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Linguistic Integralism and the Phenomenon of Neologistic Influx in Contemporary Romanian Language

Abstract

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There has been a long on-going debate in the past several decades about loanwords, ‘anglicism’ and generally foreign words in contemporary Romanian language, as well as about the risk of ‘anglicisation’, or even of ‘irreversibly damaging’ Romanian due to the numerous new words that have been borrowed mainly from English. The neologistic influx in Romanian which is the object of this research continues to spark controversies to this date. The constant need for adaptation to the new social, scientific, technological and communicational realities of the contemporary world is often invoked as an argument by the defenders of an uncontrolled openness towards borrowed linguistic signs. On the other side, the main opponents of the excessive linguistic borrowing warn against the dangers of opacification, and even damage to the Romanian lexicon. In this controversial context, we believe that there is a need for an exploratory, convergent and theoretically sound study on the topic of the neologistic influx in contemporary Romanian language.

All lexicogenetic research must be integrated in the wider field of linguistic ‘change’, since all new words, including loanwords are, in essence, changes in the lexical-semantic layer of a language. From our point of view, Eugeniu Coșeriu’s masterpiece *Synchrony, Diachrony and History* (1957/1997) has the most substantial, profound and valuable approach towards linguistic change. This very fact in correlation with the ever-growing scientific support, both locally and internationally, of Linguistic Integralism have led us towards integrating our research within this paradigm. Thus, the purpose of our study is not only to answer the questions *why* and *how* foreign words are borrowed in Romanian, but also to show that Integral Linguistics provides the entire toolset necessary to answer the aforementioned questions. Naturally, this general orientation of our research is not limited to Coșeriu’s work, but integrates the wider path which for more than half a century has been producing studies, papers and fundamental research in all the three layers of Linguistics: the universal layer (of language/speech), the historical layer (of historical languages) and the individual layer (of text/discourse). Many linguists with highly diverse cultural backgrounds — from Spain to Japan, to South America, Germany, France and Romania — have developed and interpreted Coșeriu’s vision, contributing to its shift towards an articulated and rigorous research path. In our study, we used papers by Andreas Blank, Dirk Geeraerts, Eugen Munteanu and Lucian Lazăr, all of whom are successors of Coșeriu’s line, albeit to different degrees. Their

studies in the fields of Semantics, Lexicology and Terminology have helped us understand and explain a contemporary phenomenon, which applies not only to Romanian, but also to most languages spoken nowadays – the neologistic influx in the highly globalizing context of the past couple of centuries.

Our research mainly belongs to the historical layer of language, since it tackles a linguistic trend (the influx of loanwords) within a historical language (Romanian). We say *mainly* because in reality, as it is known, the three layers of language cannot truly be isolated from each other, and can only be explained in relation to each other. Hence, we cannot comprehend and describe the main types of loanwords in contemporary Romanian ignoring the mechanisms of change in the universal layer of speech, as well as the actual place where one can perceive them most frequently, i.e. in the discourse and text ‘products’, which are the expression of the linguistic activity.

The aim of our research was not to create an extensive, descriptive and quantitative study of linguistic borrowing in Romanian throughout the past several decades. What we did aim for was to lay the foundation to a broader endeavour, which may have multiple lexicographic and terminographic applications and which might ultimately contribute to establishing normative principles regarding the use of loanwords. In other words, we wanted to get to the root of the problem, starting from the semantic influences of the borrowing process on Romanian language and ending with the effects of the linguistic transmutation on the very borrowed linguistic signs, but also with the terminologies and specialized discourses, that are the most permeable to the neologistic influx.

We set out in our journey with the firm belief that at the heart of any exploratory effort regarding linguistic change lies the **motivation**, which should be separated from *cause*, considering that language, as an activity of human intellect is not and can never be subject to the laws of causality. Our research is no exception, since its main purpose was to **identify the motivations** behind speakers’ decisions to innovate and adopt new linguistic signs in Romanian. We were interested both in discovering the general motivations of the neologistic influx as a whole, and the individual motivations of every loanword. Studying motivation requires, first and foremost, a deep dive in the field of Semantics with a view to establishing the relationship between changes occurred in the semantic layer and the process of borrowing, perceived as a means to achieving a particular change. We can thus formulate a first motivational category, i.e. **semantic motivations**. However, despite the main role of Semantics in the study of loanwords and neologisms, in order to have a clear picture on the entire phenomenon, we need to

transcend its borders since *the great number of borrowed linguistic signs are not semantically motivated*. To restrict the scope of our research to the semantic aspects would mean to ignore *all the non-semantic motivations* that determine speakers to adopt new words again and again, and to have just a partial understanding of the essence of the neologistic influx in contemporary Romanian. It is the reason why this dissertation aims to formulate a complex approach regarding motivations, separating semantic from non-semantic motivations – the latter mainly pertaining to the field of Sociolinguistics.

Our dissertation was structured in order to best reflect its exploratory character, beginning with a general theoretical framework, continuing with an in depth study of the specific topic correlated with the defining of the ‘toolset’ needed for the study of loanwords, and ending with two classifications of the main categories of loanwords in contemporary Romanian.

The first chapter, entitled **The Research Framework for Loanwords within the Scope of Linguistic Integralism** plays a foundational role, which explains why it covers about a third of the entire length of the thesis. Its main role is to show how the integralist paradigm explains language change and, implicitly, language itself. We followed the same pattern, from general to specific, by discussing the principles of integralism, and the general mechanism of changes in the language and ending with a classification of semantic changes.

The first part of the Chapter I is dedicated to Coșeriu’s view of language change, and is built around his seminal work *Synchrony, Diachrony and History*. In order to comprehend what is and what *what is not* a language change from the perspective of a Humboldtian-Coșerian paradigm, one needs to define the concepts with which the latter operates. Thus, the first several subchapters are dedicated to the concepts of *energeia* – the most general, superordinate concept –, speech and language, concrete and abstract language, norm and system. Next, we dedicated a subchapter to each of the three problems of language change: **the universal problem of change** at the level of speech, which discusses *innovation* and *adoption*, the two defining operations of each and every specific change; **the general problem of changes** at the level of historical languages, that Coșeriu includes in the realm of empirical research and which aims to provide an answer to the question “why do some changes occur?”, and, finally, **the historical problem of change**, which deals with the individual changes from a historical perspective.

The second part of the first chapter focuses on *semantic* changes and is mostly based on the studies of two successors of Coşeriu's theory: Andreas Blank and Dirk Geeraerts. Loanwords are semantic changes, and the comprehension of the main semantic change typologies and patterns contributes to the identification of the main types of motivations, as well as to the classification of loanwords according to motivations. Andreas Blank's study, *Why do new meanings occur? A cognitive typology of the motivations for lexical semantic change (1999)* discusses, as the title suggests, the main six motivational categories and constellations *from a cognitive perspective*, following the pattern of changes within the lexicon of a language. We included in our analysis of this first classification, several examples of semantic changes by means of borrowing, proving that the model not only complies with Coşerian cognitivism, but also strongly applies to our research. On the other hand, Dirk Geeraerts proposes in his comprehensive book *Theories of Lexical Semantics (2010)* a different classification, based on the *semasiology-onomasiology* axis. Without having a good grasp of the two perspectives, it is very difficult to establish a pattern within which any semantic change occurs in the language. It is the reason why we defined at length the concepts of semasiology and onomasiology and the subcategories of semasiological and onomasiological changes.

While the first chapter mainly deals with **change**, the second chapter focuses on the **study of borrowing** as a means of producing change, against the background of the neologistic influx in Romanian. The title of the chapter, **The Investigational Coordinates in the Study of Loanwords and the Phenomenon of Neologistic Influx in Contemporary Romanian**, highlights our multidimensional approach to the study of linguistic borrowing. The second part of our thesis is therefore structured on four dimensions.

The first subchapter integrates the study of loanwords in the field of *language contact* and is based on Sarah G. Thomason's book *Language Contact (2001)*. We wanted to discuss both the effects of language contact on individual languages, and the different types and intensities of contact, but also the link between loanwords and linguistic interferences. The loanword propagation media is another essential debate in the context of the contemporary neologistic influx which is why we included it in a separate subchapter.

Although language contact remains the underlying mechanism of loanword propagation in today's globalized world, how it works is different from the classical model, wherein the proximity of two different linguistic communities was the main catalyst for the

transfer of words from one culture to another. Nowadays, language contact is often mediated through the various new communication media. Written texts have always played a major role in the transfer of linguistic signs between different languages, however, the full scope of the contemporary phenomenon goes well beyond any similar past phenomena. Our research has shown that the neologistic influx in contemporary Romanian is part of this general trend.

The next logical step after establishing the subject matter framework is the definition and description of *linguistic borrowing* and setting up the typology of loanword forms. To this end, we used Einer Haugen's classic study, *The Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing* (1950), since the classification it propose remains highly relevant to this day. We believe that the two coordinates proposed by the linguist — the degree of morphological and phonological substitution — in building the double classification are very relevant for any initiative discussing linguistic borrowing. The morphological dimension of the classification, which includes loanwords proper, hybrid loanwords, calques and semantic borrowings has helped us create a holistic approach of neologisms in contemporary Romanian. It made us realize that the scope of our research should not be restricted to linguistic signs unadapted from a phonological viewpoint. The phonological dimension, on the other hand, helped us separate the words borrowed in the neologistic wave of the first half of the 20th century from the more recent loanwords. The contemporary neologistic influx mostly includes words that are not adapted to Romanian phonology. With Haugen's classifications in mind, we initiated a discussion about **adaptation** and the **confusions** that speakers make when using newly borrowed words in Romanian.

Probably the most important subchapter of the entire dissertation tackles **the semantic and sociolinguistic motivations of the neologistic influx in contemporary Romanian**. Its purpose is to create a synthesis of all the motivations we identified based on the theoretical foundation laid in the first chapter. Our main assumption was that any loanword is in fact **motivated**, even if the types and levels of motivations differ. Thus, not every loanword used and accepted by a community of speakers is semantically motivated. A semantically motivated loanword, however, is both a linguistic change in itself and the result of a change in the semantic layer of language, meaning that it is **double-motivated**. As a consequence, our classification of motivations is two-layered and includes a sub-classification of semantic motivations stemming from Dirk Geeraerts'

classification according to the semasiology-onomasiology dichotomy, as well as a sub-classification of sociolinguistic motivations.

There is no need to look for complex and sophisticated motivations in order to explain the influx of neologisms to Romanian. They pertain, to a great extent, to sociolinguistic aspects and can easily be identified by characterizing today's interlinguistic context. A quick analysis will reveal that the great majority of the world's languages are confronted with an ever-growing number of borrowed linguistic signs. This means that Romanian language is no exception. However, what may differentiate Romanian from other languages such as Hungarian, German and French is the extent of this phenomenon. Indeed, one can argue that the neologistic influx in Romanian is less 'controlled' and more intense than in other languages. Essentially, however, most loanwords follow a common pattern. Thus, one of the general motivations is **globalization** itself, in its wider definition. International cooperation in all aspects of human life, overlapped on the new, cutting-edge technologies have sparked a genuine communication revolution. Today, we are the witnesses of faster, if not instantaneous, communication wherein space and time no longer matter. Regardless of the field or subject matter, there is an intense intercultural dialogue which uses English as *lingua franca*. Under these circumstances, the adoption of English words and expression in various languages can easily be explained, especially in the context of the unification and standardization of scientific and professional communication.

The extent of loanword adoption in contemporary Romanian language is also motivated by the **prestige** that Romanian speakers assign to the cultures of the Western World. Although it has been almost a century since the great Romanian linguist, Sextil Pușcariu, maintained that "[new expressions in Romanian are a testimony to] a lack of traditionalist sense and a great prestige of everything that is foreign, an unusual adaptability intensity to all new forms" (Pușcariu, 1940/1976, pp. 370-371), the situation does not seem to have changed too much. In many fields, there is a strong willingness for emancipation and adhesion to values promoted in Western World cultures. Many times, local models and practices are considered inadequate or obsolete, which is why they require change. This can be best experienced in the fields related to the professional world. The adoption of various organizational methods by the professional community has brought along many borrowed terms, mostly from English. Even though the majority of these terms do have a semantic motivation, there are a number of 'residual' terms which duplicate established Romanian terminology. The main motivation for the use of the former instead of the latter is the very lack of the aforementioned prestige.

Apart from the general motivations of the neologistic influx phenomenon as a whole, we wanted to explore the individual semantic motivations that explain the patterns of linguistic borrowing. To this end, we used Einar Haugen's 1950 study, as well as the *semasiology* – *onomasiology* dichotomy described and discussed by linguists Dirk Geeraerts (2002) and Andreas Blank (1999). The latter helped us characterize the changes in the semantic layer of language, which can be split into two categories: onomasiological and semasiological changes. Corroborating the conclusions of Dirk Geeraerts' studies, the semantic change model put forth by Andreas Blank (1999) and our descriptive and taxonomic study of the main loanwords in contemporary Romanian, we identified several types of motivations.

The great majority of loanwords in contemporary Romanian are motivated from an onomasiological standpoint. The first and most logical onomasiological category pertains to *inventions and new discoveries*. The change occurring in the semantic layer in this case is the very emergence of new concepts that need to be lexicalized. Linguistic borrowing is one of the means to lexicalize new concepts (e.g. 'smartphone', 'router', 'blog').

Apart from inventions and discoveries, there is a series of other *new concepts* that are adopted by a culture. In the past decades, for instance, there have been a series of major socio-cultural and socio-professional changes which have brought about semantic changes. All of these changes mimic the models developed in cultures perceived as 'superior' by speakers of Romanian. More precisely, most of the words borrowed according to this pattern belong to the professional environment: 'management', 'marketing', 'head-hunting' etc. and to areas pertaining to lifestyle: 'hobby', 'weekend', 'supermarket' etc.

The third category of onomasiological motivations include *irregularities in the lexicon*, as characterized by Andreas Blank (1999). Applied to the scope of loanwords, they most commonly appear as semantic loans, or popular etymology. The examples 'locație' (borrowing the meaning of the English 'location'), 'tabletă' (borrowing the meaning of the English 'digital tablet') and 'aplicație' (borrowing the meaning of the English 'professional application'), which although appear as semantic extensions of the Romanian words, are actually semantic loans. Usually, they fill in what speakers identify as semantic gaps.

Loanwords that have been adopted following semasiological changes are more interesting, albeit significantly less numerous. In this case, the adoption of new signifiers is motivated by various shifts in the semantic core of a language. Essentially, Geeraerts (2010) splits semasiological changes into two categories: denotational changes (including

specialization, generalization, metonymy and metaphor) and non-denotational changes (usually occurring around emotionally-intense concepts, such as death, sexuality, superstitions, etc.). The semantic gap left behind by the semasiological shifts may be filled by borrowed words or phrases. Examples such as ‘job’ (adopted following the specialization of the Romanian word ‘slujbă’ – which used to generically designate a job, but nowadays is almost exclusively used to designate ‘religious service’), ‘gay’ (adopted following the degradation of the term ‘homosexual’), ‘dizabilitate’ (adopted following the degradation of the term ‘handicap’) are included in this category.

Finally, in the last section of the second chapter, we wanted to highlight the **semantic implications of the linguistic borrowing process**. In order to achieve that, we set off with several examples of recent loanwords, monitoring their path, as well as what has been lost in the process. As expected, contacts between languages and cultures generate imperfect transfers and, sometimes, even confusions leading to incorrect uses of certain words. Many times, incorrectly used loanwords duplicate already existing words and phrases, which contributes to some excesses, especially in the absence of a coherent normative approach.

Chapter III of our dissertation contains our contribution to the topic. In this chapter, we propose **two classifications of the recent Romanian loanwords**, based on the theoretical aspects and concepts discussed and developed in the first two chapters. The two classifications contribute to a better understanding of the neologistic influx and can be the foundation rocks of a **normative** approach regarding loanwords in Romanian. We wanted to expand the scope of our approach in order to include as wide a panel of loanwords as possible, hence including highly specialized terminology and words that are known to a limited number of speakers of Romanian. By doing this, we can have a better grasp of the phenomenon at large.

The first classification explores the various levels of penetration of borrowed linguistic signs, and is based on the introduction to the study *Lexicologie biblică românească (Romanian Biblical Lexicology) (2008)*, written by one of the most important representatives of Romanian Integral Linguistics, professor Eugen Munteanu.

The loanwords included in the stage of primary language contact usually belong to specialized terminologies of highly fertile subject matters. Medicine, Information Technology, cutting-edge technologies are several such examples, and indeed, by closely studying the communication within these fields, one can note an intensive use of borrowed terms, mostly from English. Nonetheless, despite the intensive use of these terms within communities of experts, they are not known – or are barely known – by

outsiders. In other words, these terms have yet to 'break out' of their initial circle and become part of the idiomatization process. Examples include 'screening' (used in medicine), 'burnout' (psychiatric term), 'autoclav' (term used in medical technology) and 'strip*' (term used in the field of medical testing).

Similarly, loanwords in the primary language contact stage are often used by members of communities built around various hobbies. The example illustrated in our dissertation is the community of video gamers. The members of this community also use loanwords that are only accessible to insiders of this community and whose scope is strictly limited to the initial environment that adopted them (see examples such as 'frag*', 'rogue', 'loot' or 'aggro*').

Last, but not least, there is a third subcategory of loanwords that may be included in the primary language contact stage. It comprises words picked up by Romanian communities living abroad, following the contact with the languages spoken by locals. Although this phenomenon is still in its initial stages, we believe that the influences of Italian, Spanish, German, or French, or even of dialects such as Catalan, Neapolitan, or Sicilian on the Romanian language spoken by the extended Romanian diaspora should be monitored and studied on the long term.

The second category identified by Eugen Munteanu, i.e. loanwords undergoing idiomatization, includes linguistic signs that have propagated beyond the initial adopting community. There are several factors that facilitate this transition, such as traditional mass media, but also new media, like social media, blogs, online fora or mobile applications.

From a diaphasic perspective, we are dealing with concepts belonging to trendy domains, which capture the attention of a growing audience, not just locally, but also internationally. The worlds of fashion and food are very good examples. Many loanwords are undergoing idiomatization, and although they might seem like specialized terms, they are nothing more than words borrowed, sometimes uncontrollably, based on mimicking mechanisms. If we consider examples such as 'chef*', 'dish*', 'plating*' or 'catwalk*', 'fashion*', 'shooting*', it can be easily noted that these duplicate from a semantic point of view words that already exist in Romanian.

The second classification depicted by the third chapter of our dissertation is built around the criterion of semantic motivation, in other words, around the motivational model discussed in chapter II, which divides loanwords into two categories: semantically motivated and non-motivated. Within both categories, one can identify several subtypes, stemming from Andreas Blank's classifications and Dirk Geeraerts' semasiology - onomasiology dichotomy.

The onomasiologically motivated loanwords are by far the biggest category and they mostly include specialized terms from a wide variety of fields. There are two further branches in this category: terms designating new inventions and objects and terms designating concepts which are new **for the Romanian culture**. The first branch includes mostly scientific and technical terms belonging to subject matters with a fertile research activity (e.g. ‘amplicon’, ‘spacer’, ‘driver’, ‘browser’, ‘software’, etc.), whereas the second branch is mainly made up of terms designating concepts of the socio-professional world that have been adopted following the reshaping of Romanian society following the anti-communist Revolution. Examples from this subcategory include ‘marketing’, ‘audit’, ‘logo’, ‘modelling’, ‘media’, ‘public relations’, etc. The wider category of onomasiologically motivated loanwords also integrates words that depict new cultural realities for Romania. These are linguistic signs that have been borrowed following the adoption of new activities and behaviours by Romanian society, like ‘hobby’, ‘weekend’, ‘brunch’, ‘cocktail’, ‘punch’, or ‘mall’.

As previously mentioned, **semasiologically motivated loanwords** are adopted following various semantic denotational or connotational shifts of linguistic units. Examples of this category are illustrated above.

Loanwords having no semantic motivations can be divided into two categories: **residual loanwords** — usually motivated by the speakers’ desire to emancipate — and **stylistically motivated** loanwords. We used the adjective ‘residual’ to describe these words in order to highlight that a great deal of lexical units borrowed into Romanian duplicate words that already exist in the language. All pseudo-terms and elements of professional jargon can be included in this category (e.g. ‘make-up artist*’, ‘hair-stylist*’, ‘task*’, ‘draft*’, ‘speaker*’, ‘CEO*’, ‘opening*’, ‘lunch*’ sau ‘meeting*’).

Stylistically motivated loanwords have a special status. Their role is to highlight specific characteristics of certain concepts. This is the reason why they are mostly used in a high-level academic discourse. We illustrated this subcategory with the contemporary Romanian philosophic discourse, which makes heavy use of loanwords such as ‘theoria’, ‘laissez-faire’, ‘revival’, ‘edificatio’, ‘savoir’. Along with these words, the category also includes slang words used mostly by the younger generations: e.g. ‘man’, ‘horror’, ‘loud’, ‘cool’, ‘fun’ and so on.

The topic of the neologistic influx is often associated with a so-called language ‘hygiene’. However, if we look beyond this issue, a rigorous study of loanwords is well warranted and highly interesting in the accelerated globalization we all witness. Changes

in society have always left their mark on language. Indeed, the fundamental changes in today's society influence languages spoken throughout the world in the most direct way. The neologistic influx (which is not restricted to Romanian) is both a consequence and a sign of the changes that occur around us. And it would be interesting to see how each culture reacts to the propagation of neologistic items, in other words, a comparative study on the influx of neologistic elements in several languages would be highly welcome.

What is more, an interlinguistic research of loanwords, based on the principles of Integral Linguistics could reveal interesting features about the 'exporting' languages. One might be tempted to perceive English as the only resource of loan-worthy words and phrases, however it has been noted that other widely spoken international languages have influenced the process of lexical unit transfer at large. We have in mind, here, languages such as French, Italian and Spanish. This 'negative' perspective of the study of linguistic borrowing would help us understand, for instance, what the status of *lingua franca* means nowadays and how this status could influence, or even change a language.

It is our hope that this modest **explanatory** and **exploratory** contribution will trigger further qualitative and/or quantitative research in a complex and never-ageing matter and inspire a scientific dialogue based on rigorous theoretical grounds. Last, but not least, we shall consider our main objective achieved if and when an institutional normative initiative is launched regarding neologisms and the loanwords in contemporary Romanian that have been the topic of our research.