8th LUMEN International Scientific Conference Rethinking Social Action.
Core Values in Practice | RSACVP 2017 | 6-9 April 2017 |
Suceava – Romania

Rethinking Social Action.

Core Values in Practice

A Few Considerations Concerning Latin And Slavic Influences On The Development Of Noun Inflection In Contemporary Romanian

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<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.rsacvp2017.53>

How to cite: Peica, C.-E. (2017). A Few Considerations Concerning Latin And Slavic Influences On The Development Of Noun Inflection In Contemporary Romanian. In C. Ignatescu, A. Sandu, & T. Ciulei (eds.), *Rethinking Social Action. Core Values in Practice* (pp. 578-586). Suceava, Romania: LUMEN Proceedings <https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.rsacvp2017.53>

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**A Few Considerations Concerning Latin And
Slavic Influences On The Development Of Noun
Inflection In Contemporary Romanian**

Cipriana-Elena PEICA^{1*}

Abstract

The Romanian language is the representative of the Latin language spoken continuously from the time of the Roman rule in the Eastern Roman Empire until today. Latin has changed, has evolved under the influence of the native populations of Dacia and the Balkan Peninsula or of the populations coming from other regions and settled in the Danube regions. All these changes are reflected in texts showing that vulgar or spoken Latin underlying the Romanian language is not different from the Latin spoken in other Roman provinces. The evolution of Latin is reflected in all areas of grammar, from the phonological system to the morphological and syntactic system. In this paper, we will focus on the influences of Latin and Slavic languages on noun inflection in Romanian; we will also focus on the reversed situation, namely on how the particularities of the Romanian language influenced, in turn, Slavic languages such as Bulgarian. Therefore, we will address two linguistic systems that are different, but which are interlinked and mutually influenced. We will refer to analytical declension, synthetic declension, articulated and non-articulated forms of nouns, and prepositions, in a desire to present a few particularities of the two linguistic systems that explain how Latin and Slavic influences are reflected in noun inflection in contemporary Romanian.

Keywords: noun, Roman, Balkan, Latin, inflection.

1. Introduction

The Romanian language is the representative of the Latin language spoken continuously from the time of the Roman rule in the Eastern Roman

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<https://doi.org/10.18662/lumproc.rsacvp2017.53>

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Empire until today, but at the same time it is *the only survivor of oriental Latin which, while living together with non-Romance languages of the Balkan Peninsula, acquired through centuries non-Romance features that distinguish it from the other Romance languages* [9 p585].

2. Theoretical Background

Al. Rosetti demonstrated that Romanian was the Latin spoken in the Danubian regions from ancient times to the present day[8 p75-87]. The genealogical definition given by the author is the following: *Romanian is the Latin language spoken uninterruptedly in the Eastern Roman Empire, which includes the Romanised Danubian provinces (Dacia, South Pannonia, Dardania, Upper and Lower Moesia), from the penetration of Latin into these provinces until nowadays*[8 p75].

Latin has changed, has evolved under the influence of the native populations of Dacia and the Balkan Peninsula or the populations coming from other regions and settled in the Danube regions; all these changes are reflected in texts showing that vulgar or spoken Latin underlying the Romanian language is not different from the Latin spoken in other Roman provinces.

The Latin element of Romanian is composed of inherited words brought by Romans in the conquered provinces and words introduced by Școala Ardeleană (the Transylvanian School) in the 18th century. We know that Romanian has about 120 Latin words, which other Romance languages do not have, such as: *adăpost* (*shelter*), *farmec* (*charm*), *a defăima* (*to slander*), *aierta* (*to forgive*), *lingură* (*spoon*), *ferice* (*happy*), etc. Of the 1500 words that make up the basic elements of the Romanian language (determined according to the importance of the word and its use by the entire population), 60% are of Latin origin and 46.60% of the words used by Mihai Eminescu in his poems are Latin[8 p172]. The connecting words - conjunctions and prepositions - without which a correct sentence cannot be made in Romanian are Latin. The pronouns are Latin. The verbs defining the key senses (*auzi* / *to hear*, *a gusta* / *to taste*, *a vedea* / *to see*, *a simți* / *to touch*), the adjectives (*amar* / *bitter*, *dulce* / *sweet*, *cald* / *warm*), and the numerals are Latin. The words defining basic notions of agriculture (*câmp* / *field*, *a ara* / *to plough*, *usturoi* / *garlic*, *ceapă* / *onion*, *fasole* / *beans*, *varză* / *cabbage*), shepherding (*berbec* / *ram*, *lână* / *wool*, *lapte* / *milk*), plant names (*arbore* / *tree*, *fag* / *beech*, *plop* / *poplar*, *prun* / *plum tree*, *piersic* / *peach tree*), occupations (*morar* / *miller*, *fierar* / *blacksmith*, *argintar* / *silversmith*), names of domestic animals (*cal* / *horse*, *câine* / *dog*, *capră* / *goat*, *cățel* / *puppy*, *bou* / *ox*, *găină* / *hen*) or wild animals (*urs* / *bear*, *lup* / *wolf*, *cerb* / *stag*, *iepure* / *rabbit*), body parts (*corp* / *body*, *păr* / *hair*, *barbă* / *beard*, *nas* / *nose*,

ureche / ear, ochi / eye, piept / chest, limbă / tongue, dinte / tooth) or kinship ties (*fiu / son, frate / brother, mama / mother, nepot / nephew, noră / daughter-in-law, soră / sister*) are of Latin origin. The names of the days, months, seasons of the year are of Latin origin as well.

3. Argument of the paper

In this paper, we will focus on the noun and the way in which it has evolved under Latin influence and from the viewpoint of the elements which it has acquired through contact with south Slavic languages, such as Bulgarian, since the 5th and 6th centuries.

We consider that this paper has an international impact because the Romanian language has developed among Balkan languages, which represented another culture, another civilisation, and that fact gives it a profoundly particular character among Romance languages.

4. Arguments to support the thesis

Al. Rosetti demonstrated that the oldest Slavic elements that entered the Latin language of the Romanised populations, which later became the Romanian language, possessed the features of the Bulgarian language[8 p584]; thus, although the case inflection of the Latin noun continues in the Romanian language, it is obvious that the case inflection of the Romanian noun is now greatly simplified, given that desinences can be identical in all cases. In fact, desinence indicates the form of a noun according to case: one for nominative-accusative, another for genitive-dative, and another form for vocative - the introduction of the singular vocative desinence-**o** for common feminine nouns and names of people[8 p583-584], in examples such as *fetișo, Ano, Ileano* etc., reproduces the Slavic system.

In a Latin sentence, each word was independent from the other, since its role was indicated by desinence, each word being marked by the role it fulfilled. Gradually, the role of inflection became secondary, and the use of prepositions was favoured by the disappearance of case desinences. Later, the tendency to substitute a free word order with a fixed order rendered declension useless. As final consonants gradually disappeared, case inflections were used without any distinction, and consequently the relationship between words could not be expressed anymore by the existing means[8 p156-160].

In contemporary Romanian, desinence is a secondary mark of the case, but the same can be said about phonetic alternations, which contribute

to the identification of cases that appear only in some feminine nouns with two case forms in singular, and about the article. The nominative-accusative form and possibly the vocative form of certain nouns such as *școală*, *poruncă*, *stea* (school, command, star) form the singular genitive-dative with the help of a phonetic alternation: *școli*, *porunci*, *stele*. Due to the fact that phonetic alternations occur in a small number in nouns, they are only a redundant means and have a secondary importance in indicating the cases. Romanian articles have two case forms – in singular one for nominative-accusative and another for genitive-dative (possibly also vocative), and in plural one for nominative-accusative and another for genitive-dative, which means that articles cannot indicate a certain case, but only a case form: *lui* in *luitata* or *tatalui* (of/to the father) indicates genitive-dative, singular; *lorin* *baieților* (of/to the boys) indicates genitive-dative or vocative, plural. Exceptions are only articles such as *a*, *al*, *ai*, *ale*, *alor*, which indicate the genitive in nouns. The genitive with *a* (e.g. *judecata a doi oameni* / the judgment of two people) comes from the vulgar construction with *ad* and the accusative (e.g. *membra ad duos fratres*)[8 p157].

Since desinences disappeared, the use of prepositions has been extended to express in a sentence the relationships between the different parts of that sentence. This trend has developed in vulgar Latin and is fully achieved in Romance languages[8 p158-160].

In Romanian, a preposition is usually used as an annex to a noun, but it is a secondary mark of a case. In nouns, prepositions are specialised for a particular case. Prepositions such as *pe*, *pentru*, *de la*, *în* (on, for, from, in) etc. usually require the accusative case; prepositions such as *împotriva*, *înspre*, *asupra*, *contra*, *împotriva* (against, behind, in front of) etc. require the genitive case, and prepositions such as *contrar*, *conform*, *grație*, *datorită*, *mulțumită* (contrary to, according to, thanks to, due to) require the dative case. Prepositions are secondary marks of a case. Not all cases are indicated by prepositions: the nominative case and the vocative case do not accept prepositions [5 p276-281].

Romanian innovations include the use of the preposition *de* + accusative instead of the Latin genitive to link the object to verbs that mean *a-șiaminti*, *a uita* (to remember, to forget), the use of the preposition *de* + accusative with verbs expressing perception - *a vedea*, *a auzi*, *a ști* (to see, to hear, to know)[8 p 156-157], and the use of the accent as a secondary mark to identify the vocative case, especially when its morphological structure is identical to other cases[3 p132-135].

In the noun sphere, other elements that reproduce the Slavic system and which are found in the contemporary Romanian morphology are the numerals from 11 to 19, the process of counting tens from 20 to 90 (dr.

douăzeci; v. sl. *dŭvadesęti*), the counting of units of tens (dr. *șazecișitrei*; v. sl. *šestidesęti* (*ti*) *trije*), the numeral hundred (v. sl. *sŭto*), and the reflexive inflection[8 p583-585].

5. Arguments to argue the thesis

Although the evolution of Latin is reflected in all areas of grammar, from the phonological system to the morphological and syntactic system, the fact that the Romanian language has developed among Balkan languages, which represented another culture, another civilisation, gives it a profoundly particular character among Romance languages.

5.1. Structure

Next, we will discuss a few aspects regarding the evolution of cases from Latin into Romanian. It is obvious that the case system of the contemporary Romanian language distinguishes it from other Romance languages. Romanian kept a synthetic inflection system explained by Al. Rosetti and Al. Graur as being the result of the Slavic-Romanian bilingualism. South Slavic languages are rich in inflections, they have influenced noun inflection in Romanian. Although the three-case declension of feminine nouns in *-a*, the two-case declension of feminine nouns in *-e*, and of masculine nouns having the vocative in *-e*, except for the vocative in *-o*, are similar to Latin desinences, the issue of Romanian desinences was and is much discussed because some researchers believe that they are not always deduced from the Latin forms with which they were connected.

An example in this respect is the origin of the *-e* and *-i* desinences in the oblique case of feminine nouns. Al. Rosetti, I. Iordan and Ovid Densusianu are only three of the great researchers who consider and argue their Latin origin; they do not believe that this tendency was interrupted by the Slavic influence, but that the unification of the genitive case with the dative case took place in colloquial Latin, while in the common Roman Latin the two cases became indistinguishable. The genitive-dative identity in feminine nouns is not due to the influence of the Slavic morphological system[8 p 585]. Very few of the Latin forms have been maintained in the genitive-dative cases; among them, the words designating the days of the week have been kept as nominatives: *marți* (Tuesday) < in Latin *martis* (*dies*), *joi* (Thursday) < in Latin *jovis* (*dies*), *luni* (Monday) < in Latin *lunis* (*lunadies*). *Lunis* has been restored by analogy with forms like *martis* (*dies*)[2 p40].

On the other hand, although he does not intend (as he himself stresses) to contradict the tendency of colloquial Latin manifested

throughout the entire Romania to replace the synthetic inflection with the analytical one also in feminine nouns of the first and third declension, Sorin Stati[9 p63-75] is of the opinion that, since the situation attested by inscriptions does not help to explain the continuity of the dative in *-e*, it should be admitted that at the beginning of the Slavic-Romanian bilingualism the unification of the cases in masculine and neuter nouns was already done, given that the Slavic influence did not have any oblique case forms to support apart from the vocative, while in feminine nouns it was not yet done, as stated also by I. Coteanu[1 p 11].

The purpose of these explanations is not to demonstrate or determine *who is right* in this respect, but to point out that the Slavic-Romanian bilingualism has generated the scientific discussions about the Slavic influence on noun inflection after the 10th century.

The undeniable existence of interactions between the Balkan Romance and the Balkan Slavic languages is in fact only part of a wider network of interactions involving other languages, both Greek and Albanian. Diachronically, the evolution of the two linguistic systems demonstrates a series of parallels that are morphologically explained also by the fact that there are three cases in Romanian and Bulgarian, while other Romance languages only have one case, and other Slavic languages have up to seven forms of declension. Tomasz KLIMKOWSKI explains this phenomenon from the perspective of the coexistence of the two peoples [4]. Seidel believes that this close coexistence has resulted in an exchange of influences so intense that in some cases it cannot be determined which of the two languages gave and which one received[10 p15-16, 21].

Tomasz KLIMKOWSKI states that *there is an attitude that perceives linguistic relations of this kind as a compromise: the two different linguistic systems meet halfway, one speeding up and the other one slowing down the evolution of the language group to which they belong*. This explanation is generally justified and correct, but it does not apply to all the phenomena that are common to the two languages, since a feature of one of the two is implanted in the other and is explained either as a common innovation - an action of the internal forces that are common to both linguistic systems due to bilingualism and the general ethnic mixture; or as a loan from one language to the other; or as a reverse loan, as an independent innovation or an influence from another linguistic system. The concordances of noun inflections between Romanian, Istro-Romanian, Megleno-Romanian and Aromanian on the one hand, and Bulgarian and Macedonian on the other hand, are a case in which the proposed solution was to take into account all the criteria mentioned above[4 p223-233].

In the article “*Parallels between Balkan Romance and Balkan Slavic Languages in Noun Inflection*”, Tomasz KLIMKOWSKI demonstrates that the changes in the case system from Latin to Romanian and from the old Slavic to Bulgarian had similar results at least at one point in time. *The changes are very big compared to the previous stages in the evolution of these idioms. The number of cases has decreased and, due to the occurrence of suffixed definite article, an articulated declension has been created*[4 p223-233].

As regards the synthetic declension and the suffixed article in Romanian and Slavic languages, several clarifications are needed. We only point out, on the one hand, that Slavic languages do not have the form of article which appeared at different times in almost all Indo-European languages, and on the other hand that the Balkan Romance languages have a more synthetic noun system than the other Romance languages and a suffixed definite article (not prefixed like Romance languages), while Balkan Slavic languages have diverged significantly from the other Slavic languages, developing an analytical model of the noun system and creating article forms that do not exist in the rest of the Slavic world.

The Latin language had six cases: nominative, genitive, accusative, dative, vocative, ablative, from which the Romanian language retained the following: nominative, accusative, genitive, dative and vocative, but it had no definite or indefinite article. Therefore, the suffixed article is an innovation both in Balkan Romance and in Balkan Slavic languages.

In the field of noun morphology, the works of I. Pătruț “About the ‘Neuter’ Gender in Romanian”[6 p26-34]and “About the Gender of Romanian Nouns of Slavic origin”[7 p95-100] contain the author’s finding that Slavic neuter nouns did not remain neuter once they entered the Romanian language, but became feminine, and the Romanian neuter nouns borrowed from Slavic languages are masculine in Slavic; this seems to prove that the preservation and development of the neuter gender in Romanian is not due to a Slavic influence. Regardless of the chosen opinion, one thing is certain: given that the need to distinguish a gender of things can be explained by the Slavic environment, especially since Slavic languages have this gender, and for the Romanian language the neuter gender represents an element of individuality among Romance languages, the existence of the neuter gender as a grammatical category is a common point of the two languages.

6. Dismantling the arguments against

As we already said, the undeniable existence of interactions between the Balkan Romance and the Balkan Slavic languages is in fact only part of a wider network of interactions involving other languages, both Greek and Albanian. Diachronically, the evolution of the two linguistic systems demonstrates a series of parallels that are morphologically explained also by the fact that there are three cases in Romanian and Bulgarian, while other Romance languages only have one case, and other Slavic languages have up to seven forms of declension.

7. Conclusions

In this paper, we focused on the influences of Latin and Slavic languages on noun inflection in Romanian, but also on the reverse situation in which the particularities of the Romanian language influenced, in turn, Slavic languages such as Bulgarian.

We addressed two different linguistic systems by presenting only some of the connections and mutual influences – therefore the paper can be expanded – out of the desire to present a few particularities of the two linguistic systems and point out how Latin and Slavic influences were reflected in noun inflection in contemporary Romanian.

Acknowledgments

This paper is a result of a doctoral research made possible by the financial support of the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007 -2013, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project POSDRU/187/1.5/S/155383 - „Quality, excellence, transnational mobility in doctoral research”.

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