

Building Romanian Linguistic Identity through Foreign Words

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Abstract

Language is a “living organism”, which is subject to change due to borrowed words and structures from different languages. Thus, in the case of Romanian, words and lexical structures enter the vocabulary and then fall out of use or are totally replaced in different circumstances along the process of communication. Some of these words, which are frequently used in speech, belong to the “active vocabulary” of Romanian, whereas other lexical structures, which are not constantly used, belong to what lexicologists call “passive vocabulary” and are (re)activated when used in certain fields.

The aim of this paper is to bring into discussion the influence exerted by European languages such as French, English, Italian, German, etc. on Romanian language through language contact and the process of neologisation. The words borrowed from these languages into Romanian reveal the extent to which they contributed to building and reshaping the Romanians’ linguistic identity.

Keywords: *linguistic identity, loanwords, Romanian words, language contact, foreign words, borrowings*

1. Neologisms/linguistic borrowings

New words influence a language’s vocabulary in two ways:

1. internally, through the creation of new words through derivation, changing the grammatical value, composition;
2. externally, through borrowings from other languages: borrowings of syntagms, words or structures.

Neologisms in Romanian have a distinct etymological “profile” and regarding their phonetic adaptation, morphological framing and semantic assimilation.

An overview of the variety of borrowings that have entered Romanian is offered by Graur (1968: 278) in *Tendențele actuale ale limbii române*:

Unlike western Romanic languages, Romanian has not received borrowings from Latin until late, directly and relatively few. The first ones came from Polish, and in Transylvania, probably from Hungarian. In the 17th-18th century the international element consisted of mostly Greek words, borrowed directly from Greek or through Slavic (...), rebuilt later according to the western pattern, that is, based on Latin (alphabet, mechanism). Also through Greek, French and Italian words, and fewer English words came in the 1800s, with certain pronunciation modifications. Then, Russian became an intermediary, through which our language gained many international elements, mostly from Latin, Greek and French. Finally, in the second half of the 19th century and in the 20th century we had direct contact with the western languages, firstly French. [Spre deosebire de limbile romanice apusene, româna n-a primit împrumuturi din *latinește* decât târziu și, direct, relative puține. Întâi au venit din *polonă*, iar în Transilvania, probabil, din *maghiară*. În secolele XVII-XVIII *elemental internațional* era reprezentat mai mult prin cuvinte *grecești*, venite direct din grecește sau prin *slavă* (...), refăcute mai târziu după model apusean, adică trecute prin latină (alfabet, mecanism). Tot prin greacă au venit, mai ales, în jurul anilor 1800, cuvinte *franțuzești*, *italienești* și mai puține *englezești*, cu unele modificări de pronunțare. Apoi a intervenit, ca intermediar, *rusa*, prin care au pătruns la noi numeroase elemente internaționale, majoritatea latinești, grecești, franțuzești. În sfârșit, în a doua parte a secolului al XIX-lea și în

secolul al XX-lea, ne-am adresat direct limbilor apusene, în primul rând francezei.]

The process of adaptation of neologisms in Romanian is determined by the language system pressure, and its aspects are caused by different circumstances:

1. The basis of articulation¹ according to which Romanian speakers guide themselves, and the form that borrowed words have, thus distancing themselves from the principles of the lending language;
2. Bringing foreign words closer to the formal aspect lexemes have in the borrowing language etc.

Research has showed that borrowings of Latin-Roman origin do not present major difficulties in adapting to Romanian, unlike other languages in which adaptation of neologisms is more difficult. For example, Italian has nouns that end in the vowel [o]: e.g. *acconto*, *allegretto*, or in the vowels [a], respectively [e]: *capodopera*, *spese* (expenses), and the language under discussion borrows quite difficultly lexemes ending in a consonant. Unlike Italian, French has nouns ending in a consonant, thus it adapts with difficulty forms with a final vowel: e.g. *chauffeur*, *coiffeur*, *bactériophage* [bakteRjɔfaʒ]². If we consider the way of adaptation in Romanian of the French word *bactériophage*, we will notice: Fr. *bactériophage* [bakteRjɔfaʒ] > ro. *bacteriofág* [bakteriofag], (cf. DOOM₂, s.v.). We observe a double stressing of the word *bacteriofag* in Romanian: the main stress on /-fá-/ , followed by a secondary stress on /-té/. Unlike Romanian, in French the stress is only on /-té/. In the process of adaptation to Romanian of the above mentioned word, we notice the following phonetic modification: [-ʒ] > [-g-]. From the point

¹ By “basis of articulation” we understand the way in which sounds are pronounced, which is different in each language or dialect, [our translation] in Romanian – „modul de pronunțare a sunetelor, care se face într-un anumit fel în fiecare limbă sau dialect”, cf. DN₃, s.v.

² The source of the phonetic transcription is *Hachette – Le dictionnaire de notre temps* (HDT), France, Paris, 1991.

of view of the stress, we notice a partial adaptation of the French element *bactériophage* [bakteriofáj] to Romanian.

There are also neologisms that have not found a singular and definitive form. They allow more than one possibility:

Ro. *piunéză* < Fr. *punaise* (cf. MDN, s.v.), lexeme tested as *piunéză* in DOOM₁, *piunéză/pionéză* in DOOM₂, *piunéză* in MDN, respectively in MDA. In MDA, the word *piunéză* also presents the following forms: *pineză*, *pioneză*. Both forms of the Romanian neologism *maieu* [majéw] and *maiou* [majów] are inserted in MDA: At: DLR/V: ~ieu/Pl: ~uri; the form *maiou* appears in DOOM₁/DOOM₂, s.v.

Ro. *kaki* [ka'ki] < Fr. *kaki*, cf. MDN, s.v. The same lexeme in MDA: At: DN₃/V: *kakiu* [ka'kiw], *kakiie* [ka'kije]/E: Fr. *kaki*. In DOOM₁/DOOM₂, only the form *kaki* is confirmed.

Ro. *portofel* (-e), cf. DOOM₁/DOOM₂, s.v. The form attested in MDN is *portfeuille* [portfëi] < Fr. *portfeuille*.

Neologising has increased, both at the phonetic and the phonological level, the number of attested vowels in Romanian, through the appearance of two other vowel-like sounds, phonemes at the same time³: [ö] and [ü]. Neologisms which contain the sound [ö] are written either through the grapheme [ö], or through the graphemes *eu*, *oe* or *u*, according to the etymon:

Ro. *bleu* [blö] adj., n. (de) culoarea albastru-deschis; azuriu[(light blue)]. (<Fr.*bleu*), cf. MDN, s.v.

Ro. *alúrá* [alürä] ținută, aspect, înfățișare [poise, aspect, look] etc.; Ro. *alúrá* < Fr. *allure*, cf. MDN, DOOM₂, MDA, s.v.

³ See articles by Petru Zugun, *The Vowel and the Romanian Literary Phoneme ö*, in – "Studii și cercetări lingvistice" – (SCL), L, 1999, no. 2, p. 475-479, and *The Number of Romanian. Literary Language Phonemes*, in – "Revistă de lingvistică și știință literară", 2003, no. 3-4, p. 92-95.

Ro. *bluf* [blöf] n. „vorbă spusă (sau acțiune făcută) în scop de intimidare; cacialma”. (<Engl. *bluff* [blʌf]); (cf, MDN, s.v.), compared to MDA: Ro. *bluf* < Fr.*bluff*, dar *bluff* [pron. blaf] s.n., pl. *bluffuri*, cf. DOOM₂, s.v. *blufs*. n. [pron. fr.blöf], pl. *blufuri*, cf. DOOM₁, s.v.

Ro. *loess* [pron. lös] n., pl. *loessuri* [pron. lösur] (*loes-*) < Fr. *loess*, Germ. *Loess*), cf. MDN, s.v.

Ro. *gafeur* [pron. gaför] n. „cel care face gafe”. (< Fr. *gaffeur*), cf. MDN, DOOM₂, DEX, MDA, s.v.

Ro. *pasteurelöză* [*eu* pron. ö] < Fr. *pasteurellose*, cf. MDN, DOOM₂, MDA s.v.

Ro. *foehn* (pron. fön) s.n. 1. „vânt cald și uscat care bate în munții Alpi” (warm, dry wind blowing in the Alpes). 2. „aparat electric pentru uscarea părului cu ajutorul unor curenți de aer cald” (appliance used to dry the hair using warm air currents). (<Fr. *foehn*, Germ. *Föhn*), cf. MDN, MDA, s.v., but in DOOM₂/DOOM₁, the etymology of the word is only one: < (Germ.) [pron. fön] s. n., (aparate) pl. *föhnuri*.

Ro. *loess* [pron. Fr., Germ. lös] s.n. „rocă argiloasă din particule fine, gălbui, foarte bogată în săruri minerale” (sediment with fine yellow particles rich in mineral salts). (<Fr. *loess*, Germ. *Loess*), cf. MDN, DOOM₁/DOOM₂, s.v.

maséză s. f. „femeie care practică masajul” (woman practicing massage). (< Fr.*masseuse*), cf. MDN, DOOM₁, but in DOOM₂: *maseur* [pron. masör] (*-seur*) s. m., pl. *maseuri*; *maseuză* [pron. masöză] (*-seu -*) s. f., g.-d. art. *maseuzei*; pl. *maseuze*.

Ro. *rummy* [pron. rö-mi] s. n. „joc de societate cu cărți sau cu mici plăci prismatice marcate cu cifre de diferite culori” (game with small cards marked with numbers of different colours). (<Engl.*rummy* [ˈrʌmy], cf. MDN, DOOM₁/DOOM₂, s.v., but in

MDA: *rummys*. n. [At: Camil Petrescu, P: *römi, remi*/E: Fr. *rummy*, Ger. *Rummy*].

In the above-mentioned examples, the etymology of the same word varies and differences in pronunciation can be observed.

Ro. *röntgen/roentgen* [pron. *rönt-ghen*] 1. s. m. – „unitate de măsură a dozelor de radiație X, cantitatea de radiații care, în condiții fizice normale, produce, prin ionizarea unui cm³ de aer, o sarcină electrică de un franklin” (“unit of measure for the doses of X radiation, the quantity of radiation, which, in normal physical conditions produce a 1 franklin electric load through ionising a cm³ of air”). 2. n. n. „aparat cu care se produc raze X ([– “a machine that produces X rays” –]). (<Fr. *röntgen*[*Röntgen*]), cf. MDN, DOOM₁/DOOM₂, but in DEX: *röntgen* s. m. „unitate de măsură a dozei radiațiilor X sau Y” [(– unit of measure for the dosage of X or Y radiations)]. The lexemes that contain the nominal element *röntgen* are known especially in academic fields, for example in *röntgendiagnóstico/roentgendiagnóstico*, *röntgenologie/roentgenologie*, *röntgenoluminescență/roentgenoluminescență*, *röntgencinematografie*, etc., cf. MDN, s.v.

Ro. *tul* [pron. *tül*] s. n. „– țesătură de mătase sau de bumbac, subțire și ușoară”. (< Fr. *tulle*, Germ. *Tull*), cf. MDN, MDA s.v., but in DOOM₁/DOOM₂ and DEX, the etymology of the lexeme is unique: <Fr. *tulle*.

Ro. *tartufe* [pron. -tűf] s. m. „–tip uman ipocrit, fățarnic”. (<Fr. *tartufe*), cf. MDN, MDA (We have also a mentioning of the common noun originating from the name of Molière’s character, *Tartuffe*– a symbol of religious hypocrisy).

Another aspect of phonetic neologising (Zugun 1999: 479) along with the phonemes [ö] and [ü], is given by the palatalization of the dental, alveolar and sonant consonant [n], an aspect we can observe in words of French and Spanish origin. Thus, the group [gn] from French

and [ñ] from Spanish are rendered in Romanian by a soft [n], that is [ɲ], in phonetic transcription.

Ro. *doña* [doɲa] < Sp. *doña*

Ro. *viñetă* [viɲetă] < Fr. *vignette*

Ro. *coñac* [koɲak] < Fr. *cognac*

Ro. *castañetă* [kastanjetă] < Fr. *castagnette*, Sp. *castañeta*

Ro. *señor(a/ita)* [seɲor] < Sp. *señor(a/ita)*.

2. Adapting neologisms to the Romanian lexis

The process of adapting neologisms to Romanian, irrespective of their origin, is a lengthy one and involves special attention to their linguistic “behaviour”.

From the very beginning of this section, we have placed under discussion opinions regarding the necessity and the adaptation of linguistic borrowings because they are an important problem concerning the Romanian vocabulary. In *Gramatica românească*, Heliade (1980: 22) raises the problem of borrowings, questioning their utility in Romanian and the situations in which we have to turn to foreign structures:

We have to borrow, but we have to pay attention and not end up like those merchants who do not evaluate the situation correctly and end up bankrupt. We have to take only the ones we need, from the right languages and in the right manner. [“Trebuie să ne împrumutăm, dar trebuie foarte bine să băgăm de seamă să nu primim ca neguțătorii aceia care nu își iau bine măsurile și rămân bancruți (mofluzi). Trebuie să luăm numai acelea ce ne trebuie și de acolo de unde trebuie și cum trebuie.”].

The same view on things is supported by Titu Maiorescu in his well-known article *Neologisme* from 1881: “Neologisms must only be accepted when that word does not exist in our current language, and the idea must absolutely be introduced.” [“Neologismele sunt numai

atunci de primit când ne lipsește cuvântul în limba de până acum, iar ideea trebuie neapărat să fie introdusă.”]

Despite such resistance towards freely accepting neologisms, the Romanian vocabulary continuously enriched with new lexemic units of foreign origin, specific to different fields of activity: medicine, fashion, technology, science, economy, etc. Thus, French represented an important source of borrowings beginning with the 1830s when political and cultural relations with France expanded. However, the foreign element that revolutionised the Romanian vocabulary at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century as well as at present is represented by English structures and lexical units, considered “external models” (Guțu-Romalo 2005: 247) of an aggressive nature and international structure. They have entered massively into the media (press, television, radio) as well as other fields of activity and of socio-professional training (political, economic, cultural, literature etc.) and there seems to be no way to stop this continuous penetration of foreign elements into the language.

Under these circumstances, a mechanism of preservation of the indigenous character of a language is the process of adaptation, which is “a lengthy process, with periods of fluctuations until the word finds its appropriate form that sets it in the existent system. The length of the adaptation period depends mostly on the frequency with which the word is used” [our translation] (Iordan & Robu 1973: 314).

Regarding the morphological adaptation of neologisms with various origins, we will refer to the most frequent aspects. Given that French lent lexemes to all other Romance languages, we find that the modifications that appear in the adaptation of French words to Romanian have not been extremely difficult, compared to other languages that require attention to the linguistic lexeme analysis.

The *verbs* of French origin that end in *-er*, such as: *collaborer*, *caractériser*, *blamer*, *brusquer*, *calculer*, *élucider*, have been adapted to the 1st conjugation, the most productive in Romanian: > Ro. (a) *elucidá*, (a) *colaborá*, (a) *caracterizá*, (a) *blamá*, (a) *bruscá*, (a) *calculá*.

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Invariable adjectives (the examples are taken from MDN, MDA, DOOM₂, DLRM), borrowed from different languages: French, Italian, Latin, have been adapted in Romanian under the following forms:

- Ro. *mov* < Fr. *mauve*;
- Ro. *oliv* < Fr. *olive*;
- Ro. *bleu* < Fr. *bleu*;
- Ro. *crem* < Fr. *crème*;
- Ro. *gri* < Fr. *gris*;
- Ro. *lilá* < Fr. *lilas*;
- Ro. *maró* < Fr. *marron*, It. *marrone*, Germ. *Marone*;
- Ro. *verníl* < Fr. *vert* Nil;
- Ro. *atróce* < Fr., It. *atroce*, Lat. *atrox*; -*cis*;
- Ro. *eficáce* < Fr. *efficace*, Lat. *efficax*, -*acis*;
- Ro. *motríce* < Fr. *motrice*;
- Ro. *propíce* < Fr. *propice*;
- Ro. *viváce* < It., Fr. *vivace*.

A new class of nouns ending in [ó] and with the plural ending in *-uri* was also formed with the help of neologisms, for example: *chimono*, *studio*, *zero*. Usually, French origin nouns ending in stressed [o] have been adapted into Romanian with the ending **ou** [ow]. Thus, French words such as: *stylo*, *tableau*, *lingot*, *cadeau* have become in Romanian: *stilóu/stilóuri*, *tablóu/tablóuri*, *lingóu/lingóuri*, *cadóu/cadóuri*. We notice the fact that recent neologisms or the ones that are used less frequently, which have maintained the ending in stressed [ó] are uttered in the singular and graphically rendered through the descending diphthong **ou**:

- Fr. *métro* [metRo] > Ro. *metróu* [metrow]
- Fr. *manteaux* [mãto] > Ro. *mantóu* [mantow]
- Fr. *stylo* [stilo] > Ro. *stilóu* [stilow]
- Fr. *kimono* [kimono] > Ro. *chimonóu* [kimonow].

Some neologisms do not have a stressed vowel in the final syllable of the word and in inflexion the stress moves: *radio* (sg.) – *radióuri* (pl.); *zero* (sg.) – *zeróuri* (pl.); but *motto* (sg.) – *móttouri* (pl.) in

DOOM₂, compared to DOOM₁ which registers the forms: *móto* (sg.) – *motouri* (pl.).

There are also borrowings ending in syllabic [i]: *taxi* [taksi] < Fr. *Taxi*; *dérbi* [derbi] < Engl., Fr. *derby*.

French origin lexemes that end in [e]: such as: *triple*, *cenacle*, *cycle*, *câble*, *tendre*, *cadre*, *calibre*, gave in Romanian words ending in [u]: *triplu*, *cenaclu*, *ciclu*, *cablu*, *tandru*, *cadru*, *calibru*. Enriching the Romanian vocabulary with new meanings is possible even through prefixoids and suffixoids which, as affixes, enrich the semantic field of the lexis:

aero-/aeri- < Fr. *aéro-/aéri-*, cf. Gr. *aer-*, os; elem.: –"aer", –"avion", –"aviație": *aerogară*, *aeromodel*, *aerosol*, etc.

áuto- < composition element meaning "within itself", "through its own means", and which serves in forming nouns, adjectives and verbs. [Pr.: *a-u-*] < Fr. *auto-*; *autoconservare*, *autoamăgire*, *autocontrol*, etc.

zoo- < Fr. *zoo* - "grădină zoologică"; referring to animals: *zootehnică*, *zoochimie*, etc.

hiper- < Fr. *hyper-*, cf. Germ. *hyper-*; composition element meaning –"peste" (over), –"excesiv de..." (excessively...), used to form nouns and adjectives: *hipertensiune* (arterială), *hipercalcemie*, *hipercloremie*, etc.

-cid element –"a ucide" [(to kill)], „-a distruge”[(to destroy)]: < Fr. *-cide*, cf. Lat. *coedere*: *insecticid*, *fungicid* etc.

-fil (o)-, *-fil*, *-filie* element „- prieten”[(friend)], *amator*, „iubitor”[(love of)] < Fr. *phil* /o/, *-phile*, *-philie*, cf. Gr. *philos*: *englezofil*, *germanofil*, *rusofil*, etc.

-crát, *-crație* „element putere, conducere” [(power, leadership)] (< Fr. *-crate*, *-cratie*, cf. Gr. *kratos*): *democrat*, *tehnocrat* etc.

Conclusions

In conclusion, borrowing is more than an external means of enriching the lexis. It represents the process of by which

[...] the beauty of a language is ensured, first of all, by its richness, the variety of its vocabulary, by the continuous increase of its lexical inventory, and the modifications which take place within it are often directly or indirectly linked to the progress of human society, in its entirety, and, especially to the transformations that occur in the material and spiritual life of a certain linguistic group. [Frumusețea unei limbi este dată, în primul rând, de bogăția, varietatea vocabularului ei, de continua sporire a inventarului lexical, iar modificările care au loc în cadrul lui sunt, cel mai adesea, direct ori indirect legate de progresul societății umane, în ansamblul ei, și, în mod special, de transformările care se petrec în viața materială și spirituală a unei anumite colectivități lingvistice.”] (Hristea 1984: 31)

The factors that determine and explain the evolution of Romanian language, as well as its richness are:

1. The continuous development of science and technology;
2. A diverse cultural life, the political, economic and social changes;
3. The changes in people's mentality and their perception of life;
4. The relations between peoples, rendered as linguistic, socio-cultural, political and economic contacts.

As a result of the investigations we conducted, we feel entitled to consider that the borrowings of different origin (French, Italian, German, English, etc.) largely influenced the Romanian lexis, and contributed to shaping the linguistic identity of the Romanian people not only at the national level, but also in the European space.

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- (2017): "The Lexical and Symbolical Meanings of Dream" (Mihaela Hriban, Gabriela Andrioai), in *Interstudia*, Bacău: Alma Mater, pp. 91-97.
- (2016): "Sporting Language and the Influence of Mass Media" (Mihaela Hriban), in *Communication, Context, Interdisciplinarity* 4, Tîrgu-Mureş: Arhipelag XXI Press, pp. 56-62.
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