

Oriental Influence on Romanian Vocabulary between Past and Present*

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Abstract:

Some Oriental elements with old or obsolete meanings are reviving in the current language as a result of extra-linguistic factors, social factors that remind us not only of the words, but also specific Oriental attitudes, behaviors dressed in modern clothes. Our interest was aroused by words such as *beizadea*, *bairam*, *manea*, *paranghelie* persisting in our vocabulary, though neologisms of English origin as *party*, *hit* and *cocktail* are very frequent. We believe that the speaker is keen on these Oriental elements not only for reasons of style, but also from a special openness that Romanian language has for such lexical borrowings, indicating in the same time a vibration of spirit and thinking in certain patterns without affecting the profound essence. The hospitality of the Romanian language enhances its stylistic resources and the ability to create images, being also a mirror of various major linguistic influences.

Keywords: Oriental influence, Romanian vocabulary dynamics, cultural pattern, social behavior

Oriental influence on Romanian vocabulary combines Greek elements with the Turkish ones and it is strongly represented by a period when the Oriental cultural pattern generated mentalities, social attitudes in Romanian society bringing with them different terms or words. Some of these terms are part of the fundamental word-stock; some of them belong only to the past and are considered archaisms. Most of the terms indicate aspects of material culture creating a sort of fashion in every respect, even concerning language. Following the destiny of the words we could notice their impact not only in the Romanian society of the period, but even the occurrence of forgotten words in nowadays Romanian vocabulary. Having a strong stylistic effect they are used in Romanian press which also contributes to enhance aspects that involve not only linguistic matters, but social ones, too.

Oriental influence strongly influenced Romanian language vocabulary, having as a result over 4000 new words in Romanian. The

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climax in Modern Greek influence was reached during the Phanariot époque. Turkish influence and Modern Greek influence were simultaneous and, together, they represent the Oriental influence in Romanian language.

The name *Phanariot époque* comes from the word *Fanar* (a district of Constantinople) having French etymon: *fanai*. This époque is the culmination of Turkish influence and also of the Modern Greek influence on the Romanian language. Turks take hold of state life: politics, economy, administration, trade, military, construction, trades etc. In this way, an appreciable number of Ottoman Turkish words entered the Romanian language, words that will be deprecated, not long after the removal of Phanariots rulers during the nineteenth century. Throughout the Phanariot period, words of Osmanli origin occur only sporadically in religious literature language. Turkish influence during Phanariote époque reached at first only the ruling classes. As a consequence of this Turkish influence, during the Phanariot period some popular words were formed or some of them became popular and they belong to different fields, such as *food* containing consumer items and utensils or containers: *acadele, baclava, cazan, cașcaval, ceaun, ciulama, chiftea, farfurie, iaurt, ibric, pilaf, tipsie, tavă, șerbet* etc. Other fields that contains words borrowed in Phanariot époque are the following: trade (*alișveriş, calp, chilă, cântar, para, peșin, raft, saftea, teanc, teighea, telal, samsar, teanc* etc.), clothing (*anteriu, basma, fes, giubea, ilic, ipingea, maramă, ciorap, șalvari, testemel, zăbun*), justice (*amanet, chirie, mezat, telal, vadea*) and of grazing (*caimac, cioban, otac, odaie, salepgiu, telemea, vătăf*).

Along with the Turkish influence during the Phanariot period, the Modern Greek influence should be discussed because the second one takes place in conditions almost identical to those of the Osmanli Turkish influence. Modern Greek language is the official language of the court. Modern Greek Words borrowed into Romanian during the Phanariot period refer to the state life (politics, administration, legal institutions and army), social or individual life (social hierarchy, family, conversation, correspondence, entertainment and mental condition), the intellectual life (schools, printing, library and science), trade and crafts and religious life.

The number of Modern Greek elements that have entered the fundamental word-stock of the Romanian language is something higher than that of the Turkish elements. Including Old Greek and Byzantine elements, the following Greek words are considered part of the fundamental word-stock of the Romanian language: *boboc, folos, frică, hârtir, mânie, pat, patimă, pedepsi, piper, prisos, proaspăt, proaspăt, procopsi, sigur, sosi, traistă, ursi, vopsi, zahăr*. Some of these words have a great power of derivation (*folos, mânie, patimă* etc.). These

widespread Modern Greek terms were preserved due to a stylistic nuance that they gained in Romanian language: *fandosi*, *moft*, *mutră*, *matracucă*, *lefter*, *ifos* etc. The Modern Greek terms that remained in Romanian language can be assigned to different areas, such as health care (*aerisi*, *cangrenă*, *epizootie*, *flegmă*, *gargarisi*, *istericale*, *lehuză*, *mamoș*, *molipsitor*, *tifos*) etc., the intellectual life (*dascăl*, *filă*, *logos*, *silabisi*, *teatru* etc.) terms referring to individual and social life (*agale*, *anapoda*, *anost*, *babac*, *ifos*, *ipocrizie*, *matracucă*, *mutră*, *cucă*, *noimă*, *simandicos*, *taifas*, *țață* etc.), trade (*agonisi*, *costisitor*, *fidea*, *folos*, *fundă*, *lefter*, *lin*, *portocală*, *prosop*, *saltea*, *stambă*, *zaharisi* etc.) Therefore, most Modern Greek borrowings preserved until today in Romanian literary language relate in particular areas of commercial and intellectual life.

A monograph devoted to the influence of Turkish on the Romanian language on which we based our research was conducted by Emil Suciu in 1986. The author analyzed 13 literary works published between 1968 and 1982 and in the following years of analysis on the Romanian lexis, 26 texts were used to determine whether the number of elements of Turkish origin has increased or decreased. It was found that the terms of Turkish origin most commonly used are: *geam*, *cafea*, *hai*, *chef*, *murdar*, *musafir*, *habar*, *odaie*, *dușman*, *caraghios*, *cutie*, *degeaba*, *soi* etc. Thus, of the 10 words presented in the 1986 study it was found that only 6 were maintained, the terms with the greatest importance. They are: *cafea*, *chef*, *dușman*, *geam*, *hai* and *murdar*. The other 4 words considered in the same way fell on lower places, but not under position 35. Emil Suciu concludes that:

the fundamental word-stock of Romanian language does not automatically include an exact number of words of Turkish origin. It does not necessarily include 10 words, as it was established in earlier study, or 13 words that Graur, in 1954, believed that are part of the word-stock (*cafea*, *cântar*, *chior*, *ciomag*, *dușman*, *moft*, *murdar*, *para*, *soi*, *tăbăci*, *zor*, *zori*). The compenence of the word-stock can be approximated only on investigation of a large number of texts belonging to areas and various typologies (less dictionaries) and by putting in balance the lexical elements of various origins, but even this approach can only be relative and forced, because no one can set a limit to the researcher. (Emil Suciu, 2009: 606)

The recent study from 2009 changed the situation regarding elements of Turkish origin in Romanian language vocabulary. Unlike the old study according to which Romanian vocabulary has 800–900 words, this one indicates 12,55–12,60 words of which 1,006 are borrowings and the rest are Romanian formations from them.

The current word-stock really contains only *cafea*, *chef*, *dușman*, *geam*, *hai(de)* and *murdar*, not *cearsăf*, *chibrit*, *ciorap* and *degeaba*. The latter are in the immediately below layer, so they do not leave the fundamental word-stock of the Romanian

language. In the current word-stock there are not 39 words (including two derivatives), but 40 borrowings plus one represented by a derivative. In the representative current stock there are not 71 terms of Turkish origin, but 81 words borrowed and a derivative representing an old borrowing, plus 102 other Romanian formations from these borrowings. The Romanian vocabulary contains not 700–800, but 645–680 words of Turkish origin, the majority (485–520) being part not of the representative vocabulary, but of the outer layer of the standard current vocabulary, having low levels of use. (Emil Suciu, 2009: 614–616)

The semantic evolutions of some Oriental elements rediscovers certain words, especially those of Turkish origin, for example *beizadea*, circulated in contemporary media, loses the original meaning of “son of a Turkish ruler” acquiring a pejorative meaning in different contexts. Therefore, we believe that certain Oriental elements which have lost their vitality reappear in active vocabulary by their special stylistic values they acquire and by contrasting with the new English lexical elements.

Among the Oriental elements selected for analysis only *beizadea* has not got a neological synonym, recently borrowed from English. Moreover, it is almost untranslatable in English, any attempt to find an equivalent fails by losing nuances that assure its stylistic force. The word *beizadea* designates in contemporary Romanian language not only “an Ottoman prince”, but evokes a timeless dimension of decadence, the moral rot that allows a worthless man and with no merits to occupy a high position with all the default arrogance. No wonder that in Romanian culture such lexical element was revived, updated, acquiring new semantic values and pejorative connotations in different époques characterized by such mentality.

BEIZADEĂ, *beizadele*, noun, feminine (Obsolete, today more ironic) Son of prince, prince. “Overthrown in a chair, *beizadeaua* Mitică Ghica puffing on a cigarette”. PAS 37. L. I The housewife bends before *beizadelei*, kissing his outstretched hand. SADOVEANU, ZC 43. “Look at him, Dad, he resembles a *beizadea*, does he? FILIMON, C. 111 – Pronounced: *bei-za-*. – Variant: **beizadé** (KOGĂLNICEANU, S. 210) feminine noun, source: DL-RLC (1955–1957) <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/beizadea>

In contemporary Romanian press, *beizadea* appears, however, accompanied by an Anglicism, so *beizadeaua* is the son of a *boss* (noun *boss*, Anglicism in Contemporary Romanian language) as follows:

Fiul unui director Romgaz, vacanțe de lux și plăceri împachetate în foite! *Beizadea* pozată în timp ce rula *una mica*.
CANCAN prezintă fotografiile inedite, primite pe cunoscuta adresă de e-mail pont@cancan.ro, în care apare Bogdan, fiul unui mare *boss* de la Romgaz: Grațian

Rusu, șef de exploatare în cadrul sucursalei Mureș.¹ (<https://www.cancan.ro/fiul-unui-director-romgaz-vacante-de-lux-si-placeri-impachetate-in-foite-beizadea-pozata-in-timp-ce-rula-una-mica-204138.html>)

BAIRĂM, *bairamuri*, noun, neuter 1. Name of two major Muslim religious festivals. 2. (Familiar) Party, big party. – From tc. **bayram**. (<https://dexonline.ro/definitie/bairam>)

The combination of an Oriental element with an Anglicism in Contemporary Romanian language is frequent in the field of *party language*. Thus, in written press we meet *bairam* along with *party*, a funny combination that expresses utterly the idea of *having fun* (contained in the Oriental element), updated to the new rhythms of the urban culture by the Anglicism *party*.

COOLTURA de WEEKEND. De la muzică clasică la *bairam: Party* pe acoperiș. Teatru sub Lună. Nopti cu Mozart
Bairam! – Party – Events in Bucharest² (<http://www.bucharest-tips.com/events/958-party-bairam>)

Another example from cyberspace media indicates a nuanced use of the old revitalized Oriental borrowing *bairam* and of the Anglicism *party*. So, *bairam* refers to old time's parties, understood by generations of those born before 1989 Revolution, who have nostalgia of those times, while *party* brings us to present, with energy, enjoying two essences: one from the past and one of present days:

Dacă te-ai născut înainte de Revoluție
Dacă știi cum era la *bairam*
Dacă ți-e dor de anii '90
Și dacă ai chef de *party*,
Vineri facem *bairam* ca altădată. Cu distracție, cu șlagăre, cu gașcă și cu chef. Fără ținută și fără fandoseli. Aceiași oameni. Aceleași vremuri. Aceeași muzică.³
(Șlagăre cu TEO de pe <https://www.liveout.ro/events/detalii/69099-%C8%98lag%C4%83re-cu-TEO>)

¹ The son of a manager of Romgaz, luxury holidays and pleasure wrapped in grass! *Beizadea* photographed while wrapping a “small one”. CANCAN presents original photographs received on the popular e-mail pont@cancan.ro, in which appears Bogdan, son of a great *boss* of Romgaz: Grațian Rusu, chief operating within the Mureș branch.

² COOLTURA of weekend. From classical music to *bairam: Party* on roof. Theatre under the moon. Mozart nights! *Bairam – Party – Events* in Bucharest. (The title *COOLTURA* is a word play containing another Anglicism *cool* instead of Romanian *cultura* for *culture*.)

³ If you were born before the Revolution/ If you know how it was like at *bairam!* If you miss the 90's/ And if you are in a mood of *party!* On Friday we have *bairam* like before. With fun, with famous songs, with gang and joy. No fancy dress. Same people. Same times. Same music.

The Turkish *bairam* is competed by Modern Greek *paranghelie* when we take into account the negative connotations.

PARANGHELIE, *paranghelii*, noun, feminine (familiar term) party. – from Modern Greek *paranghelia* <https://dexonline.ro/definitie/paranghelie>

Paranghelie seems a lexical element with a heavier load, designating a shameful party that ultimately defies common sense. Therefore, *paranghelie* appears in media in other contexts that usually highlights immoral aspects related to policymakers, spending public money etc. Here such a context:

Paranghelia a avut loc pe bani publici, la Băile Herculane, și s-a lăsat cu o băută serioasă, cu dansuri pe mese, cu pahare sparte, cu câte și mai câte, scrie [expressdebanat.ro](http://www.b1.ro/stiri/politica/paranghelie-din-bani-publici-lideri-politici-locali).⁴ (<http://www.b1.ro/stiri/politica/paranghelie-din-bani-publici-lideri-politici-locali>)

Sometimes *paranghelie* is even used to describe a social attitude, a *social pattern* emerged today:

Mai e și „solidaritatea” derivată dintr-o dorință multiplu împărtășită de a participa la o „*paranghelie*”. Viermuiala comunitară (de stradă, de club, de stadion) devine *hobby*. „Vrem *fun!*” „Te fac o Piața Universității?”; „Vii diseară la un marș de protest?” (Andrei Pleșu, *Reflecții despre patologia solidarității*, 30 iunie, 2014 de pe http://adevarul.ro/news/societate/reflectii-despre-patologia-solidaritatii-1_53b10d550d133766a8029c34/index.html)⁵

MANEÁ, *manele*, noun, feminine; love song of Oriental origin, with a tender melody – From tc. **mānì**.

Another hilarious lexical association is that between tc. *manea* and angl. *hit*. That is why in Romanian contemporary press, *manea* becomes *hit*: “O *manea* românească este *hit*-ul verii in Italia. Ascultă melodia!”. („Opinia Timișoarei”, 9 iunie, 2013 <http://www.opiniatimisoarei.ro/o-manea-romaneasca-este-hit-ul-verii-in-italia-asculta-melodia/09/06/2013>)⁶

The doublets selected on the pattern *old borrowing– recent borrowing* or *Oriental element – Anglicism* revealed not only the vitality

⁴ *Paranghelia* was held on public money at Herculane, and it finished with a serious drinking, dancing on tables, broken glasses with and what not, writes [expressdebanat.ro](http://www.expressdebanat.ro) writes.

⁵ There’s also the “solidarity” derived from a multiple shared desire to participate in a “*paranghelie*”. Community swarming (street, club, stadium) becomes *hobby*. “We want *fun!*” “Are you coming to University Square?” “Are you coming to a protest march tonight?” (In this text, the author mingles deliberately the Oriental element with some Anglicisms to underline social cliché).

⁶ “A Romanian *manea* is the summer *hit* in Italy. Listen to this song!”

of old borrowings and their capacity to develop series of synonyms in Contemporary Romanian Language by borrowings from English, but also certain behavioral patterns and social attitudes that developed on time, both by force of cultural pattern and by linguistic influence.

Romanian speaker also assimilates with language such patterns that are metabolized generating new attitudes to society, to the world. We speak of *spiritual contamination* through *language*, as an outcome of takeover *mentalities* that have not always proved to be beneficial. It is obvious that such lexical structures increased the expressiveness of Romanian language, enriching its resources and the ability to put into words realities specific to Romanian spiritual dimension.

Beyond any analysis of Romanian lexis in terms of old borrowings (Oriental) and recent ones (Anglicisms), we notice the permanent double folding of the spirit of this Romance language on cultural and linguistic paradigms that enabling it to express the richest way states, emotions, temporal color, this hospitality towards lexical elements so different in origin couldn't affect its Latin essence.

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ABBREVIATIONS

angl. – Anglicism

tc. – Turkish

