

# LANGUAGES SPOKEN AROUND THE BLACK SEA AS A SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE: GREEK INFLUENCES TO THE ROMANIAN LANGUAGE AND THEIR COMMON CHARACTERISTICS

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## *Abstract*

This project is an alternative proposal of teaching the Romanian language as a second/foreign one. Firstly we will examine the linguistic and structural characteristics that are common in the Balkan languages (Balkansprachbunde). In addition we will locate the Greek influences in the Romanian language. Finally, there will be presented the possible origins of each common characteristic.

**Keywords:** Greek, Romanian, common, characteristics, method.

## **1. Introduction**

It is known that Greece, as a member of the European Union maintains and continuously develops various kinds of new relationships with other members-states and the Eastern Mediterranean. In recent years, however, the evolution of the relationship developed with the Balkans (mainly of economic, educational and diplomatic interest) is really rapid. In response to the activities mentioned, the problem of communication arose. Thus, the interest in learning the most widely used languages such as English or French was shifted to the Balkan languages.

To meet the teaching needs of specific languages, the Greek state has established relevant University Departments including the Romanian language. The acquisition of the Romanian language by Greek speaking students is an interesting and complex process, presenting features in common with the Greek. More specifically, learning the Romanian language is facilitated by the common characteristics it presents with the Greek language. Thus, teachers of Romanian achieve their Greek speaking students to have a better understanding and a smooth acquisition of the language, through paralleling the two languages. The characteristics that appears common in both languages exist on all levels of language (phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical-semantic). Moreover, the Romanian vocabulary has added a number of Greek words that are loan words from the time of Phanariots. This vocabulary contributes to meeting the cognitive objective knowledge from the moment that Greek students are aware of it

## **2. The development of the Romanian language and the term "Balkanisms".**

Making a brief reference to historical sources, the Romanian language first appeared in the 3rd century when the Romans conquered Dacia (275 AD). Since then the Romanian language starts to develop, enriched by words from other languages and influenced by various conquests. As regards to the languages by which affected the Romanian was affected are Latin, French, Greek, Slavic etc. Around the 16th century we have the Greek influence

because of the particular development of Fanar across the region and the settlement of many Greeks there known in history as “Phanariotes”. In particular, Phanariotes were concerned with the development of literature and science. They also moved to Iasi for the development of literature and commerce, occupying very high positions and gradually enriching the Romanian vocabulary with Greek words. These are transferred either with their real significance or with slight variations. However, influences, seems to exist in the structure of the language as well.

Concerning the common characteristics that Romanian and Greek share, where linguists showed their interest in the languages of the Balkans found that many of these languages have common characteristics either lexical or structural.

Nowadays, linguists refer to two categories of languages used by speakers in the Balkans. The first category is termed "Languages of the Balkans". The second category is the "Balkan Languages." So, according to Schaller, «Languages of the Balkans are considering all the languages spoken in the Balkans. Nevertheless, he states that the term may be qualitative rather than purely geographical. On the other hand, the term "Balkan Languages" is the known linguistic term assigned to the German bibliography as "Balkansprachbund" (that is Balkan linguistic group). The term “Linguistic Group” (“Sprachbunde”), refers to the group of the languages that are geographically adjacent and share many lexical and structural features, but, nevertheless, they do not often belong to the same language group or family. Such a linguistic group was observed in the Balkans, so when talking about "Balkan Languages," we mean the languages spoken in this region and although they do not belong to the same linguistic family, they share characteristics common in vocabulary and structure. Thus the term “Balkan Languages” include Albanian, Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian and Serbian.

These common features found in the languages belonging to the group of Balkan languages are called “Balkanisms”. Unfortunately, there has not been a consensus among linguists about the number of characteristics that are considered "Balkanisms" since this number often fluctuates. In this paper we will present the characteristics that are common according to most modern scholars. Thus, characteristics that are considered "Balkanisms" are:

a) the elimination (or reduction) of the infinitive and its replacement with subjunctive or indicative accompanied by monosyllabic particle (corresponding to the Greek “να”), even in the case of one subject construction

**Romanian**  
**să nu vadă**  
**vreau să citesc**

**Greek**  
**να μη βλέπει**  
**θέλω να διαβάσω**

b) the use of periphrastic future, formed by a verb form that has the meaning of I “want”(or derived verb has a meaning) and a monosyllabic particle corresponding to the Greek “να”.

**Romanian**  
**o-să citesc.**

**Greek**  
**θα διαβάσω**  
**(θέλω (= vreau)- θα)**

c) the identification of genitive and dative cases of the noun

**Romanian**

am spus copilului să citească

**Greek**

είπα του αγοριού να διαβάσει

d) the complementary use of negative (“negative agreement”)

**Romanian**

n- am spus **nimic**.

**Greek**

**δεν** είπα **τίποτα**

e) the hypothetical sentence with an affirmative verb and its negative verb

**Romanian**

vrea **nu** vrea

**Greek**

θέλει **δεν** θέλει

f) the use of periphrastic future perfect formed with an auxiliary verb that means “I am” or “I have”

**Romanian**

vreau **să** citesc

**Greek**

θέλω **να** διαβάσω

g) the definite article

**Romania**

băiatul

eleva

autobuzul

**Greek**

ο άντρας

η μαθήτρια

το λεωφορείο

h) the use of periphrastic comparatives and

**Romanian**

**mai** frumos

**Greek**

**πιο** όμορφος

j) the use the personal pronoun as an anticipatory object.

Reading the origin of these features, the following theories through time propose, as mentioned by Tomic theories which are listed below:

***Of Thracian, Dacian or ilyrrical origin.***

Since most of these features can not be found in languages related to those in the Language Group (like other Slavic and Roman languages), the first researchers, including Kopitar, thought that they were inherited from the paleo-Balkan languages (Thracian, Dacian and Illyrian) that formed the basis for the modern Balkan languages. But since very few are known to us about any of these languages it can not be determined whether these features existed.

***Of Greek origin.***

Another theory, put forward by Kristian Sandfeld in 1930, was that these features were of entirely Greek origin. The Greek language could not have borrowed these language features because these features already existed in it. However, no ancient Greek dialect has “Balkanisms”, so the features that have spread to other regional languages seem to be post-

classical innovations. Also, the Greek language seems to be a regional language in the Balkan Linguistic Group, because it lacks some important features such as the case of the article.

### ***Of Latin and Romance origin.***

The Roman Empire ruled the Balkans, and the local variations of Latin may have left their mark in all the languages there, which later become the basis to the Slavic newcomers. This was suggested by Georg Solta. The weakness of this theory is that other Roman languages have some of these features, and there is no evidence that the Balkan Roman language were isolated for a long time to develop them.

### **3. The common characteristics in the Greek and Romanian language.**

Here are some of the influences of the Greek to Romanian vocabulary, structure and phonology:

#### **a. In the vocabulary**

As already mentioned, with the settlement of the Greeks in the Fanar in the 16th century, a significant number of Greek words penetrated the Romanian vocabulary. Until the 16th century, however, it is worth mentioning that loans of this period are very short and that the bulk of the entries added to the Romanian vocabulary was observed during the 16th to 18th century, around 1000 Greek words. Of these, up to now used in everyday life, are fewer than a hundred, representing 2.37% of total Romanian vocabulary. These Greek words entered in various fields as you can see from the following examples:

#### **Medicine:**

- aerisi (αερίζω)
- cangrenă (γάγγρενα)
- epizootie (επιζωοτία)

#### **Everyday life:**

- agale (αγάλι)
- ananghie (ανάγκη)
- anapoda (ανάποδα)
- anost (άνοστος)
- orfan (ορφανός)
- plicticos (βαρετός)

#### **Social words:**

- anarhie (αναρχία)
- catagrafie (καταγραφή)
- epitrop (επίτροπος)

- partidă (παρτίδα)

#### **Political life:**

- agramat (αγράμματος)
- dascăl (δάσκαλος)
- logos (λόγος)

#### **Religion:**

- aghiazmă (αγίασμα)
- amvon (άμβωνας)
- anaforă (αναφορά)
- pronie (πρόνοια)
- tagmă (τάγμα)

#### **Words of professions:**

- calapod (καλαπόδι)
- igrasie (υγρασία)
- ipsos (γύψος)
- mistrie (μυστρί)
- sculă (εργαλείο)

#### **Trade:**

- agonisi (κερδίζω)
- chefal (κέφαλος)
- costisitor (ακριβός)
- fidea (φιδές)
- scumbrie (σκουμπρί)
- stambă (στάμπα)
- zaharicale (ζαχαρωτά)

### **b In the structure**

Noting the common features of the two languages, one can easily wonder to what extent the Greek language influenced the structure of the Romanian. According to recent theories, characteristics that seem to have Greek origins are as follows:

**b.1** The effect of the abolition of the infinitive, replacing it with a monosyllabic particle (like Greek “*να*”) and subjunctive even when there is one-subject construction. However, the official written Romanian language prefers the use of infinitive. As long as that these phenomena co-exist, we can consider that perhaps one of the two is a loan, and can not be any different from the first regarded as a speaking structure. The same structure (i.e. the use of the subjunctive with a monosyllabic particle), seems to have been used in the Greek language since the 16th century in northern Greece and particularly in Thessaloniki but we can also see in the every day use.

**b.2** The use of periphrastic future which is formed by a monosyllabic form of verb “*I want*” (“*θέλω*”) and a monosyllabic particle (corresponding to the Greek “*να*”), is also likely to have Greek origins. More specifically, the Romanian language uses two structures to indicate the future tense. The first is already mentioned above and is used mainly in speaking and the second is formed by the verb “*want*” and the infinitive of each verb. The second structure of the future exists in the written language which means that it may be a loan as it also happens with the previous structure. The possibility of this structure being of Greek origin, results from the fact that the Greek language had already disappeared since the sixth century and the periphrastic future was formed by the one-word particle “*to*” (“*να*”) and subjunctive of past tense. Later, however, in order to clarify “wishes”, “imperative”, “obligatory sentences” or the simple future statements, the use of the verb “*want*”, was necessary. In Romanian language the same structure does not seem to come from Latin. We know that even in Latin the future in the verbs of 3<sup>rd</sup> conjugation was the same type as the subjunctive present tense of the verb of the same conjugation. So, the Greek origin of this structure is very likely.

**b.3** The problem of identification of genitive and dative cases, probably has its in the Greek language too. In Greek, this phenomenon occurs only in some pronouns while in everyday language this identification appears only in the structure with an indirect object (with a meaning of dative case). Also, in everyday speech, we may encounter sentences with nouns in genitive case with the use of “*de*”. We know that in Latin there were distinct types for these two cases except in the case of first declension nouns names so we can assume that the identification of genitive and dative is due to another language which is likely to be Greek if we consider that the dative had already been abolished in speaking since the 10th century.

**b.4** The structure of an affirmative verb accompanied by the same verb in negative (as in Greek “*θέλει δεν θέλει*”, “*vrea nu vrea*”) may have its origin in Greek rather than in other Roman languages, since this structure in the other Roman languages has a slightly differentiated structure.

Regarding the other common features that the Romanian and Greek have, the chances be Greek, are minimal and they are more likely to be of Latin origin and not Greek.

### **c. In the phonology**

The phonological features common in Romanian and Greek belong to the less common features among the Balkan languages. These are the frequent replacement of “*l*” by “*r*” (the

same happens in Albanian) and very rarely, the augment of “o” to “u” in a few syllables in Romanian but also in words that belong to the northern Greek dialects.

#### 4. Conclusion

From everything discussed above, we conclude that the influence of the Greek language both in vocabulary and in various structural features is quite large. As already mentioned since the 17th century onwards, the Romanian language has acquired about 1000 words directly from Greek and until today still exist in the Romanian vocabulary, although their number has declined. Moreover, regarding the common features of the languages belonging to the Balkan Linguistic Group, called “Balkanisms”, we observe that many of them seem to have Greek origins.

In conclusion, this small research could contribute to the teaching of Romanian language as a second language, by teaching the common vocabulary in Greek and Romanian as well as the common features present in grammar, in syntax and phonology, enabling students to understand better the structure of the Romanian language.

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