The Battle of Words in the Digital Era

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Abstract: The present study is intended to reveal the most important aspects that have led to *vocabulary changes* in both Romanian and Spanish due to the massive use of new technologies, with users (i.e. communicators using social media) turning to social networking sites in order to communicate with each other or to express their attitudes and feelings. Whether synchronous or asynchronous, communication uses a dynamic language, which is brought before our eyes and modified by the users – a fact that has led to real "battles of words" as to whether the change should be viewed as linguistic enhancement, refinement and progress or degradation, downfall and ruin. Obviously marked by *informality*, the new language used in communication, often referred to as *Globish*, *Netlish*, *Weblish* or *Neoespañol*, is more flexible, playful and eloquent than ever. Focusing on three major perspectives in the analysis of the new language used in computer-mediated communication, namely *practicality*, *convenience* and *novelty*, the following analysis attempts to explain how some words have gained popularity and come to prevail over others; that is, how language alters and readjusts or "updates" itself, in order to suit the speakers' need for socialization in an era dominated by technology.
Keywords: *linguistic changes*, *social networking sites*, *informal register*, *new languages*, *language creativity*.

Historically, any language is subjected to change, a fact which is highly visible in the new media, and especially on the social networking sites, which seem to add a great deal to the redefining of human relationships and of what is known as "public space". What we nowadays call *social networking sites* are but communication platforms or virtual spaces that have successfully taken over almost all activities based on communication. New computer and smartphone applications have replaced the traditional correspondence with emailing services and other instant message services, all newspapers have their own web pages and establish a fast and more direct relationship with their readers via the comment section, TV programs can be watched in real time on ever more sophisticated gadgets, and advertisements reach their target audience faster than ever. In other words, we live in a technologically revolutionized society, in which we are globally connected via these social networking sites, also called *social media*, which have offered us a new perspective on the way we communicate, work, spend our free time, make ourselves known or develop socially.

Also, social media makes it possible for the average people to no longer be an anonymous mass, as they have the chance to make themselves heard and become communicators that have the possibility to reveal their points of view freely and openly, with

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the help of the contents they generate during the process of communication. User-generated contents in the form of texts and/or images subscribe themselves to what is known as "digital culture", having nowadays a globally recognized influence on personal development.

The language productions are interesting to our study inasmuch as they bring forth changes in the linguistic scenario, one of the most affected by alteration due to the lack of time, space and the fact that communicators are not next to each other, as they would be in face-to-face communication, and that they may turn to fake identities or "avatars" in order to express themselves freely. In the view of it, the language used in communication via the Internet, also known as *computer mediated communication* or *CMC*, is economical (communicators use merely the right number of words and/or signs to express their feelings, attitudes, to inform etc.), creative (communicators have the liberty to use any language items that they feel to be suitable, in order to be original; they may even coin new words) and informal (communicators have the liberty to select their words from whatever register they find suitable for a certain context), in order to make communication more expressive, more appealing, more flexible, more playful and therefore more eloquent. In other words, the language used in the digital communication is more *practical*, *convenient* and *new*, and the choice of words and different discursive strategies reveal texts with a high degree of orality, which add a great deal to the expressive function of language.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the online communication is a complex process deriving from the interaction between the users of the social networking sites and the fact that communication is, in this case, a continuous self-regulating process, as "the possibilities of interaction and feedback are almost unlimited, the potential of communication being determined only by the resources of creativity, imagination and personal involvement of the participants" [Stipiuc, 2016: 34; our translation]. The form of the message sent to receiver(s) depends on the limits imposed by the technical medium. The language is typed, therefore all the conventions of a face-to-face conversation are graphically rendered, and new conventional ways of expressing paralinguistic features in the form of emoticons or glyphs are used, with the purpose of replacing the absence of the interlocutor(s).

When communicating via the Internet, both Romanian and Spanish users respect the conventions of what is now called *cyber communication*, *communication writing* [Jonsson, 2015: 5], *Internet discourse*, *Netspeak*, *Netlish* [Crystal, 2004: 17], *cyberspeak*, *comunicare electronică* [Pomian, 2009: 139-150], *oralitate digitală* [Molea, 2017: 56], all using *cyberlanguage*, *Netlish*, *Neoespañol* [Durante, 2015], or a language that is brought before our eyes and modified by users, with a graphical rendering full of internationally acknowledged or autochthonous abbreviations, repeated letters, punctuation signs, emoticons, unknown words, loans, and technical neologisms.

Some of the features of the language used on the social networking sites are given by the typographic transcriptions of what would otherwise have been oral interaction between the communicators. The most common way of reducing the "body" of the words in order to make typing almost as fast as speaking is the employment of elisions of any kind in the form of abbreviations (i.e. omissions of graphic elements that correspond, in oral interactions, to sounds and groups of sounds), most of the time employed randomly. They come in the form of written apocopes (*app* < *app[lication]*), syncopes (*wapp* < *W[hats]app*), aphaeresis or a combination of them, doubled by substitution (*fbfvx* < *F[ace]b[ook] f[a]v[ourite] crack*) and are not to be considered "phonetic accidents" [Pomian, 2009: 139-150], as they are deliberately employed with a practical purpose. Another reason

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for using them would be to make communication on the Internet more cryptic and hidden to prying eyes, such as parents, or any *noob*[1].

Elisions have long been employed to form clipped words that have come to be lexicalized and included in lexicons. It is the case of the abbreviations designating political parties such as FSN, or more recent ones (PSD, PDL, UGT, PC), which have come to be lexicalized, as they have grown to large word families (*fesenist*, *a feseniza*, *fesenizare* etc.; *pesedist*, *pesedizare*, *pesedistic* etc.; *ugetero*, *pecero*). Some others, for example Rom. *bac*, *prof/ă*, *dirig/ă*, have been formed having French as a model (fr. *le bac*) and are to be found in dictionaries [DCR, 2013, for example] as elements of teenagers' argot. The procedure paved the way for other clipped words to be coined and used as such and, even if they are not yet included in dictionaries, they do appear in private (or public) conversations or on blogs. We may thus encounter words such as the Romanian *filo* < *filologie*, *mate-info* < *matematică-informatică*, the Spanish *cole* < *colegio*, *insti* <*instituto*, *poli* < *policía*, *compi* < *compañero*, and the more recent ones that the social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram are full of. Some illustrative examples to the points above would be Rom. *frumi* < *frumoasă* (*Eşti o frumi!*), *sal* < *salut* or Sp. *cumple* < *cumpleaños (¡Feliz cumple!*).

Younger generations seem to be more preoccupied with time; therefore, they try to make speaking more economical. Consciously or not, they tend to express more meaning with fewer lexical units, using one-fits-all words that belong to some trend in speech and involve the interlocutors actively in the process, by letting them decode words such as Rom. *mişto*, *tare*, *genial*, *epic* (which can be both adjectives and adverbs), Sp. *chulo* (mostly adjective) or *chupi* (both adjective and adverb, as in *una pelicula chupi* or *pasarlo chupi*), an item which has already been registered in the *Dictionary of the Spanish Royal Academy* (DRAE) [Borrego Nieto, 2016: 351].

Another trend in speech in both Romanian and Spanish is the use of calques of English origin, such as Rom. *iubesc să* (< Engl. *love to/-ing*) instead of the five-word structure *îmi place foarte mult să*. It is but one example of the countless instances when the employment of borrowings, mostly from English, seems more convenient and useful, as it makes speech shorter and more precise – a condition for a word to get acknowledged with a dictionary entry.

It is common knowledge that the trend of the new borrowings, i.e. English loanwords, has come along with the emergence and constant development of the new technologies used in communication. It is perhaps the most debated linguistic aspect of our time and almost impossible to control, and therefore it has given rise to many academic debates, or "battles of words", as we may put it metaphorically, as the boundaries between necessary and unnecessary loans[2] are more and more difficult to delimit precisely.

The lexical items that are borrowed from English are known in lexicology as Rom. *anglicisme*[3] and Sp. *anglicismos*. They have been studied at all linguistic levels, from their etymology

[1] *Noob,* also spelt *n00b*, is a creative respelling of *newbie* or *newb* (a slang term for a novice or newcomer, or somebody inexperienced in a profession or activity).

[2] Necessary and unnecessary loans are called in Romanian *împrumuturi necesare* and *împrumuturi „de lux"* [*apud* Stoichiţoiu-Ichim, 1996a: 40]. In Spanish they are referred to as *extranjerismos necesarios o muy extendidos* and *extranjerismos superfluous o innecesarios*. The linguists that are against the necessity of loans refer metaphorically to the process of borrowing as an "invasion" [Borrego Nieto, 2016: 337-345] or as an "avalanche" [Stoichiţoiu-Ichim, *idem*], while the ones that recognize the necessity of such loans for the development of a language speak about a tendency to "modernize" the language, as long as their use is not exaggerated [Avram, 1997: 9].

[3] From the multitude of definitions given to recent borrowings of English origin called *anglicisme* we have chosen that of Adriana Stoichiţoiu-Ichim, which we find more suitable for our analysis: "recent loans of British and

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to stylistics. In the view of it, we speak about *anglicisme* as "cultural borrowings"[4] that can be *denotative* or "*technical*" and *connotative* or "*stylistic*" or, according to their registration in dictionaries (DN, DCR, NDULR, DRAE), they can be *registered* or *unregistered* [Stoichițoiu-Ichim, 1996a: 40].

The speech of the younger generation is full of English loans that are added quite naturally to the lexical inventory of both Romanian and Spanish, as they are convenient and can easily be recognized by the other members of the linguistic community. Moreover, they offer a fertile ground for lexical creativity through innovation, as words do not appear out of the blue, but are newly coined on the basis of existing items. Therefore, the linguistic corpus selected for the following analysis of recent English borrowings has been selected from various social networking sites and refers to the applications designed for communication on social media platforms or to ways of dealing with such computer applications. The contrastive approach we propose is intended to show that the popularity and usage of such terms have given rise to variants – adapted or not to the phonological, morphological and semantic systems of the target language (i.e. Romanian or Spanish) or have crossed the barrier of denotative or "technical" towards the connotative or "stylistic" domain, and added to the inventory of lexical items used by a certain linguistic community (i.e. social media users/communicators) due to lexical expansion or semantic change. Once again, the words under discussion belong to a certain community of speakers, who tend to use them without thinking of their origin, which makes it easier for such lexical items to be recognized and accepted – or, in other words, to get lexicalized – and to compete with others (*a șerui* vs. *a da share*, for example).

The names of social networking sites such as *Facebook* or *Twitter*, of message services such as *Whatsapp*, of blogs or even *Google* developed, by means of suffixation and composition, word families adapted differently to the two target languages, or developed new collocations in accordance with the preference of one community of users for one or the other. Here are some examples:

- In Romanian we have encountered verbs belonging to social media metalanguage such as[5] *a blogări* (also *a bloga*) [DCR, 2013], *a chatui* [DCR, 2013], *a crăcui* (<Engl. *to crack*), *a feisbuci* (*a fesibucări*), *a gugăli*, *a hăcui* (*a hack-ui* < *Engl. to hack*), *a șerui* (*a sherui*, a *share-ui* < *Engl. to share*), *a tăgui (<Engl. to tag)*, *a tuitări (a twitteri)*, mostly verbs subscribed to the fourth group (ending in *-i*), which tend to get lexicalized as they add more and more items to their word families: *blogat*, *blogăr* (*bloger*, *blogger*), *blogăreală*, *blogărit*, *blogăriță* (*bloggeriță*), *blogosferă* [DCR, 2013], *blogărime*, *chatist*, *feibuc(h)ist*, *facebookist* [*apud* Ulmanu, 2011: 112], *feisbucăreală*, *fesibucit*, *gugăleală* [DCR, 2013], *șeruială*, *troli* (<Engl. *trolls*), *tuităreală (twittereală)*, *tuitărime*, *tuitărist* (*twitterist*) etc. Others refer to Internet activities performed not necessarily via social networking platforms or chatrooms, and are mostly verbs of the first group (ending in *-a*): *a posta*, *a clica*, *a downloada*, *a seta*, *a (se) loga*, *a spama*, *a bloga* etc.
- In Spanish there are verbs such as *bloguear*, *chatear*, *feisbuquiar*, *followear* (largely used in South America), *guglear* (*googlear)*, *jaquear* (<Engl. *to hack)*, *linkear*, *postear*, *trolear*, *tuitear*, *wasapear* (*guasapear*), mostly subscribed to the first group, ending in *-ar*, with their roots being

American English origin, either completely adapted or unadapted (therefore, they are written and pronounced in Romanian in a very similar or identical way to the language of origin" [Stoichițoiu-Ichim, 2001: 83, our translation].

[4] Almost all necessary loans referring to new technologies have been coined in English. Some others (very few) have come to Romanian or Spanish via French or Latin, but also from English (for example, according to NDU, 2008, *a notifica* < fr. *notifier*, lat. *notificare,* has the meaning "a anunța în mod oficial; a înștiința în scris"), and are therefore neologisms of multiple etymology [Pînzariu, 2014b].

[5] The underlined words are already included in dictionaries or recognized by the Spanish Royal Academy (RAE).

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extremely productive in accordance with the degree of popularity the platform has among its users: *bloguero/a*, *blogósfera*, *blogalaxia*, *chateo*, *estoquer*, *estoquear* (<Engl. *stalker*, in Argentina), *jaqueo*, *tuit*, *tuiteo*, *retuiteo*, *atwención*, *atwistocrat*, *egotwista*, *illtwiterato*, *twetiqueta*, *vlog*, *vloguero* etc.

- In Romanian, as well as in Spanish, some verbs have, through conversion, reached to form part of specialized collocations with Rom. *a da* = Sp. *dar* or Rom. *a face* = Sp. *hacer* after the model *a da bip* = *dar un toque*: *a da click*, *a da block*, *a da share*, *a da spam*, some others collocate with nouns belonging to the sphere under discussion: *a da like* = *dar like*, *a da dislike* = *dar dislike*, *a da unfriend* = *dar unfriend*, *a da eject*, *a da reject* etc. Note that in such case the collocations preserve the original spelling of the source language, i.e. English, which is not the case with, for instance, *a face o postare* (< *a posta*+*-re*), *a-și face un selfie* = *hacerse un selfi*.

While some of the borrowings of English origin referring to computer operations and also to communication via the Internet social platforms have been adapted semantically to the target languages with a meaning or a set of meanings of the etymon, others have been semantically expanded in the target language itself, acquiring new meanings when referring to the new technologies or to social media.

- Some of the loanwords circumscribed to social media terminology expanded semantically in the source language and have then been borrowed with their new meanings. For example, *wall* has come to be blended into such words referring to social media platforms (*Facebook*) with a shift in meaning by means of metaphor, expanding its meaning from "a vertical structure that divides or encloses something" to what it is known as "the area on a profile or page where friends and fans can post their thoughts, views, or criticism for everyone to see"[6], while *status* is "(on a social media website, especially Facebook™) a piece of information that you publish about yourself telling people what you are doing, thinking, etc. at a particular time"[7]. In Romanian, such terms are used in parallel with their translation, *perete* or *stare*, while Spanish speakers have adopted the translation only, for example, *estado*: *María no ha actualizado su estado en semanas*. = *Maria nu și-a actualizat statusul/starea de câteva săptămâni*. Other such examples of semantic expansion by metaphorisation are *tweet* and *troll*. The recently coined word *tweet* comes from an onomatopoeic expression that refers to the reproduction of the sound made by a bird. Nowadays it is used to designate "a message put on Twitter to let people know what you are doing, thinking, feeling", and has converted to a verb, whose meaning is "to publish a short remark or piece of information on Twitter" or "to communicate on Twitter using quick short messages" (CDO). In the same way, the word *troll* used to designate "an imaginary, either very large or very small creature in traditional Scandinavian stories that has magical powers and lives in mountains and caves" (CDO) and it is commonly used nowadays to refer to someone who keeps bothering others by posting rude comments on Facebook or Twitter.

- There are instances when the translation itself produced a shift in meaning. It is the case of the verbs *to set* and *to reset*, which had initially entered the target language (Romanian, in this case) with their technical meaning, i.e. *a seta* = „a fixa, a stabili (condiții de funcționare, parametri etc.)" [DCR, 2013] and *a reseta* = *a da reset* = „a porni computerul, telefonul, etc. pentru a reinița sistemul de operare" [DCR, 2013], only to later acquire new meanings. For example, *a seta* also appears in DCR with the meaning „a se organiza, a se mobiliza" (as in *a se seta pe un anumit obiectiv*). Note that the shift in meaning was possible by

[6] From https://www.whatis.techtarget.com/definition/Facebook-wall.html, available on 2.07.2018.
[7] From https://www.dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/status.html, available on 2.07.2018.

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making the verb reflexive. In the same way, we may encounter *a se seta la cap* ("îţi recomand să te setezi intâi la cap cam câte kilograme vrei să dai jos") [*apud* Dragomirescu, Nicolae, 2011: 71], *a se reseta* as in „Lui Gabriel Cotabiţă i s-a resetat creierul?"[8], the analogy between the brain and the computer system being quite obvious and making its meaning more transparent, or „Primăvara în care mi-am resetat prioritățile"[9], the meaning of *a(-şi) reseta* being here *a selecta*, *a ordona*, *a pune în ordine*. It is an illustrative example of how a *denotative* or *"technical"* loanword turned into a *connotative* or *"stylistic"* one.

- The compound word *hashtag* changes its meaning when used in phrases such as Rom. *Generația Hashtag*, referring to Romanian youngsters who use social media frequently in order to gather together and protest against the government policies, and it is the source for the coinage of the nonce-word *hashtagist*. But *hashtag* is a term coined to designate the keyword or phrase that identifies messages on a particular topic (#COLECTIV), which is preceded by the *hash* sign. In American English, the sign is sometimes called *pound sign* and it was used for pounds weight, also *number sign* in co-texts such as *go to question #3*. Moreover, in music it is called a *sharp*, and on telephone dials is known as a *square*.
- The word *unfriend* (vb.) is one of the most recent lexical innovations in English. It has been coined artificially by using the prefix *un-* to form the opposite from *friend* and, by turning (through conversion) into a verb, it now means "to remove a person added as 'friend' from one's list of contacts". In the form it is used today it is concise, and therefore more convenient.

Such instances as those presented above are quite common within the informal register of both Romanian and Spanish, a register in which speech develops plenary, even if not all the linguistic productions manage to become part of the lexicon of the language. Most of them will preserve their status of nonce-words and fade away with time, due to the disappearance of the reality they designate or to the shift in attitude or attention on the part of the speaker. Therefore, the acceptance of new words in a certain language community and their longevity depends on their appeal, convenience and usefulness to the public. In the same way, since Facebook is one of the most frequently used social media platforms, which was humorously referred to as a *digital word of mouth* [Ulmanu, 2011: 67], we may say that all social media, as free communication facilitators, play an important part in spreading both nonce-words and borrowings among communities of users and turning them into neologisms that will, sooner or later, be adopted by writers, reporters, teachers, or the average speakers.

The study and the understanding of every new aspect related to language innovation with reference to the new technologies or the new media are useful in that they make it possible for newly coined words to be integrated in the language system of the two languages. In our view, social networking sites are the battlefield on which the old and the new face each other. However, the user-controlled confrontation guarantees the evolution (or rather *re*volution) of a language, as any technological development entails the enrichment of its lexicon. The precipitous conclusions of traditional language defenders, of the so-called "purists", are understandable up to a point, as usage and frequency tend to prevail in considering the new language acquisitions. Therefore, we believe that it is worth re-evaluating the significance of the "traditional" language as compared to the one spoken

[8] Article available on https://www.click.ro.html, 25.11.2015, accessed on 25.06.2018.
[9] From https://www.doinacernavca.eu/2018/primavara-in-care-mi-am-resetat-prioritatile.html, available 25.06.2018.

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today, the language that we use on social networks as well as in translations, newspaper articles or textbooks. And so the "battle" goes on.

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CDO: *Cambridge Dictionary Online*, available on https://dictionary.cambridge.org/

DRAE: *Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*, available on https://dle.rae.es/

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