JUST HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH IN THE EVER GLOBAL USE OF ENGLISH?

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Abstract:Along the centuries, Latin, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and French have each been the world's lingua franca at one point or another. English in turn is used currently anywhere around the globe when two or more people meet who need to talk to each other and do not share the same first language. As the title of this article states, it is paramount for the identity of a culture and its pertaining language to wonder how much can sometimes prove to be too much?Anglicisms as defined by the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language represent a word or phrase borrowed from English into a foreign language, i.e. a harmless means of language enrichment.Only it turns out that when abused of, loan words may eventually affect the entire concept of enrichment. Have we actually enriched Romanian by taking over English words and using them as such or have we merely depleted it of the purport of its very existence?

Keywords: lingua franca, Anglicisms, globalisation, borrowings, barbarisms

Ever since I was a child, I have always been intrigued to find myself in a situation where I could not understand what exactly was being said - and not necessarily because of my lack of knowledge on the subject matter. The most disturbing aspect of this issue for me has always been me being able to understand only bits and pieces of a conversation because of my incapacity to fully comprehend the language under circumstances such as the one I am going to enlarge upon. One would have to admit that it is rather frustrating to be in one's own country where one's own mother tongue is the national language, yet being confronted with half-sentences making no sense whatsoever! Of course, I am speaking of Dobrudja, a region where the national diversity is ample enough to account for this sort of situation. It is just that it really took me some years, when I was growing up, to be able to understand why… I did not understand (?)! Irrespective of the environment, be it on the bus, in the park or even with my grandmother and some of her neighbours, I would often come across old ladies speaking in a strange mixture of Romanian with Turkish, Tatar, Aromanian, Romani, Greek, Albanian or Bulgarian elements. Speaking of old ladies and regional dialects of the national minorities in my home town Constanta, I find it only normal today that while speaking in their pertaining mother tongues they were practically forced to use Romanian words such as *întreprindere*, *abonament*, *oncologie* or *radiografie*. When they apprehended their respective mother tongue from their parents, the mentioned notions and terms thereof may just not have been invented yet, so they actually learned them first-hand in Romanian and probably never even considered to try and find out what the equivalent in their mother tongue might be. The most intriguing part of this was not necessarily the fact that I was not able to grasp the meaning of their conversation, but the fact that I did understand random words, so I was even more taken aback by the mystery of whatever was being said.

On the other hand, I will always cherish childhood memories of me always asking for my mother's help in coping with *Frenchisms* I would encounter in Alecsandri's and Caragiale's plays. This time, the message of the discourse was quite clear, but there were still words and phrases that made the gist of it all escape my power of understanding. I kept wondering: What sort of words were *furculision*, *fripturision* or even *învârtision*, not to mention the name *Şarl*?!

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These are all childhood memories from the late ’70s and the early ’80s, but I think they serve my purpose to highlight the challenge that the Romanian society has had to face in the last three decades. Unfortunately, whoever said that Alecsandri and Caragiale have never been more up to date than nowadays postulated a genuine truism.

Along the centuries, Latin, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and French have each been the world’s lingua franca at one point or another. English in turn is used currently anywhere around the globe when two or more people meet who need to talk to each other and do not share the same first language. English is referred to as a foreign language when used by non-native speakers in order to communicate with native speakers, but it is regarded as a lingua franca when, despite native speakers being present, it is used among two or more persons who do not speak the same native language.

In a statistics study conducted by the British Council, English was reported to have an official or special status in more than 75 countries, i.e. it is spoken as such by a total population of over two billion. One quarter of the world’s population speaks English to a certain degree of competence, while the expectancy from the other three is ever increasing.

As far as science is concerned, the vast majority of scientists throughout the world read, write, listen and speak in English in order to enlarge or disseminate their knowledge in their particular fields of interest. It has been ascertained that more than three quarters of the electronically stored information globally is also conceived in English.

The question arises, then, naturally: “Is English really going to take over the entire planet?” Why do we even bother to use our mother tongue anymore? Are we not indebted to our millennia-long cultural heritage to try to preserve correctness and purity of our language? How far has globalisation reached out to claw at cultures all over the world? I am grateful that I studied English in school (let alone that I teach English), because I can only imagine what the older generation (who only learned French and Russian in school) may be feeling like these days when around younger people who use an English phrase for every other two or three words in a sentence. They are probably just like the younger me sitting next to the national minorities speaking naturally in their respective mother tongues. Because it is the naturalness in our English-influenced discourse which is becoming more and more unsettling for the well-being of our national language and identity.

Both the Romanian lexicon and the Romanian syntax alike have been under the assault of English. Each language is capable of naming everything; it is a national context-depending decision whether people are allowed, if capable, to develop terminologies in their mother tongue, or whether they have to resign themselves to borrow a vehicular language for a particular subject field. The Romanian *economic vocabulary* in general and, more specifically, the *banking specialty* thereof in particular provide an illustrative example of this kind of linguistic circumstances.

After the Romanian Revolution, in the framework of the overall economic reform, the Romanian banking system was reshaped at the beginning of the transition period (1991) along with the lines of the banking systems in the West. To this purpose, two major laws were adopted: Law no. 33/1991 on banking activities and Law no. 34/1991 on the status of the National Bank of Romania (NBR). The new legislative framework established a two-tier banking system with a central bank under the authority of the parliament on the one hand and commercial banks (organized as joint-stock companies) on the other hand. Since 1991, however, the Romanian banking system has developed extensively not only by expanding the volume of its activities and the diversity of its services but also in conception and structure. Nevertheless, because of the

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lack of notions in our mother tongue at that particular moment, and being unable to provide proper equivalents, Romanian economists had to start using the foreign terms introducing thus new terms and notions in the economic lexis. In choosing to do so, a decisive factor might also have been the fact that ours was not the only language and/or nation that resorted to this solution. Aside from our former communist neighbours who probably found themselves facing the same predicament in the all-new economic context, even the German language had already resorted to English terms in banking. For some of the terms economists eventually came up with adaptations, but others just had to be taken over as such: *lombard credit*, *stand-by credit*, *roll-over credit*, *offshore bank*, *swap*, *factoring* are only a few examples. There equivalents in Romanian and German respectively are: *credit Lombard* - *Lombardkredit, credit stand-by* - *Stand-by Kredit*, *credit roll-over* - *Roll-over Kredit, bancă offshore* - *Offshorebank*, *swap* - *Swap* and *factoring* - *Factoring*.

As David Crystal (Crystal 1997, pp. 7-10) explains in his comprehensive study of English as a global language, it is not military and political power nor literary expression and grammar paradigms or religious standing what it takes a language to become global. The engine of language globalisation is actually driven by the "economic developments beginning to operate on a global scale, supported by the new communication technologies – telegraph, telephone, radio – and fostering the emergence of massive multinational organizations [and] progress in science and technology [fostering] an international intellectual and research environment" (Crystal 1997, p. 10). Moreover, the power of the fourth estate should never be underestimated in what regards the circulation of information as a means of large-scale education and influence of the audience and the entire society. Of course, not all events have the same significance for everyone, yet mass media certainly have a bearing on the flood of ideas that a whole country may be thinking about.

As the title of this article states, it is paramount for the identity of a culture and its pertaining language to wonder how much can sometimes prove to be too much? *Anglicisms* as defined by the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language represent *a word or phrase borrowed from English into a foreign language*, i.e. a harmless means of language enrichment. Alain Rey finds borrowings (Rey 1995, p. 105) to be "the most obvious and laziest solution but also the internationally most efficient one, because [they are] easily done and because [they] partially [neutralize] interlingual differences and thus [respect] the original concept." Only it turns out that when abused of, loan words may eventually affect the entire concept of *enrichment*. Have we actually enriched Romanian by taking over English words and using them as such or have we merely depleted it of the purport of its very existence?

Constantin Manea underlines the gloom reality that our society has been through a substantial process of *Englishing* due to "loan translations […] especially encouraged by poor translation of various Internet materials and press articles, or else as a result, and under the influence of, the original wording of such press articles and media materials." (Manea 2017, p. 90) As he points out, certain instances of English borrowings can be regarded as sheer *barbarisms*. (Manea 2017, p. 80). For example, on an internet page on clinical studies, the following explanation is offered: "Majoritatea studiilor clinice cu grupuri de comparație folosesc *randomizarea*. Aceasta înseamnă alocarea întâmplătoare a pacienților în diferite grupuri de comparație." It would have been a lot easier to simply use the phrase "*distribuire aleatorie*" instead of writing a whole (unnecessary) explanatory sentence thereafter. Even the Romanian DEX has a defintion for the noun *randomizare* as "acţiunea de a *randomiza*", a verb further on defined and explained as "(Englezism) A distribui întâmplător variantele din câmpul de experiență (pentru eliminarea erorilor experimentale). – Din engl. *randomize*." Reading on, the

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internet page enlarges on their topic, providing additional details for their beneficiaries. Thus, we find out that clinical studies take place on various *locaţii / locations* (for *loc de desfăşurare*) and patients are *înrolaţi* / *enrolled* (i.e. *înregistraţi*). Before *înrolarea unui pacient / patient enrollment*, the duration of the study is *menţionată /* mentioned (instead of *precizată*). In case they need any, readers are also explained why there are *motive pentru a conduce un studiu clinic / reasons to conduct clinical studies* (instead of *a realiza or a desfăşura un studiu*). And last but not least, a sum of *testimoniale* / *testimonials* (for *mărturii*, *recomandări*) from other patients are provided at the end of the page.

Along with the *Englishing* of the Romanian language due to *Anglicisms,* linguists have debated in a plethora of articles, studies and books on the topic of *Romglish*. A bibliography in this respect shall be provided at the end of this paper, where ample definitions of the term can be found. A further analysis of this matter may be enlarged upon in a future article of the author. As far as the "barbarity" of Anglicisms is concerned, the opinions of linguists on the extent of their negative impact on the language and even on naming them as such are divided. Mioara Avram finds that the term *Anglicism* has a rather negative connotation, frowns upon the label *barbarism* while deeming the term as quite unacceptable (Avram 1997, p. 11).

The most "barbaric" aspect of Anglicisms is in my opinion the case of calques. The Collins English Dictionary and Thesaurus defines *calque* as "a borrowing by which a specialized meaning of a word or phrase in one language is transferred to another language by a literal translation of each of the individual elements (e.g.: *masterpiece*, from German *Meisterstück*)". Because we speak of translations, then of course there are always a source language and a target language involved. The problem consists in the speakers' failure to adapt the term or phrase from the source language to the structure of the target language, which is why calques are so disturbing.

A simple taxonomy of calques can be drawn according to various criteria:

- Syntactic calques imitate the syntactic functions of the source language being in the target language, in violation of their meaning: "În […] 2009, Brian Acton era *un inginer* software care nu-şi găsea de muncă." (businessmagazin.ro); "Eu *nu sunt* foarte *confortabil cu* această soluţie de scutire de impozite pentru domeniul IT." (Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, 10th February 2018)

- Semantic calques transfer a double or even multiple meaning of a word from the source language onto an existing word in the target language while keeping only the primary meaning thereof: "[…] jucătorii noştri au dat dovadă de caracter şi multă *determinare*." (Marius Stan, 5th November 2010); "prin materiile predate mult mai variate şi profesorii specializaţi, conţinutul învăţământului *academic*" ("Învăţământul *Academic* Din Ţările Române (I)" by Şerban N. Nicolau, where *academic* refers to higher education and has nothing to do with any academy, as the Romanian term implies). That is the case of *False Friends* which fall under this specific category as well and this topic shall be explored to a greater extent in a different paper by the author. Other semantic calques are "barbarian" statements or utterances such as "Programul OECD de Evaluare a Pericolelor în conjuncţie cu alte agenţii […] este în curs de *a dezvolta o evaluare* a pericolelor […]. Alte *metode care au fost dezvoltate* includ monitorizarea şi modelarea concentraţiilor *prezise* […]" (Managementul Riscurilor de Dezastre pentru INA, p. 126). The Romanian term *a elebora* has long been forgotten apparently.

- Phraseological calques translate idiomatic phrases from the source language in a word-for-word manner. They are mostly to be found in the mass media and this is probably the main reason why they have become so actively used by the younger population especially, who do not

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realize the clumsiness of their newly acquired vocabulary. Among the most popular phrases are *ghici ce?* for the English phrase *Guess what?* alongside *Poţi să o faci!* for the English *You can do it!*. The correct and already available Romanian phrases are *Ia, ghici!* and *Hai, că poţi!* And the list goes on: "*Obişnuiam să* muncesc şi în concediu." (psychologies.ro) instead of "*Munceam* şi în concediu.", "Această autarhie […] s-a *acompaniat* de un adevărat embargou internaţional." (*Actorii* sociali ai promovării tehnologiilor, informaţiei şi comunicaţiilor, p. 116) instead of "[…] *a fost însoţită* […]". To blame are also some of the translators who work for televisions, who seem to have learned Romanian as a foreign language rather than as their mother tongue.

Another category of ill-used terms in Romanian is the one pertaining to English words that have been "played by ear". One can only wonder what Romanian senior intellectuals with a vast cultural background and vocabulary may be thinking when confronted with "*Extindem* (instead of *prelungim*) *deadline-ul* de înscriere […]" instead of *termenul de înscriere* and "În momentul în care ai răspuns la toate întrebările, *poți trimite aplicația ta* […]" instead of *îţi poţi trimite formularul de înscriere.* (Social Impact Award, 16th May 2018). Likewise, when they know that the verb *a clama* means "a se manifesta, a se exprima în termeni violenți sau cu strigăte; a chema cu voce tare. – Din fr. *clamer*", then a title such as "[…] *clamează* lupta împotriva corupției" (cotidianul.ro) or a statement like "[…] nu e doar un mod de a fi de tip religios, ci și al unora care *clamează importanța științei*." (contributors.ro) are regarded as ambiguous.

In an interview for a general-audience newspaper, the highly respected linguist Professor Rodica Zafiu explains how "language is both a factor of cultural differentiation, and a prestige factor rendering people a certain status. In our country, people have become very sensitive to the dress code, it seems very important [for them] to have some marks of acknowledgement of the value of their clothes. It is about the same with language." The way we speak, the way we write, the words that we choose along with the proper intonation and accent convey a message about who we are and the values they we stand for.

This article has provided but a rough overview of the manner in which English borrowings may turn out to pose a real danger for Romanian if serious consideration fails to be given to what exactly we keep from what we borrow. As stated, instead of enriching our culture and language we stand the risk of forsaking them altogether. This paper is intended as a shy distress call for public awareness meant to prevent the loss of our national identity and mother tongue. Room has been left herewith for more profound studies on this topic.

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