, »well, who are you anyway?« – because locals might think that he/she is an old acquaintance, who had changed a lot during a long period of time, and he cannot be recognized.” (IL). The precondition of the speech situation must be the fact that “I have to know the person and his/her place in the local community” (IL), and vice versa, too.

That is why if the locals go some place else, they will also use other formulas like “good morning”. IL for example used only the mentioned formula whenever she went to another village not really far from her own. The custom of calling does not work in someone’s own village in the case of local “outsiders” as the priest or the teacher. IL said that even if she is practically the local priest’s neighbour, she never “calls” on him, either in Hungarian, or in Romanian. The “official” greeting must be “Praise” or “May God give you a good morning”.

As concerns the forms of greeting, usually “we ask about the momentary activity of the other person: »hoeing«, »mowing« etc. Or: »can you carry on«, »rest for a while«. The answers will reflect the questions, using the same verbs: »we can carry on«, »we will rest«” (IL).¹¹ The calling “always refers to the actions of the other person. For example, if I meet a man who is drawing some water, I will say »drawing water«. I do not want to know anything but I know him well enough to solve this with a simple greeting. Or some men are working on a roof. I pass in front of the house. »Covering?« The answer: »covering«. I could walk past without a word because they are far enough so they would not mind.” (NyT)

With the last sentence we arrive to the question of distance between the actors of the speech act. It is obvious that beyond a certain distance greeting is impossible, or at least pointless. “Greeting is valid only if the other person can hear it. It would be a shame to yell »praise«.” But everything is determined by distance, because “If I am on the fields, and I cannot see the other person, but I know who is there, I can shout to him. The distances are big there, but sometimes I shout from afar: »what are you doing«. But if the distance is too big, I won’t. It might happen that in the church some people would say: »well-well«, but I didn’t recognize them, or I didn’t know whose land that was.” (NyT) The same thing was formulated by IL as it follows: “If I am walking on a hill and I see people in their gardens, but they cannot be identified, I won’t say a word. Because things do not degenerate into shouting”. Therefore in the case of a big distance, the calling, the greeting depends on the context and the interpersonal relations of the actors involved in the speech act: every person decides for himself/herself to greet the other or not, undertaking the related consequences.

Talking about short distances, there are three basic situations: a) passing by someone; b) meeting oncoming persons; c) catching up with someone. A further d) situation might be when arriving somewhere (at someone’s house, at church, at the store), where there are other people already, that is entering a closed space from the outside. The rules differ from situation to situation. In situation a) it is always the persons who are passing by the others who greet first, so the general rule mentioned by Kata Jávör, according to which the persons in motion are the ones to greet the standing or sitting ones is valid in this place, too.

¹¹ Péter Trunchi reports the same in the village of Răcăciuni: “These greeting formulas are very natural for the inhabitants, as well as the fact that we ask about the momentary activity of the other person. Maybe this is the most common one, expressing that we realized who he/she was and what he/she was doing” (Trunchi 2005: 15)

In situation b) we are dealing with a more complex case, when both actors are in motion, coming from opposite directions. Just like in our “urban” culture, other factors will decide in this case (age, sex, social status) who will be the first to do the calling, the greeting. According to the norms, youngsters will greet the elder or in other words: “the younger person will greet the older person, the inferior one will greet the superior one. If there are two persons of the same category, very often they will greet each other in the same time” (IL). But within this general rule there are several variants as well as a few exceptions: “It might happen the other way, too. An older person will not wait until I say to him »Praise«, and in this case I have to tell him/her what I am doing, where I am going, because he/she really wants to know!” (NyT) I saw a similar case myself, when Anna Puskás greeted the oncoming group of youngsters with “What are you doing?” Opposite to our urban culture, in this culture there is not a request that men should greet women first. It is more the age and the personal relation between them to decide who is going to greet first. Due to these situations, IL had to meditate on the rules when she tried to explain the principles of this act: “of course there will be a greeting, but when and who’s going to do it first I don’t know”.

A separate question shall be the distance between the two persons, the so-called speech threshold beyond which it is impolite to remain silent. I can recall a certain case when at Lespezi two women waited until the last moment to greet each other. They almost passed by each other, and had to almost turn back to greet. NyT and IL commented on this case in a similar way: “both of them were curious if the other will greet her” (IL) and “neither of them knew what to do with the other” (NyT). Anyway, distance is determined by my aims with the oncoming person. “If I want to stop the other person, I greet him/her at the distance of at least three metres, in order to have sufficient time. Or if I want to keep the conversation short, I will postpone the greeting. But you don’t wait for too long either; about two metres is the appropriate distance. Otherwise it will look like a negative sign: you were not going to greet him/her, but finally opened your mouth.” (NyT)

However, in these cases – just like in our urban culture – eye contact has an important role, and the fact that one person wants to force the other to greet first, aims the recognition of his/her superior status. But looking at each other, just like any other body gesture, is not obligatory at all. Quite often people do not raise their eyes, just maybe in the last moment and for only a moment, preparing to speak. “Maybe I won’t even look at the person”, “Eye contact and recognition are not important”, “I stare at the ground”, “In my subconscious I know that he/she will greet me. Maybe I just kick a pebble or I sing something, but he/she will take it as a greeting” – explained IL. This rule is not available for close relatives or acquaintances: “I look into the eyes of a relative or godfather and I call him by his name”. If I do not know who the coming person is, “I take a look at him/her and then I greet him/her”, so “if we recognize each other, we speak to each other” (IL). In relation with these close relatives and acquaintances there occurs *stopping*, as a possible consequence. But this is not too frequent: “they stop if something ties them together”, if he/she “is a relative, acquaintance, neighbour” or if “there is some kind of relation between them because of an actual case”, thus “if they want to stop for a reason” (IL). Otherwise people just greet each other and move on without stopping.

Situation c) is quite similar to situation b) presented above: “when I catch up with someone and pass him/her by, I speak to him/her exactly when we are side by side” (IL). The rule in this case is that the one who is passing by will greet the other person. “If I am faster than someone else and I catch up with him/her, and I know that he/she is going home, I say »finished«, »where have you been«, »coming«”. Anyway in Arini you have to use the person’s name, too. The speech act is polite and complete only with the name of the other person: “coming, uncle Steve” or “finished, godmother” and so on. Passing someone does not make eye contact really possible, and the fact that we catch someone up, meaning that we are in a hurry, makes stopping and a longer conversation rather impossible.

Finally there is situation d), when someone arrives at a place where there are already others. According to the context we can imagine numerous variants. Arriving at church, people can greet some persons sitting nearby: “you’re here”, but obviously cannot greet the whole congregation. In a consulting-room, in a smaller place featuring more or less strange people, the question needs a different formula. Someone who enters might use a formal greeting like “good morning”, “praise” or something similar and not talk to anyone. Or he/she might speak to someone known, a neighbour, a person of the same age and so on. In this case greeting becomes unnecessary. “If I speak to someone, I replaced the greeting, too”. “In the consulting-room for example I look at the people, there are many. I might replace greeting with: »you’re here«, »what are we doing«, in which all present all included”. (NyT)

We might raise the question if calling requests any answers. The rightfulness of the question is supported by the fact that calling is as much an affirmation as a question; at least we cannot divide them based on the intonation used. As I can recall, at Lespezi calling was not always followed by an answer¹², but IL had no doubt that at Arini there is always one. Even if a person is passing by in a hurry, without stopping, there is always a “yes” or “yo”, the answer “cannot be forgotten”. Thus the norm is to always answer the calling¹³, and further observations will have to decide if practice follows the norms or – as in so many cases – theory and practice do not match.

As we already mentioned, the answer usually mirrors the question. If the verb is “talking” or “chatting”, the answer will repeat it: “Talking, godmother?” “Yes, we are talking”. At other questions, like: “Where are you heading?” when the verb cannot be repeated, the answer is usually a neutral one: “Well, down there” or “Well, I’ve finished” or “I was visiting neighbours”. Because as the question “is discrete, has no aim, is just propriety of conduct” and “I don’t really want to find out where she was”, the answer too is discrete, without aim, being just a propriety of conduct – and this fact transforms calling from a simple act of communication into a ritualised cultural attitude, resulting in a folklore-like custom of the speech act.

¹² As I already mentioned, my notes are not really complete, so I shall rely more on the opinions of NyT and IL than on my own memory.

¹³ The same conclusions can be found in Jenő Bilibók’s work as well (see Bilibók 2005: 19).

Of course there can be some exceptions. As I already mentioned, sometimes older people do not wait until youngsters greet them, and in these cases they really want to know what the others are doing, so it is a case of search for social information. Even though people can say “I am doing my job”, so he/she will understand that they “are not in a mood to chat” (NyT).

Regarding the relations between calling and greeting, we could see that theoretically they are used together, but practically they stand for each other, one is replaced by the other, expressing different types of relations. IL made a concise summary, saying that calling is used “every day, related to a momentary action, regardless of the scene”, while greeting is used when “I have nothing to ask about”. As we could see, calling supposes a closer relationship (close relative, acquaintance, good friend) than greeting. If people do not know a single thing about the other person from the village, they can still use formulas like “coming” or “going”, but with people from the city or with local “strangers” the only way is the “real” greeting: “good morning”, “good evening” and so on.

Above I presented the “calling”, that is the ritualised and stereotyped speech acts in a Moldavian Csángó village based on a specific speech situation and speech event, the everyday encounters of the local inhabitants. Finally, I would like to place this in a more general context.

The founding father of fieldwork based modern anthropology and linguistics, Bronislaw Malinowski was the first to pay attention to the so called phatic function of the language in the year 1923. In his opinion language is not only the tool for transmitting ideas, but in many cases it serves the building and sustenance of social relations. I quote: “Phatic [...] a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words [...] words in Phatic Communion [...] fulfill a social function and that is their principal aim.... Each utterance is an act serving the direct aim of binding hearer to speaker by a tie of some social sentiment or other. Once more language appears to us in this function not as an instrument of reflection but as a mode of action [...] Phatic communion... serves to establish bonds of personal union between people brought together by the mere need of companionship and does not serve any purpose of communicating ideas...” (Malinowski 1923: 315–316).

Malinowski’s results were further developed by one of the major individualities of modern linguistics, Roman Jakobson, who distinguishes six functions of language (emotive, referential, poetic, phatic, meta-language, connective), and who stated: “There are messages with a primary aim of creating, lengthening or interrupting communication, controlling if the channel is working (*Hello, can you hear me?*), raising the attention of the speakers or assuring their continuous attention (*Are you there?* Or with the words of Shakespeare: *Lend me your ears!* And on the other end of the channel: *Aha!*) This focusing on contact, or with the words of Malinowski, phatic function can be expressed

through numerous variants of ritualised formulas, by entire dialogues, which have their only aim in extending the act of communication. [...] The endeavour to start and sustain an act of communication is a characteristic of twittering birds. Therefore phatic function of language is the only one aspect showing similarities with their language. At the same time this is the first verbal function mastered by children. They are ready to communicate before being able to emit or receive informative communications.” (Jakobson 1972: 238)

Following Jakobson’s steps, many scholars tried to develop further the theory of the functions of language in many ways.¹⁴ Hymes for example mentions the function of “focusing on contact” as one of the seven functions of language (Hymes 1975: 118–119), underlining that “usually in a speech event we have more than one function in action, even if we take in consideration only one actor. Jakobson solves this problem by saying that in his opinion all functions are in action each and every time, and one certain speech event is characterized by one specific hierarchy of functions [...] It would be a big mistake for us to analyse one specific speech situation as if all components determined one single function...” (Hymes 1975: 124–125). Then he affirms about phatic function that “Anyway, if phatic function is regarded as a speech function in the group’s attitude, it must be empirically identified, and its characteristics such as actors and situations, must be named. Even if phatic function were universal, the cases of its appearance and its importance must be different from one group to another, and ethnographically it cannot be considered as a single component.” (Hymes 1975: 127)

There is no use or need for further search in the literature of phatic communication. It should be enough to state that nowadays in sociolinguistics affirmations on phatic utterances are quite commonplace. Here is an example: “we do not use these for their content, but for their emotional values, because they show that a person is willing to talk to another, and he/she opens or keeps a communication channel open. Phatic utterances practically do not communicate anything; they are more like possibilities of communication in cases when someone has something to say regardless of the nature of the consequences.” (Wardhaugh 1995: 257). Moreover, “communication mostly serves the sustenance of society, more precisely, one of the functions of communication is to sustain society. Language is used for the sustenance of reality [...] and the aim (of ethnology and ethno-methodology) is to analyse how people work together in sustaining reality and how they use language as a tool for this purpose” (Wardhaugh 1995: 214). In other words “research of ethnography of speaking [...] regards discourse as one of the major »places« of recreating and continuing patterns of knowledge and social actions” (Duranti 1988 quoted by Szalai 1999: 273).

The works of Griffin, the representative of the related science of the theory of communication, were written in the same spirit (Griffin 2001). Among the theories of communication the author names seven traditions or schools of research, but there is only *one* socio-cultural tradition that regards communication as the creator and embodiment of

¹⁴ In Hungarian see for example Robinson 1977.

social reality. “Socio-cultural tradition is based on the supposition that people reproduce culture over and over again through speaking. Most of us believe that reality is mirrored by words. According to the socio-cultural approach very often this happens the other way. Our image about reality is strongly influenced by the language we have been using since our childhood.” (Griffin 2001: 41) Then the author states: “Contemporary scholars in socio-culture affirm that »the creation, sustenance, reproduction and transformation of reality is realized through the process of communication«. In other words, people who are talking to each other are constructing their own social world all together.” (Griffin 2001: 43)

After all this it will be probably no surprise that the explanations of the phenomenon we referred to as “calling” can be searched for inside these frames. Related to all written above, the function of calling is phatic contact: the creation and sustenance of a common everyday reality, the cultivation of social relations, the expression of good will and respect. Each and every data refers to it: the ritualised and stereotyped character of speech events, the mixture of affirmative and interrogative, the “mirroring” answers given to questions, and the fact that people have to speak to each other again, even if they did so a few minutes earlier, because “the only rule or logic is that, if two people meet, they have to call on each other” (IL). “There is no such thing that I neither call on the person, nor greet him/her”, but if “I called on him/her, I saved my honour and showed my respect” (NyT).

In this context phatic communication reflects beyond itself, showing the human relations of a certain society. That is why people can conclude many things from the forms and ways of greeting and calling. “When people are optimistic, they greet you first and quite merrily. In times of conflict and confusion people are staring at the ground and use only formal greetings »Praise!« So the way of greeting is in fact a means of getting in touch with somebody, depending on how it is formulated. You can always find out more from these greetings, callings than from what is happening on the street.” (NyT)

In fact phatic communication is a polyvalent phenomenon, being accompanied by the exchange of information from time to time. In these cases, as we could see, the fact is signalled by the *exchange of roles*, the person hungry for information will redirect the relation, will not wait for the other one, but will be the first to greet and to ask – this way interaction discourse becomes a transactional discourse. Therefore several variants are possible. In the case of the Moldavian Csángós, as we already quoted: “I have to tell him/her what I am doing, where I am going, because he/she really wants to know!” (NyT) I also know from Ilona Nagy that in some places you could avoid even these situations! Like 50 years ago in the village of Nagyfödémes (Hungary) the stereotype answer for the “where were you” stereotype question was “sticking salt in your ass, counting farts” (meaning “go f**k yourself!”)¹⁵ However unbelievable it might seem, this answer was not insulting, in spite of the fact that it was mostly used by elders as an answer to the youngsters, expressing that it was none of his/her business. Anyway, the important thing is

¹⁵ Ilona Nagy has not heard this formula in the last 30 years.

that the “where were you” stereotyped question was also known there, and the avoiding answer shows that it had a phatic connecting role.

One question seeks for an answer at the end: phatic communication is a characteristic of the Moldavian Csángós only or generally of the Hungarian peasantry living (or who used to live) in a traditional way? This cannot be the aim of the present study, and neither can be the presentation of the neighbouring people’s formulas in the context of the ethnography of speaking. But even a superficial glimpse can show us that similar customs are regular almost everywhere. Thanks to Péter Berta I know that Gypsy men from Nyárádkarácsonyfalva often greet each other with “You’re up?” and the answer is “Once again” (meaning “God helped me to get up once again”), while women say “What are you doing?” and answer with “Sitting”. For the upcoming Romanian and Polish data I will have to thank Vilmos Keszeg. In the methodology and questionnaire of Romanian rural research, Henri Stahl included in the chapter “The norms of human behaviour” the following question: “Do they greet each other with the same formula, or is it replaced with speaking?” (Stahl 1937: 177) Writing about the Polish peasant, Thomas and Znaniecki mentioned the ritual nature of social contact and the related socially fixed ways of speech (for example “we have lovely weather”). (Thomas–Znaniecki 2000: 257–258). The conclusion is that the phenomenon is known in the Romanian and Polish practice, too. The English formula, “how do you do?”, followed by the same answer, is also well known. There is a similar French example: “Ça va?”, which implies the obligatory answer “Ça va?”. Analyzing the greeting formulas and answers used by the peasants of the Regency of Smolensk, an early 20th-century author (Croon 1905) stated – twenty five years before Marcel Mauss! – that these fulfil the function of giving and returning a gift, having a role in building social relations¹⁶. And there are probably more similar examples.

But we already exhausted the given frames. There is nothing left but to end our study with an anecdote of Vilmos Keszeg, which illuminates the essence of phatic greetings: “This was also the practice in my childhood universe. There has been a Romanian joke in our family for a few years. Sometimes we tease each other with its punch line. Uncle Iuon is sitting on the bench in front of his house. One of the villagers is passing by. – You’re sitting and thinking? – he asks uncle Iuon. – No, I’m just sitting – comes the answer.¹⁷

¹⁶ „Wie in alter Zeit Gastfreunde unter freundlichen Reden Gabe und Gegengabe tauschten, so erscheint später an Stelle der Wertgabe die Wortgabe, Rede und Gegenrede, Gruss und Dank. Häufig fällt dabei der Dank reicher aus als die Gabe” (Croon 1905: 166.). I would like to thank Éva Pócs for drawing my attention to this article.

¹⁷ E-mail to V. G., October 2004.

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