

The Intonation of Romanian Greetings: A Sociolinguistics Approach

Anca-Diana Bibiri, Mihaela Mocanu, Adrian Turculeț

Abstract—In a language the inventory of greetings is dynamic with frequent input and output, although this is hardly noticed by the speakers. In this register, there are a number of constant, conservative elements that survive different language models (among them, the classic formulae: *bună ziua!* (good afternoon!), *bună seara!* (good evening!), *noapte bună!* (good night!), *la revedere!* (goodbye!) and a number of items that fail to pass the test of time, according to language use at a time (*ciao!*, *pa!*, *bai!*). The source of innovation depends both of internal factors (contraction, conversion, combination of classic formulae of greetings), and of external ones (borrowings and calques). Their use imposes their frequencies at once, namely the elimination of the use of others. This paper presents a sociolinguistic approach of contemporary Romanian greetings, based on prosodic surveys in two research projects: AMPRom, and SoRoEs. Romanian language presents a rich inventory of questions (especially partial interrogatives questions/WH-Q) which are used as greetings, alone or, more commonly accompanying a proper greeting. The representative of the typical formulae is *Ce mai faci?* (*How are you?*), which, unlike its English counterpart *How do you do?*, has not become a stereotype, but retains an obvious emotional impact, while serving as a mark of sociolinguistic group. The analyzed corpus consists of structures containing greetings recorded in the main Romanian cultural (urban) centers. From the methodological point of view, the acoustic analysis of the recorded data is performed using software tools (GoldWave, Praat), identifying intonation patterns related to three sociolinguistics variables: age, sex and level of education. The intonation patterns of the analyzed statements are at the interface between partial questions and typical greetings.

Keywords—Acoustic analysis, greetings, Romanian language, sociolinguistics.

I. INTRODUCTION

GREETINGS— an important dimension of communicative behaviour, with meanings assigned by social micro- and macro-group who uses it, gestural and verbal – is the most elementary form of attention or respect that can be shown to a person or a group [1]. Greeting repertoire is extremely dynamic as it is influenced by social relations, the changes in the system of those relationships, rules of politeness at a given moment. The sources of this dynamism are both internal – conversion of some older greetings, their combination or even functional converting of words and phrases – and external,

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borrowings from other languages, especially English.

II. THEORETICAL APPROACH

The study of greetings calls for a sociolinguistic perspective, as their selection is determined by extra-linguistic factors. No one can communicate without relating to the interlocutor/ to whom he/she addressed [2]. Both the first speaker and the one who answer must adapt to the social context in which the communicative process is initiated in order to have an appropriate linguistic behaviour. In other words, 'greetings change their formula and meaning throughout their evolution, acquire new values, depending on the continuous changes that happen in society. There are greetings that through substantial phonetic, lexical, morphological changes become clichés [1].

Greeting is an act of communication in which human beings make their presence known to each other, to show attention and to suggest a type of relationship or social status between individuals or groups of people coming in contact with each other [3]. Greetings fulfil some social functions [4], [5]:

- Communicative function: formal or neutral formulae as *Bună dimineața!* (*Good morning!*), *Bună seara!* (*Good evening!*) decoded as: *I wish you a good day/evening*, establish and constitute the common code for the persons implied in the act of speech;
- Phatic function: contact is done both at the verbal and non-verbal level, and also at the paraverbal one (pantomime, gestures, intonation);
- Conative function: which involves engagement, attraction; predominates greetings used by radio and TV announcers, especially in interactive programs.

Greetings can be of two types [6]:

- Conventional, i.e. formal, neutral (official greeting traditionally in written communication: diplomatic communication, business, having mostly communicative function: *Bună ziua!*, (*Good afternoon!*), *Sărut mâna!* (*Kiss your hand!*), *Bun întâlnișu!* (*Good to see you!*), *O seară bună!* (*Good evening!*)) and
- Unconventional, i.e. non-formal, in order to draw attention, to impress; the trend of using this type of greeting is persuasive, sometimes ironic, with conative function: *Ciao!*, *Hi!*, *Hai, noroc!* (*Good luck!*), *Pa!* (*Bye!*) and so on.

III. GREETINGS FORMULAE IN ROMANIAN LANGUAGE

In Romanian, between people that know each other, the dialogues are initiated not only by greetings, but also by certain interrogative structures: *Încotro?* (*Where are you*

going?), *Ce vânt te aduce?* (What brings you here/to me?), *Ce (mai) faci?* (How are you?), *La apă?* (Are you going to bring water?) – used by neighbours in the country when they meet on the streets of the villages –, alongside with traditional ones: *Bun găsit!* (Welcome!), *Bun întâlnișul!* (Good to see you!), *Bună calea!* (Good way!), *Bună să-ți fie inima, cum ți-i căutătura!* (May your heart be as gentle as your eyes!), *Ne pare bine / bucurăm că v-am văzut!* (Good to see you!). These constructions have phatic function for checking and for maintaining the code and the concrete thematic peculiarities communication, sometimes going up to semiotic level, closer to the concrete situation [5], [7], [8].

In Romanian language the representative of the typical formulae of the greeting-questions is *Ce mai faci?* (How are you?), which, bears an emotional effect, as a sign of a sociolinguistic group.

Greeting-questions are welcome formulae with phatic function, similar to the official welcome, and can become through stereotyping/ritualization greetings, as happens in English with the formal greeting used on the first occasion of meeting or introduction: *How do you do?* Most of the greeting-questions have the lexical, grammatical and semantical structure as a partial questions introduced by an interrogative word. As in the case of other languages: in French: *Ça va?*, in Italian: *Come stai/vai?*, in German: *Wie geht's?* or in English: *How are you?* Usually, these structures are used after the greeting itself, but they can be used without initial greeting [8], [9].

While greeting (as initial moment of an unscheduled meeting) signals recognition and mutual respect, opening a possible dialogue between the two speakers, greeting-questions initiate a dialogue between two speakers, the first one testing the availability and possibility (in time) of the second speaker for a mutual exchange of expressions, pleasantries, good wishes or in some cases, is used as a prelude to a (brief) conversation or introducing the topic of a talk.

As greetings, the greeting-questions are often accompanied by forms of address (examples are taken from SoRoEs questionnaire) [13]: name: *Salut-Mihai! Ce mai faci? Un-te duci?* (Hello, Michael! How are you? Where are you going?) (I4a_1a2), *Ioana, un-te duci?* (Ioana, where are you going?) (I4a_1a5); *Vasile, un-te duci?* (Vasile, where are you going?) (Ia6_1a5), *Ce mai faci, Aurel?* (How are you, Aurel?) (9L06_31a4); family kinship name: *Ce-ai mai făcut, tată?* (What you have done lately, Dad?) (I4a_1d), *Săru-mâna, mamă! Te simți mai bine?* (Kiss your hand, mother! How do you feel?) (I4a_1d_4); a friendly nickname: *Ce faci, prietene?* (What are you doing, buddy?) (I6a_46a) or neutral: *Ce mai faci, domnule?* (How are you, Sir?) (9L06_31a5).

Kinship, friendship, cordiality, concerning the peer is expressed by 'to thee and thou each other' (when the verb is used in the second person, singular – included in the verbal inflection). Instead, the attitude of subordination, respect is playing through both formal greeting formulae (with position or surname of the interlocutor), and by using second plural form of the verb: *Bună ziua, dom-profesor!*, *Bună ziua,*

doamna profesoară! (Good afternoon, teacher!) (I4a_e_1,2), *Săru-mâna, părinte!* (Kiss your hand, Father!) (I4a_1e_3), *Bună ziua, doamna doctor!* (Good afternoon, doctor!) (I4a_f_1), *Bună ziua, doamna șefă!* (Good afternoon, chief!) (I4a_h_1), *Să trăiți, șefu!* (Long live, boss!) (I6a_1d_3), *Să trăiți, domnu rector!* (Long live, Sir!) (I4a_1d_4), *Sărut mâna, doamna Prisăcaru!* (Kiss your hand, Mrs. Prisăcaru!) (I4a_1d_6).

Săru(t) mâna! (Kiss your hand!) is a greeting of men to women; gesture can manifest itself only in closed spaces; in the street, men initiate the gesture, but the ladies withdraw their hand; it is used as a sign of respect towards parents and the priest. It seems that this greeting is more common to the categories of speakers with secondary or higher education than those with elementary education. The formal greetings are not used by strangers or persons with a higher social status; in the latter case, they may seem even offensive. Politeness is used in the plural form, also in family relationships reflecting respect for parents and grandparents: *Bună ziua! Ce mai faceți? Bine v-am găsit!* (Good afternoon! How are you? Welcome!) (I3c_1d).

In Romanian language, it seems that the greeting-questions are used by people who knows each other better (roles between relatives or friend-to-friend), and is very common in closed language communities (for example, in villages, where all inhabitants know each other and even are in kinship relations), women manifesting a predilection; to illustrate this idea, it is mentioned the answers to the Question 1506: 'How women greet each other' from material collected by Sever Pop for ALR I (some examples: *Ce mai faci, vecină?* (How are you, my neighbor?), *Cum te afli?* (How do you feel?), *Ce mai spui?* (How are you?) *Măi soro, un-te duci?* (Darling, where are you going?)) [10].

Greeting-questions have a strong expressive function (affective, emotional), signaling the joy of meeting and affection for each other.

A very favourable situation for using greeting-questions is the unexpected meeting of two people who see after a more or less long period of time [11]. After the greeting process which can be only gestural or verbal (the verbal one can be accompanied by various gesture: shaking hands, hug, kiss (especially women)), are inevitably questions about the health and personal events that occurred in the meantime. On this occasion stereotyped/ritualized formulae appear: *Ce mai faci?* (How are you?), *Ce mai zici/spui?* (What's new with you?) *Cum o mai duci?* (How is going?), the first two questions expressed the interest for general conditions (especially) of health and the last one is oriented to news occurred in his/her life and his/her family in the meantime.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The acoustic analysis of the recorded data is performed using software tools (GoldWave, Praat), identifying intonation patterns related to three sociolinguistic variables: age, sex and level of education that reflect social distance/ solidarity, status and / or power of the interactants, the level of cordiality or formality of the participants which determine the choice of

vocabulary or register they use and the purpose or function of their interaction.

Recorded utterances and sequences (with the informants' own speech), are orthographically and phonetically transcribed, acoustically processed in text files (1, 2, 3. txt for the three repetitions of a sequence and 0. txt for the average of three repetitions), including the main physical features of each vowel from the utterance: the duration, maximum intensity (sound energy) and fundamental tone (F0) – the last one is measured in three points of vowel duration (at the beginning, in the middle and at the end). Based on these texts, graphics of intensity and duration are generated (in the form of histograms), and the melodic profiles of each statement.

A. Corpora (The Sample Speech Event)

The corpus for this research consists of a series of statements used for AMPER-ROM and SoRoEs questionnaires, recorded 22 subjects (persons with higher education) from 8 cultural centers: București, Iași, Timișoara, Cluj, Craiova, Constanța, Baia Mare and Cernăuți [12],[13].

Sequence of questionnaire:

- *Ce faci?/ Ce mai faci?* *How are you?*
- *Ce mai zici/spui?* *What's the latest news?*
- *Cum o mai duci?* *How is going?*

- *Cum ești? /Cum te simți* *How are you?*
- *Unde te duci?* *Where are you going?*
- *Ce mai e nou?* *What's new with you?*

B. Acoustic Processing of the Recorded Data

The acoustic analysis of greeting-questions shows that there is not a specific *pattern* of these structures. The starting point is the typical pattern of partial interrogative questions (WH-Q), pronounced with a falling intonation [14]-[16]: in which the peak of fundamental frequency (F0) is carried out by the interrogative word (IW), followed by a steep descending which may start on the interrogative word (IW), or, more often, on the next word and falling down to the minimum [17],[18]. This intonation pattern is found in greeting-questions: between people (relatives, colleagues, friends) that frequently see each other (possibly on the same day) – all examples of the type *Ce faci?* (*What are you doing?*) (aimed at concret action), I3cS_1a, I4a_46a, I6a_46a, 9H05_31a_2, 9D07_31a_1, 9D08_31a_2 (Iași, București, Cluj) and *Un-te duci?* (*Where are you going?*) (interogative structure that need a definite/precise answer) Ia4, Ia6; the same intonation model for the structures: 9H05_31a_1, 9D05_31a-1,3; 31b_1...6 (București, Cluj).

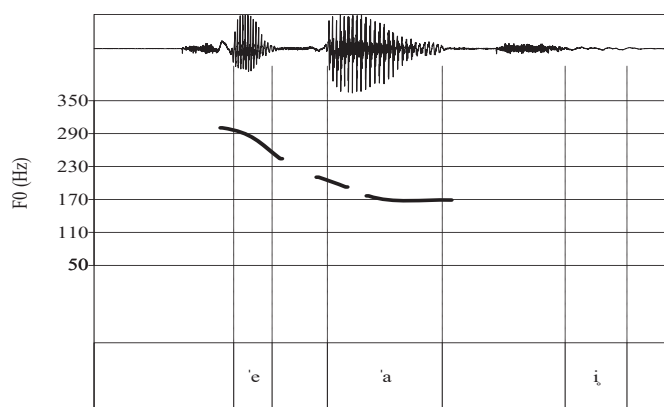


Fig. 1 9H05_31a_1 *Ce faci?* (*How are you?*)

Deviation from the WH-Q pattern are due to the expressive function of the analyzed (emotional/affective questions often accompanied by interest or curiosity) and to the directive function (persuasive: the request for an answer, not only formal, from the interlocutor).

The intimate, friendly tone vs the categorical, usually it can be expressed by a narrow register with a minimal tonal expansion: in the sentence 9H05_31b2, 5 the extension of F0 is only 66 Hertz (Hz), respective, 65 Hz.; the same dimension/average for the sentences 9J0531a1: 65 Hz, and 9K0631b1: 64 Hz.

The abrupt falling of the melodic contour attenuates through the delayed alignment of F0 on the interrogative word which occurs at the boundary between IW and the adverb *mai* (*even*)

or within the component diphthong of the adverb *ai*: 9A0531a1, 2; Ic346a (Iași).

Another feature is the (considerable) elongation of the finale syllable of the sentence: I6a_46a_3 – the stressed vowel *a* within the verb *faci* (*do*) has the physical feature (duration): 180 ms; also the diphthong *ai* within the adverb *mai*: 9I6a_46b_1 (female subject from Iași) – and the diphthong *ui* (within the verb *spui* – *say*): 275ms/*ai*: 151 (as presented in Fig. 4); 9I6a_42b2– the vowel *i* (which has an intrinsic less duration): 158 ms./*ai* within *mai*: 177 ms.; 9D08_31_c2 (male subject from Cluj) (*Cum ești?* – *How are you?*): *ie*-: 242 ms., *ș*: 254 ms.; 9E05_31b_2 (female subject from Baia Mare) – *ui*: 212ms./*ai*: 127ms; 9K05_31a_3 (female subject from Constanța) – *a*: 254 ms./ *ai*: 196ms.

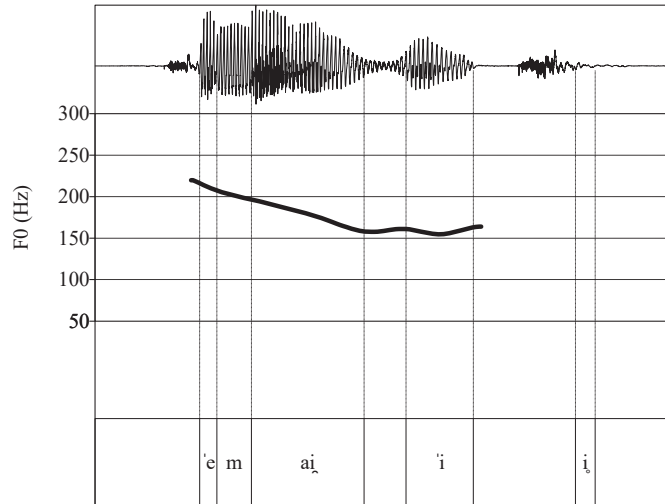


Fig. 2 9H05_31a_1 *Ce mai zici?* (What's new with you?)

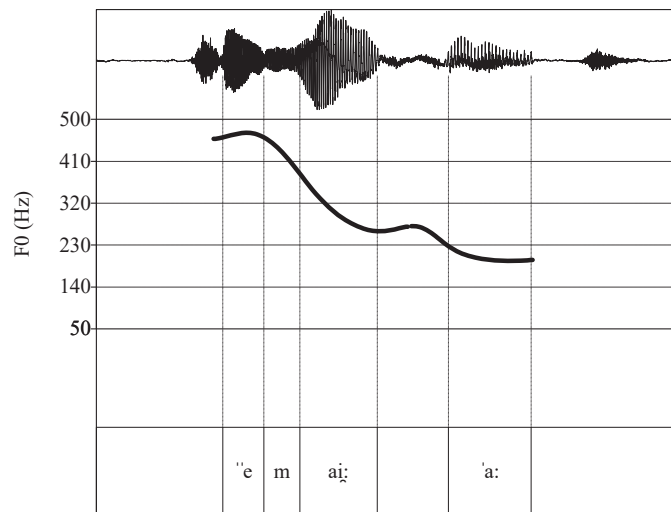


Fig. 3 9I3c_46a_2 *Ce mai zici?* (What's new with you?)

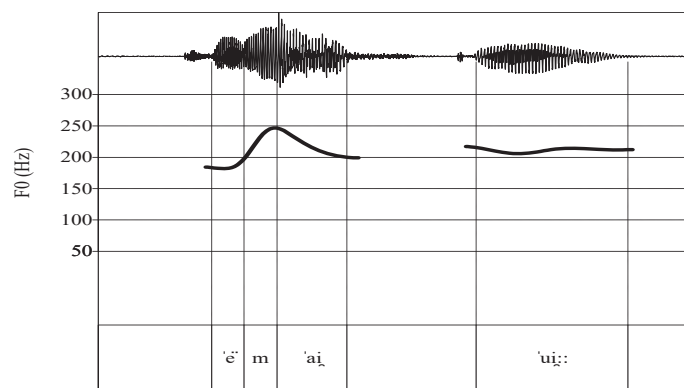


Fig. 4 9I6a_46b_1 *Ce mai spui?* (What's new with you?)

The formation of a tonal peak F0 on another constituent of the statement, attenuates the categorical tone of the IW and

moves the centre of interest from the synsemantic word of the statement (usually) on the verb: as for example in: I6a_46c

Cum îți merge? (*How are you?*) on *merge*); I6a_46d *Ce s-mai aude?* (*What's new with you?*); 9E05_31a_1, 9J05_31a_1 *Ce mai faci?* (*How are you?*). This second peak may exceed the first one, that on the IW: 9J05_31b_1 *Ce mai spui?* (the interrogative word *ce*: 238 Hz, while the component diphthong

of the verb *spui*, *ui*: 244 Hz), as shown in Fig. 4. Highlighting another constituent than IW is even stronger when F0 is aligned to the center (circumflex): 9K0531c1 *Cum îți mai merge?*

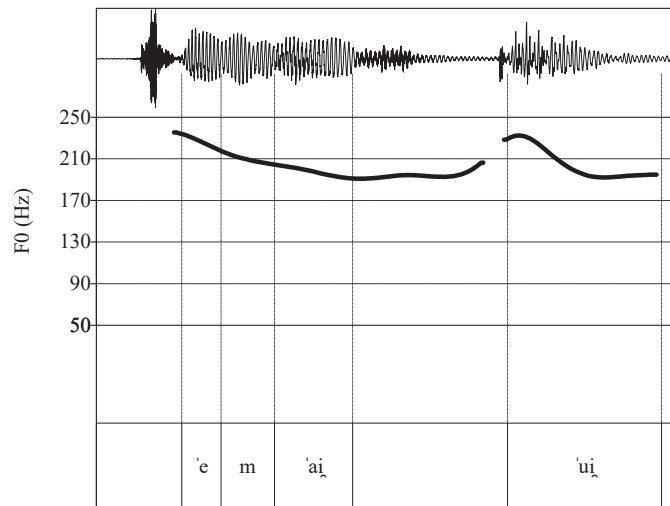


Fig. 5 9J05_31b_1 *Ce mai spui?* (*What's new with you?*)

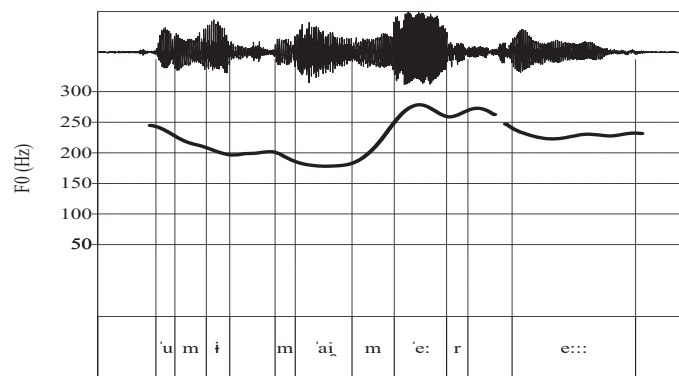


Fig. 6 9K05_31c_1 *Cum îți mai merge?* (*How are you?*)

In the questions with more constituents / lexemes the second peak of the melodic contour seems to be mandatory as in the example uttered by the female subjects from Iași (I6ad_11c): *Cum o duceți cu sănătatea?* (*What about your health?*): the first peak of the melodic contour (F0) of this greeting-question occurs on the IW, followed by an abrupt fall, then remains at a medium level until rises on the stressed syllable of the last word (the second peak of F0), and descending on the last syllable of the sentence as presented in Fig. 7. Intonation of continuity occurs in all the greeting-questions which form a chain of questions: for example, the structures uttered by female subject from Iași (I4a_1_c4), addressed to a friend who has not been seen for a long time: *Ce mai faci?* *Ce-ai mai făcut?* *Unde stai?* *Îți este bine?* (*How are you? What have you done lately? Where do you live? Are you OK?*)

The prominence of the last constituent of the sentence, which may lead to a change of the final melodic descending melodic contour in one ascending/continuing, is the last step in the delimitation of the pattern of the greeting-questions from the intonation pattern of the interrogative sentences, from which is preserved only the morphological mark (IW). The peculiarities discussed up to now are often combined between them. In particular, the considerable elongation of the final constituent (and the adverb *mai*) can accompany any of the other traits.

The different intonation patterns of the greeting-questions can occur at the same speaker, probably depending on the (imagined) position to his partner of communication; for example, the subject from Iași I3c utters the greeting-question *Ce mai faci?* (*How are you?*) in two different ways: in Fig. 7 the rise of F0 on the IW is wider, with the pick aligned on the

adverb *mai*, while in Fig. 8, the alignment is done on the IW *ce* (*what*). The perception of the two melodic contours is

different: In the I3c_46a_2 utterance, with an emphasis on the IW, is closer to WH-questions.

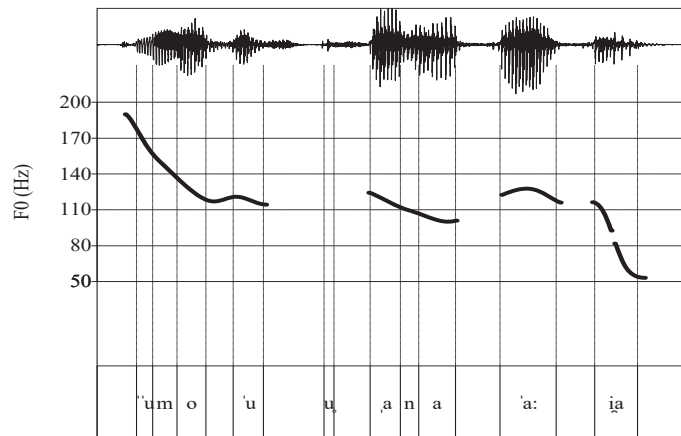


Fig. 7 I6ad_11c *Cum o duceți cu sănătatea?* (*What about your health?*)

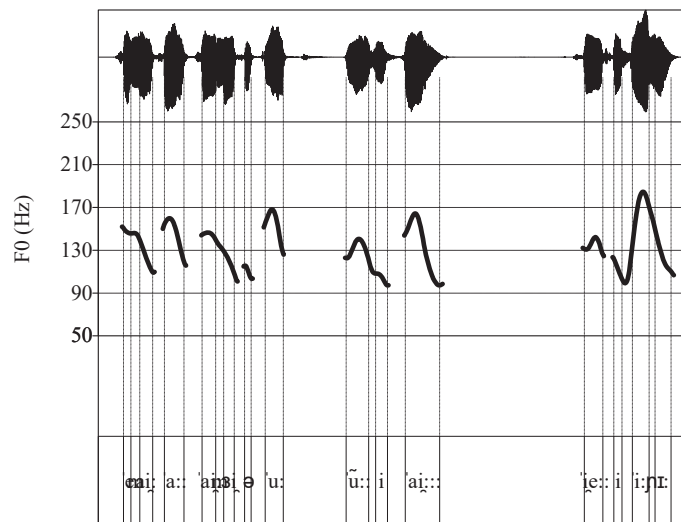


Fig. 8 I4a_1_c4 *Ce mai faci? Ce-ai mai făcut? Unde stai? Ți este bine?* (*How are you? What have you done lately? Where do you live? Are you OK?*)

The differences can be even greater, with changes including the final melodic contour, as in the case of the subject from Baia Mare (E05_31b), who utters the greeting-question *Ce mai spui/zici* (*What's new with you?*) 8 times (at separate intervals) as follows: 6 times with ascending final melodic contour and 2 times with descending final melodic contour, the last ones, specific to WH-questions.

V. SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

Greeting-questions are part of a ceremonial (routine) used between partners of equal status in the family role or friendship and mean recognition and belonging to the same group (relatives, friends).

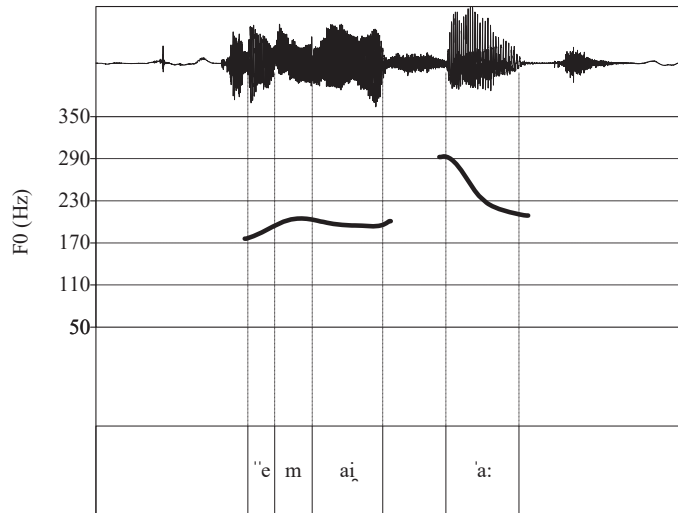


Fig. 9 I3c_46a_1 Ce mai faci? (How are you?)

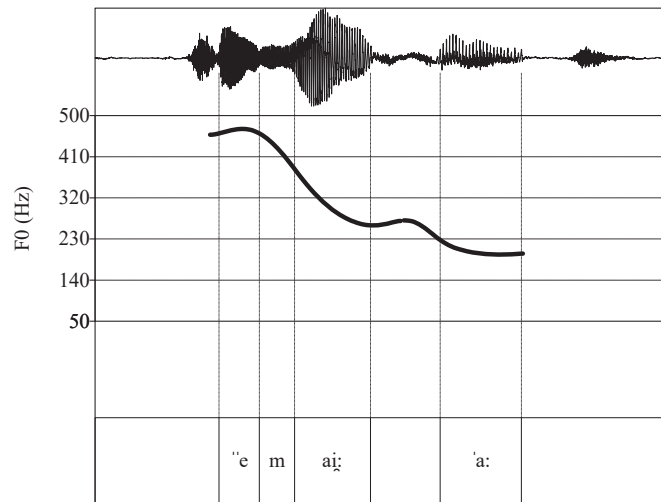


Fig. 10 I3c_46a_2 Ce mai faci? (How are you?)

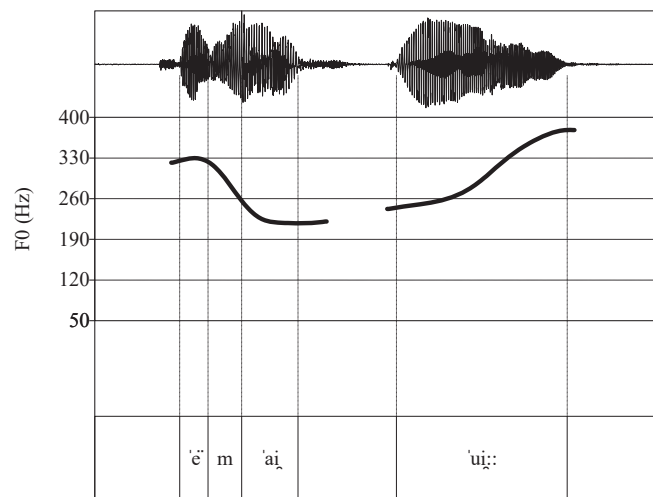


Fig. 11 9E05_31b_1 Ce mai spui? (What's new with you?)

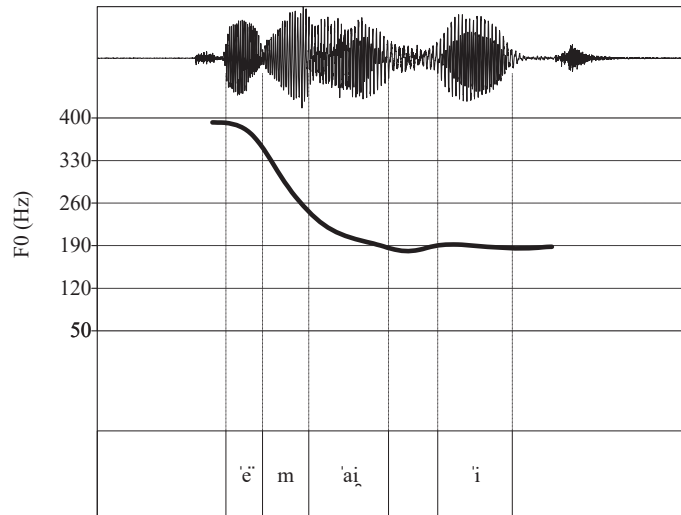


Fig. 12 9E05_31b_3 *Ce mai zici?* (*What's new with you?*)

The most favourable speech situation of the greeting-questions is the meeting, usual casual/surprise of two friends that have not seen each other for a more or less long period of time. Data analysed in this search reveal some differences between men and women to be pursued in further research:

- The descending final melodic contour characterizes the men's speech; regarding the intonation of continuity, the F0 rises on the last stressed syllable and is followed by a fall, while the intra-syllable occurs only in greeting-questions series;
- The ascending final melodic contour was registered only in two cases: to feminine subjects from Constanța (9K05 – 3 examples) and Baia Mare (9E05 – 6 examples).
- The female subject from Timișoara (9G05) lengthens the final vowel in all the 11 repetitions of the greeting-questions: *Ce mai faci?* (*How are you?*) and *Ce mai zici?* (*What's new?*): the values of duration varies from 150ms and 265 ms, while the masculine subject only a slight elongation occurs (around 100ms) in 7 examples, and only one example with 226 ms.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The form of greeting is determined by social etiquette, as well as by relationship between the people. As normal sociolinguistic custom for establishing interpersonal relationship, the greeting-questions involve seeking information about the welfare of the person being greeted, his/her family relations and friends.

The data analyzed show that women are more innovative than men, more advanced in the process of detachment the pattern of the greeting-questions from the model of WH-questions, which corresponds to women's predilection for greeting-questions.

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