MOXA' S LITURGICAL LANGUAGE

Iuliana-Valentina BOBOACĂ
University of Pitești

Abstract: This study, dedicated to Orthodox liturgical language, is based on the manuscript of Mihail Moxa: St. Gregory – The Signification of Divine Liturgy. The research analyzes the morphological and lexical features of Romanian language belonging to the seventeenth century.

Keywords: cult, old language, liturgy, theonym, prayer.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes the liturgical language used by the erudite monk Mihail Moxa in his religious writings. The Romanian literature was enriched in the seventeenth century through the efforts of this monk who, at the urge of Bishop Theophilus, wrote The Universal Chronicle (1620), the first writing of this kind in Romanian. Convinced that a nation can advance only through self-awareness of its historical place, Theophilus of Râmnic asked Moxa to translate two religious works: *St. Gregory – The Signification of Divine Liturgy* – and of *St. Basil – Teachings for Priests*, both kept in a manuscript that is currently located at the British Library, London.

In a time when the cult language in Romania was Slavonic, two papers written in Romanian were more than necessary. The writings' language is concise, having many metaphors that convey the sense of divine, without being overbearing.

The word *liturgy* comes from the contraction of two Greek words: *lakos* – *common* and *ergos* – *work*, thus one can define liturgy as: *the work of common people worshipping God.* The liturgical language is full of metaphors, because a human language that summons Divinity needs metaphors to express tension and to bend reality into new perspectives upon old facts[1].

2. MORPHOLOGY

Being the most conservative sector of the language, inherited from Latin, morphology has few dialectal variants in Romanian. The defining features observed in the studied text are oscillations occured in forming the literary norm and some morphological archaisms. For example:

- the swinging **e-i** desinence in formation of the feminine plural for *vamă – vame* (131v); *piatră – pietri* (136v);

- the conservation of **-ure** desinence for the plurals of neutres: *colțure* (136v), *duhure* (130f), *steagure* (122v);

[1] Najim, Michel and Frasier, T.L., 1995: 5-12.

BDD-A22170 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:56:27 UTC)

- the Genitive-Dative analytical forms are less frequent than the synthetic ones, which means that the specific procedure of Romance languages has not caught on Romanian land, where the forms ending in **- ei** are competing with those ended in **-ii:** *morţiei* (135v);

- the verb *a grăi* occurs as *grăieşte* with the variants: *grăieşte* (only one-time occurrent in the text: 123v) and *grăiaşte* (used four times: 125v, 128f, 131v, 132f);

- the form of the verb *erta* (127f, 128f,) is found without the initial *i*, as it is written nowadays;

- the archaic form of *sub – supt* is present twice (121f, 132v);

- the use of etymological verbal forms without the prothesis *în-* is frequent: *cerca* (136v); *chipuiaşte* (129v; the form *închipuiaşte* is also occurent – 128f); *junghie* (123f); *tinde* (134f); *tâmplă* (122f);

- the prohibitive is only once met: *nu fireţi* (136f);

- the time adverb *atunci* is very often found in the form of *atunce* (36 times);

- the post-position of particles: *avea-va* (126f), *va pleca-se* (occurent next to *se va închina* – 126v), *închipuiaşte-se* (128v), *arde-i* (128v), *arde-l* (128v), *cade-i-se* (132f); *tăia-se-va* (133f);

- the present tense of some verbs is formed with the particle *-ează*, no longer used today: *umbrează* (125f), *împreunează* (126v), *îndireptează* (135v);

- very frequent are the adverbial phrases (today – archaic or regional) *iară* (used 57 times in the text); *înlăuntru* (123f); *în veci* (133v); *întru veci* (133v);

- the strengthening pronoun *însuşi* is found mainly next to divinity names (9 times): *Însuşi pieptul lu Hs* (121f); *Însuşi Hs* (121v, 125v); *Însuşi lu Hs* (122v); *Însuşi Hs Dumnezeu* (125f); *Însuşi trupul Fiului* (126f), *însuşi pre sine* (128v); *Însuşi Dumnezeu* (135v); *pre sine însuşi* (136v);

- the repetition of pronominal forms: *ia-ţi crucea ta* (135f); *i s-a arătat lui* (123v);

- the occurrence of the reflexive pronoun *sine* (4 times): *sine-ş face* (128v); *sine de toate fărădelegile* (129f); *pre sine de toate cealea* (135v); *iubitor pre sine* (136v).

3. LEXIC

By introducing the Slavonic liturgy to the Romanians, in the second half of the tenth century, the Romanian religious terminology has been established and refined, especially the one related to organizing the cult, the church hierarchy, the christian calendar, and the holidays. The Slavonic – as spoken language of Eastern Europe – helped the pervasion of Greek-Byzantine religious terms in Romanian language. The ecclesiastical terminology research reveals the existence of two layers of religious words. The first has a secular origin and the second, which was shaped in the process of development and organization of Christian cult, enriched with semantic and lexical neologisms[2].

The religious terminology used by Moxa in *St. Gregory* can be distributed in the following semantic fields:

-sermons: *evanghelie* (123v, 124f); *leturghie* (127v – *leturghii* 121f); *pildă* (133f), *urariu* (129v, 130v); *molitva* (123v, 124f); *văhocu* (123v);

[2] Frenţiu-Ivăniş, 2013: 311-315.

BDD-A22170 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:56:27 UTC)

- used objects and materials: *aerul* (121v); *antimisul* (121v); *blid* (122v, 123f, 125f, 130v); *cadelniță* (123v); *cădi* (123v), *crucea* (132f; *crucii* – 135f); *discosul* (121v); *mir/-ul* (124f, 136v); *potir* (121v); *prescure* (122v; *prescuri* – 123f); *priceaștenie* (128v); *pocroave* (121v); *sfintele daruri* (124v, 126v, 128f);

- buildings and furniture: *biseareca* (121f, 127v); *catapetazma* (121v); *mănăstire* (133v); *oltariu* (123v, 124v); *preastolul oltariului* (121v); *sfânta masă* (124v; *sfintei mease* – 125f);

- hierarchy: *arhiereul* (129f, 129v); *vl(ădi)ca* (129f); *preot* (129f); *popa* (129f); *diacon* (129f, 129v); *cetețul* (129f, 129v); *călugărul* (132v, 134v) – *caloger* (129f, 129v);

- ritualic clothing: *analav* (135f, **gr. analevos**, *analab*, clothes belonging to monks, covering the chest and back, decorated with many crosses); *brâu* (134v, **alb**. **bres –** belt, girdle); *cuculiu* (135v); *călțuni* (136v) *felon* (122v, **sl. felonŭ**, a short cape, also called *sfită*, which is dressed over the priests clothes), *mantie* (134f, **sl. mantija** - cape), *petrahiriu* (130v), *pomisălnic* (122f, an ornament for the head), *procoave* (121v, **sl. pokrovŭ**, cloth), *scumă* (135f); *stihariul* (130v, **ngr. stihári, sl. stihárŭ, rus. stiháři**, a cloth with sleeves worn by the deacon at the sermon; is also worn by the priest under the *felon*).

The introduction of Slavonic Liturgy to the Romanian Orthodox people was understood by many linguists (including A. Lupul-Antonescul[3]) as a cultural dependence on the Slavonic world, even though just few of the terms have become popular in our language: *călugăr, evanghelie, icoană, liturghie, pildă, prescure* etc.

The Christianization of the Slavs meant also that they borrowed the Byzantine Orthodox terminology. But they did not just borrow the terminology, they had also enriched it with local terms, that would penetrate later on into the Romanian language.

In the technical text of sermons some lexical units appeared, many of these being terms attested in the first Romanian texts (the XVI-th century): *altar* (next to its variants: *oltar, oltareu, oltariu), duh, jertfă, post, taină, moaște, prooroc, sfânt, ceteț (citeț), sobor, jertfelnic, pocrovăț, sfită, cădelniță, pomeni, sfinți, praznic, mir* etc.

In the studied religious text the following semantic subclasses were found:

- basic knowledge of the Christian religion: *duh, taină (taina), trup, jertfă*;

- names that aim at holiness: *apostol (apl.), sfânt, moaște, mâcenic*;

- church hierarchy: *cetețul*;

- the church, the monastery: priestly clothes (*felon* or *sfită*) and cult objects, religious gestures: *cădelniță, (a) cădi*;

- the religious service (sequences of sermons, church hymns, rituals): *ceas, mirui, pomeni, sfinți, slujbă, sluji, taină, vohod* (the priest walking through the church during the service, when he goes out – *văhocu*).

Most of the religious terms mentioned above have entered our language after the old Slavic phase (after the XI-th century). The name of Slavonic (proposed by Gh. Mihăilă and repeated by other researchers) is most suitable. Some Slavonic elements occurent in the

[3] Lupul-Antonescul, in his study published in 1890, *Veaculŭ XVI – Limba și literatura românilorŭ,* at the page 26 noted that the Slavic prevalence kept shackled the Romanian thinking...: *Acestă predominire slavonă , ține cugetarea românéscă încătușată , presară țara cu mănăstiri în care se adăpostescŭ Bulgari, punŭ în mâna Domnilorŭ limba slavonă și le deprindŭ condeiulŭ să represinte cu slove cugetarea formulată în slavonește*.

BDD-A22170 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:56:27 UTC)

religious texts possess features of the Medio-Bulgarian or Serbian nature and many researchers agreed on the idea that the Medio-Bulgarian version is the fundamental variant of Slavonic. Being the direct successor of old Slavic, it was the dominant cult language in our country during the centuries XIV – XVI. Therefore, by elements of Slavic origin one should understand the Medio-Bulgarian Slavonic terms. The only old Slavic term that Romanian language kept is *sfânt*.

The Slavonic influence on the Romanian language had not manifested itself in one period or uniformly. Old Slavic words have been preserved or have been replaced with new, Medio-Bulgarian, then Serbian or Russian, given that in our country many works belonging to Medio-Bulgarian, Serbian, and Russian-Ukrainian editions were drafted and printed.

4. THE PRAYER AS TEXT

The prayer can be analyzed as part of religious orations genre (in terms of textual linguistics) as well as part of discursive universe (from the perspective of Eugen Coşeriu). The Romanian scholar classified the universe of discourse into four classes, taking into consideration there are four fundamental modes of human knowledge: current experience, science and technology, fantasy and art, and faith. The latter is perhaps the most strict of them all, as it posessess a founding value, being absolute. This system does not allow any hypothesis that can be verified, making the prayer a text more or less fixed, which must recognize the omnipotence of God.

The liturgy can be considered a sum of codes (gestic, proxemic, iconic, clothing) and a language that can be investigated accordingly. From a function perspective, the language of prayers is dominated by its liturgic function. Its secondary functions are: emotive, conative, and refferential.

The language of prayers is dominated by sitagms as: *Dumnezeu* (God), *ceruri* (Heaven), *sfânt* (sacred, holy), *voe* (divine will) etc. The texts of prayers have not changed dramatically, as Saint Basil the Great was advising the priests to read all the time from the holy books, not to recite, in order to avoid altering the holy texts. Up until today, the religious language held its ground, its archaic character, but nevertheless it is a poetic language, adorned with beautiful metaphors.

Every prayer begins with theonymes, as follows:

- Tatăl nostru, care ne eşti în ceruri/ Sfinţească-se numele Tău/Vie împărăţia Ta/ Facă-se voia Ta...

- Cuvine-se cu adevărat să Te fericim pe tine Născătoare de Dumnezeu, cea pururea fericită şi prea nevinovată şi Maica Dumnezeului nostru. Ceea ce eşti mai cinstită decât Heruvimii şi mai mărită fără de asemănare decât Serafimii, care fără stricăciune pe Dumnezeu Cuvântul ai născut, pe Tine cea cu adevărat Născătoare de Dumnezeu Te mărim;

- Împărate ceresc, Mângâietorule, Duhul adevărului, Care pretutindenea eşti şi toate le împlineşti, Vistierul bunătăţilor şi dătătorule de viaţă, vino şi Te sălăşluieşte întru noi, şi ne curăţeste pe noi de toată întinăciunea şi mântuieşte, Bunule, sufletele noastre;

BDD-A22170 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:56:27 UTC)

- *Iubi-Te-voi Doamne, vârtutea mea. Domnul este întărirea mea şi scăparea mea şi izbăvitorul meu*[4].

The first part of a prayer focuses on God, with all of His attributes, which is considered to be a reminscence of the Hebrew practice of prayer (scholars call this: *the Hebrew respect*), and only after respects are being payed, the believer starts to ask Divinity for food, sanity, forgiveness, and protection from Evil.

The Divine Liturgy is an act of faith including many people, it cannot be performed by the priest alone, given its *communal nature*: the priest prays for the believers, while the believers pray in return for the priest, offering sacred hymns to God.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The presentation of linguistic features of Byzantine-Slavic terminology highlights the conservatism and the archaic caracter of the technical language of worship. A diachronic perspective on the text confirms the perpetuation of archaic facts of language. It has been said that the Byzantine-Slavic terminology represents a common feature of Eastern spirituality, and rightly so. The Slavic influence on technical vocabulary in the studied text was stronger than the Greek influence. Many of Byzantine Greek lexemes penetrated Romanian through the Slavonic languages, and their presence in the first Romanian texts of the seventeenth century constituts an argument of their age in the language. At the same time, it confirms the stability of Romanian religious vocabulary. The linguistic analysis of the studied text aims to be a step in approaching the complex issues of religious language.

References

1. Coşeriu, E., 2010 – *Orationis Fundamenta. Rugăciunea ca text*, trad. Andreea Grinea, în Transilvania (7-8), pp. 1-12.
2. Graur, Al., 1963 – *Etimologii românești,* București, Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Romîne.
3. Hasdeu, B.P., 1983 – *Cuvente den bătrâni, I,* București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.
4. *ILRL1,* 1983 – *Istoria limbii române literare* (St. Munteanu, V. Ţâra), Bucureşti, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică.
5. *ILRL2,* 1997 – *Istoria limbii române literare, Epoca veche (1532-1780)* – coord. I. Gheție, București, Editura Academiei Române.
6. Iorga, N., 1925 – *Istoria literaturii românești*, Ediția a II-a revăzută și larg întregită, București, Editura Librăriei Pavel Suru, Calea Victoriei 73.
7. Ivănuș-Frențiu, Maria, 2013 – *Aspecte ale limbajului liturgic românesc,* Cluj, Casa Cărții de Știință.
8. Lupul-Antonescul, 1890 – *Veaculŭ XVI – Limba şi literatura românilorŭ,* Bucuresci, Tipografia Carol Gobl, Strada Doamnei, 16.

[4] Prayers currently sung in the Ortodox Church: *Sfaturi ortodoxe* [Online], Available at: http://www.sfaturiortodoxe.ro/rs.htm, [Accessed at 25/07/15].

BDD-A22170 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:56:27 UTC)

9. Mihăescu, D., 2006 – *Cronografele românești*, București, Editura Academiei Române.
10. Moxa, Mihail, 1989 – *Cronica universală*, ediție G. Mihăilă, Editura Minerva, București.
11. Moxa, Mihail, 1620-1630 – *Sfântul Grigorie Bgslov*, British Library, London.
12. Najim, Michel and Frasier, T.L., 1995 – *Understanding Orthodox Liturgy*, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church Archdiocese, New Jersey.
13. *Sfaturi ortodoxe* [Online], Available at: http://www.sfaturiortodoxe.ro/rs.htm, [Accessed at 25/07/15].

NOTE:

This research has been partially supported by the Project POSDRU/159/1.5/S/138963 – "Sustainlable Performance in Doctoral and Post-doctoral Research – PERFORM", co-financed by the European Social Fund.

BDD-A22170 © 2015 Arhipelag XXI Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-16 16:56:27 UTC)