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ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ



Anabella-Gloria NICULESCU-GORPIN

Influențe cultural-lingvistice asupra evoluției recente a limbii române în context european și mondial



Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române



Anabella-Gloria NICULESCU-GORPIN

**INFLUENȚE CULTURAL-LINGVISTICE ASUPRA
EVOLUȚIEI RECENTE A LIMBII ROMÂNE
ÎN CONTEXT EUROPEAN ȘI MONDIAL**



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ȘI MONDIAL**

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Colecția *AULA MAGNA*



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Abstract

**Cultural and Linguistic Influences on the Recent
Evolution of the Romanian Language in a
European and Worldwide Context**

This research proposes an in-depth analysis of the interplay between the linguistic and cultural influences affecting present-day Romanian in the context of the linguistic and cultural openness and permeability that emerged as a result of the country's integration into the European and transatlantic structures. This book is conceived as an interdisciplinary research effort meant to analyse recent developments in the Romanian language used both inside and outside Romania, based on the influences identified at different language levels – spelling, vocabulary, morphology, and syntax. The study focuses mainly on the impact of the English language and Anglo-American culture on Romanian, as they appear to have exerted the greatest influence on this language, as they did on many others.

Considering the growing interest in multiculturalism and interculturalism (Goldberg: 1994, Kivisto: 2002, Trotman: 2002, Watson: 2000), this work is a timely and necessary contribution to the domain of multi- and interdisciplinary studies dedicated to present-day Romanian, a language that is undergoing a significant transformation under the influence of a variety of factors that have not become the object of systematic research as yet. The main contribution of the research is represented by the description and the analysis of several phenomena determined by the linguistic change the Romanian language currently undergoes, as well as the fact that it identifies and examines the intra-,

inter- and multi-cultural, interactional, political and even economic factors driving that change.

The influence of the English language and Anglo-American culture is so obvious in present-day Romanian that linguists could not ignore the topic for too long. However, the specialist studies published so far (for several references see the bibliography) have rarely gone beyond a descriptive approach, and have mainly confined themselves to recording language facts. The level of language most frequently approached has been the vocabulary, as it appears to be the most affected by this change, with an abundance of English borrowings permeating the language – with or without good reason. These studies have made suggestions about how these words could be adapted phonetically or morphologically, and have sometimes proposed solutions for standardisation. I have attempted to go beyond the descriptive level, and perform an in-depth exploration of these language phenomena, formulating socio-linguistic and socio-anthropological explanations for their existence and manifestation. The study also proposes cogent solutions for the standardisation of recent instances of linguistic change, based on arguments derived from the analysis.

Chapter I contains a brief outline of the theoretical foundations of my research. After defining the concept of *anglicism*, I turned to a concise presentation of past and present influences on Romanian, of the socio-cultural and politico-economic background to the current influence of English on Romanian, emphasizing the external causes of the influence of English on present-day Romanian. Chapter I ends with some considerations about language contact and language change, followed by a brief presentation of multiculturalism and multilingualism, as defined and described in relevant official documents of the European institutions.

Chapters II and III contain my original contribution and are dedicated to the analysis of the answers given to the two questionnaires I designed for the purposes of my research.

The main objective of this study has been to provide a true picture of the influence of the English language on present-day Romanian through the eyes of the best judges there can be: native speakers of Romanian. In order to do this, I have designed two questionnaires including various

sentences containing *anglicisms*, defined as instances of Romanian spelling, uses of lexical items or phrases, elements of morphology and syntax, cases of semantic broadening (or narrowing) that can be all traced back to the influence of English on Romanian.

I decided to dedicate the first (pilot) questionnaire, containing 15 sentences, almost exclusively to lexical anglicisms (borrowings and instances of lexical broadening determined by loan translations or false friends) as the vocabulary seems to have been the most permeable to the English influence. I included two sentences, however, that contained instances of morphological and syntactic influence. This questionnaire was applied to second and third year Romanian students majoring in English at the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, Department of Applied Modern Languages. It was posted online at the following address: <http://kwiksurveys.com/> in order to protect the respondents' privacy and to allow them to fill it in at their ease.

The main questionnaire, containing 30 sentences, contained spelling, lexical and morpho-syntactic anglicisms, in an attempt to cover as many aspects of the influence of English on present-day Romanian as possible. In order to be able to acquire a more nuanced view on the way in which Romanians perceive this influence, I decided to apply the main questionnaire to speakers living both inside and outside the country. For the same reasons of privacy and convenience, I chose to post the questionnaire online on several websites.

My initial intention had been to include only Romanians living in the UK in my survey, trying to see if daily exposure to English would trigger significant differences in their perception of anglicisms. The questionnaire was posted on www.romani.co.uk, the website of the Romanians living in the UK.

Since I only managed to collect a limited number of responses (after over a month only about 12 people had answered), I decided to include Romanians living in other countries besides the UK and, of course, Romanians living in Romania. I posted the questionnaire on two websites: www.desprecopii.com and www.detailing-club.ro.

Eventually, the main questionnaire was applied to four categories of subjects: Romanians in the UK, Romanians abroad in other countries, Romanian females living in Romania and Romanian males living in Romania. As the Romanian respondents on www.desprecopii.com were mainly females (with one exception – but the answers of that respondent were added to the category of Romanian male respondents), I chose to post the questionnaire on www.detailing-club.ro, a website dedicated to motoring, assuming that more men were likely to answer. My expectations were met, and I decided to also consider *gender* as a criterion in my analysis and to see whether it was in any way relevant. My final conclusion was that *gender* was not a relevant variable, as no real gender-specific differences could be identified in the respondents' perception of anglicisms.

For both questionnaires, respondents could choose to mark the sentences as either *Correct*, *Possible* or *Incorrect*. Respondents were told that there were no good or bad answers, that they were not expected to analyse the grammatical correctness of the sentences, but rather to read the sentences quickly and choose one of the answers based on their first impression. If they opted for *Possible* or *Incorrect*, they were also asked to identify the elements they found peculiar, without commenting on the truth of the sentences or connecting them to their personal experiences. I needed this additional information in order to be able to decide whether the respondents identified correctly the problems of the sentences. It is important to emphasize that respondents were not informed beforehand about the topic of the survey, i.e. their perception of anglicisms. I decided not to draw their attention to anglicisms so that they would not concentrate exclusively on identifying them in the sentences. In order not to leave respondents completely in the dark, however, I did provide them with some additional details about my research by adding a new page to the questionnaire that would only open once they had finished filling it in.

After examining all the answers given to both questionnaires, I retained 47 for the pilot-questionnaire and 97 for the main questionnaire.

I have structured my analysis as follows: I started by discussing the place of each and every anglicism in present-day Romanian, I tried to establish their frequency by running web-searches, I provided definitions

for every anglicism in English and Romanian (where available), and then added illustrative examples taken from the internet. In an attempt to provide a more complete overview of these phenomena, I sometimes considered the situation of such anglicisms in other Romance languages, as a potential starting point for standardising various anglicisms in Romanian.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the two questionnaires is difficult to summarise in a few lines, but the main points were summarised in the Conclusions chapter.

My findings suggest that over 50% of the respondents have not perceived the anglicisms included in the questionnaires, be they spelling mistakes, lexical borrowings and broadenings, or morpho-syntactic mistakes generated by poor translations, false friends etc. They considered these anglicisms to be a natural part of Romanian and failed to perceive that there was something wrong with them. It is my belief that the respondents who qualified the anglicisms as *possible* are well on the way towards adopting them completely, thus joining the ranks of those who have fully accepted them already.

As already pointed out repeatedly in the literature (see the bibliography), there is a strong tendency in present-day Romanian to accept English borrowings and add new meanings to words already existing in Romanian based on the English influence. Our society and culture are rapidly changing and new realities are emerging almost every day. Of course these new realities require new names, so Romanian has been speedily adopting a large number of new words.

Our analysis has revealed that there appear to be other reasons that trigger English borrowings, and they are mostly socio-psychological in nature. For instance, a growing number of Romanians tend to use *job* instead of RO. *loc de muncă, serviciu, slujbă*, and, although some linguists may claim that there is no need to borrow *job*, it already has an entry in several official dictionaries. Some reasons why Romanians may prefer *job* over its Romanian counterparts are its brevity, the fact that RO. *job* is (almost) mono-semantic and it is so often used in English and Romanian that it is highly activated in the mind of Romanian speakers. Many English borrowings are quickly building their new families in Romanian. For

instance RO. *sustenabil* also has other forms such as RO. *sustenabilitate*, *nesustenabil* etc. – generated by derivational processes specific to the target-language, Romanian.

New meanings are coined for Romanian words through loan translations especially for words that seem to have a common ancestor (e.g. RO. *expertiză* and EN. *expertise* both come from FR. *expertise*; while the meanings of the Romanian word do not completely overlap with the English meanings, there is a growing tendency in Romanian to also borrow the missing meanings).

All in all, (some) lexical anglicisms are the result of a natural need in any language to find names for new realities, so they cannot be considered errors that pollute the Romanian language.

What should worry Romanian linguists and non-linguists alike, however, are the changes that occur in the language at the morpho-syntactic level. The influence of English on Romanian morphology and syntax has been less discussed in the literature (if at all), although there are quite a few instances of distorted Romanian usage in a variety of text types. I have included some relevant examples in the main questionnaire (see for instance numbers 25, 26, 27). They contain blatant cases of incorrect usage that are the reflection of poor translations from English into Romanian that have generated inappropriate Romanian structures under the influence of the English original. While at least some lexical anglicisms can and should be adopted by Romanian because of the reasons mentioned above, morphological and syntactic anglicisms cannot be approached with the same open attitude. The copying of English morphology and syntax in Romanian should be considered a mistake. To the extent possible, such distortions need to be corrected as much as possible, while also providing appropriate explanations. The most frequent morphological and syntactic elements copied after the English language are the improper use of Romanian prepositions, the absence of double/multiple negation in cases where it should be present (as Romanian allows and sometimes actually imposes the use of multiple negation), expressed subjects where they should not be present (as Romanian allows subjectless sentences), etc.

My analysis suggests that the English language and Anglo-Saxon culture cannot and should not be blamed for their inappropriate influence on the Romanian language. Their influence is undeniable and inevitable and it is often beneficial for the language. What really matters is the attitude Romanians have towards their own language and culture. What I have found out in my discussions with several Romanians living either in Romania or abroad supports my findings derived from the analysis of the respondents' answers: Romanians living abroad tend to take greater care of their mother tongue, they pay more attention to the way they speak and to the words and structures they use, and most of them seem to be more alert to the presence of anglicisms in Romanian texts, which they correctly identify as not belonging to the Romanian language.

The analysis of the two questionnaires has also given me the possibility to establish the current level of acceptability of these phenomena and to foresee whether these phenomena are reversible or not.

Besides allowing me to show the degree to which certain phenomena triggered/ emphasized by the influence of English on present-day Romania are accepted as *correct/incorrect* by native speakers, the questionnaires represent a good starting point for future research. The data I have collected can be analysed along other variables: for example, the respondents' answers and remarks can be analysed individually to establish their attitude towards the anglicisms the questionnaires contain. As I have thoroughly analysed all the questionnaires in order to see whether they were appropriately filled in and could be included in my final analysis, I can state that while some respondents accepted some anglicisms as *correct* (such as lexical broadenings determined by loan translations), they strongly rejected others (such as the incorrect use of Romanian prepositions). The reasons for this differentiated perception could possibly be uncovered by designing and applying new questionnaires and corroborating their results with those obtained in the current survey.

Longitudinal studies could also be of interest, as they could show how the respondents' perception of various phenomena evolves over time. Respondents may first reject some anglicisms and in time, due to a variety of reasons (frequent exposure, the creation of new Romanian words

starting from the same root, etc.), they may embrace them as part of the Romanian language.

The statistical analysis I have conducted, which sometimes proved to be pretty dry and repetitive, has however allowed me to conclude that the number of native speakers who have accepted anglicisms as a natural part of the Romanian language is constantly growing, and there is little one can do to slow down the phenomenon.

This may not be to everybody's liking, but language and society seem not to give too much attention to the purists' opinions. Lexical borrowings and loan translations have always been the main processes by means of which a language has enriched its vocabulary. What is different this time is that there seems to be only one language from which present-day Romanian borrows – i.e. English – although this may only be a distorted perception, as there must also be words borrowed from French, Italian, Spanish or other languages, albeit much fewer in number. What really worries purists is the speed at which English borrowings are adopted. But then again, human society is also changing very fast: new technologies are being developed, the internet and computers are increasingly taking hold of every segment of society – so there is no stopping or going back. Language cannot and should not lag behind the evolution of our society.

All these new words and meanings should not be a cause for concern. If we could count all the new words and lexical broadenings appearing in Romanian under the influence of English today and if we were to repeat that count tomorrow, the results would probably be somewhat different, as many borrowings are like mayflies: though they are short-lived, they do fly around for a day or two and they are extremely annoying. The same goes for new words: many of them just come and go, and only some actually stick in a new language. By surveying Romanian speakers, as I have done, one can see whether the new words are ripe to become dictionary items: if most people no longer perceive them as foreign words, then they should be naturalized and given a Romanian passport. Whether we like it or not, people will continue to use them and it could be useful to try to standardize them. Linguists should provide guidance, not blame society and language for the choices they make.

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