SORIN STATI'S CONTRIBUTIONS IN THE FIELD OF THE "CULTURAL" LINGUISTICS: STORIES ABOUT THE WORD

Lucian Dumitru BĂICEANU*

***Abstract*:** *Sorin Stati brings a number of contributions in the field of the „cultural" linguistics by two important volumes: Romanian words. A story of words (1964), and The linguistic journey to the land of the Muses (1967). The papers are under the sign of the keyword - etymology - and are structured and implemented in a poetic manner in which the science of language is combined with „the story of the word". The volumes analyze and study the emergence, the evolution and the disappearance (in some cases) of the word, in various forms and in different contexts. Building an almost narrative speech, Sorin Stati manages to keep the scientific value of the information presented, bringing another important contribution: to the development of linguistics as a science.*

***Keywords*:** *linguistics, Sorin Stati, word, "cultural" linguistic*.

Stories about different categories of words

Sorin Stati is, undoubtedly, one of the most important and prolific Romanian linguists who managed to make major contributions in the field of structural linguistics: theories about language methodology, mathematical linguistics theories, a careful research of syntax and semantics field (we have discussed this subject in the article „Perspective lingvistice: teoriile lui Sorin Stati privind semantica") etc. Another branch on which the Romanian linguist focuses his attention is the "culural" linguistic field, analyzed in two of his volumes: the paper from 1964, *Romanian words. A story of words*, and the paper from 1967, *Linguistic journey in the muses country*. The keyword specific for these two studies is, undoubtedly, *etymology*. Translated from Greek language, the term etymology means "the science of truth, sense". Sorin Stati says that this science "is actually a weapon - weak, at the beginning - to conquer the answer to a question as elementary as disturbing: why each thing has a certain name and not another?" (S. Stand 1967: 16). We must specify that the present paper does not follow a comparative analysis of ideas of Romanian linguist, but a synthetic rendering that reveal a new approach to the linguistics research, which Sorin Stati uses it, one more easy to understand by the reader, specialist or not. For this reason we have not given an increased attention for the purely scientific aspects, but rather for the presentation of the ideas and the original writing, which gives the impression of reading a novel and not a scientific research.

The Romanian linguist believes that "no one needs an explanation of the word ... word" but draws attention to two essential conditions in selecting a word: the adequacy to context of the words and the proper order of spelling the words for a clearer expression of the ideas that we want to convey. The practice of speech, the oral and written communication, is the motor for the proper functioning of the two said conditions. The relationship between *thought* and *language* is fundamental to the human development, in general, and for the vocabulary, in particular. The language "is a

*Alexandru Ioan Cuza University, Iași, lucianbaiceanu@gmail.com

BDD-A24489 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:18 UTC)

storehouse of words which you must handle it after some prescriptions". These prescriptions are linguistic rules, which develops in parallel with the social development. Thus, the researcher believes that a "story of words" must investigate three major problems:
a)how and why words are born;
b)why they change;
c)how and why they die.

The answer to these questions is given in the contents of a rigorous study of the word (1964, *Romanian words. A story of words*), structured in two parts: "The Story of the word" and "The words and the life". The vision of presentation of the novel ideas is like a linguistic fairy tale, in which the formal, scientific manner of expressing certain theoretical information is passed through the spectrum of the dramatic game (for every theoretical aspect, for every word it is created a real "story" and all these "stories" are inserted into an encyclopedia: *A story of words*). The direct relationship between semantic and phonetic is the mathematical formula of the word, which is formed by an sound shell (the material aspect, the sounds and the letters) and a meaning, a sense. The evolution of a word is closely linked to the two components mentioned. Therefore, sometimes some sounds disappear, others are added, others turns; and some meanings are lost, and others appear, and others turns. Starting from the definition of the word - "an indivisible whole, being the name of a class of objects, events, actions, relationships characterized by a number of features that distinguish them from all objects, phenomena, actions, relationships expressed by the other classes" Sorin Stati combat the equivalence: *word - class of objects*. The linguist identifies three cases of nonequivalents:
1) the same category of objects, events, actions, etc. sometimes it has two or more names: ex. *ceas = ceasornic (watch=clock); zăpadă = nea = omăt*, (*snow*) etc;
2) The same designation is applied to two (rarely more) categories of objects, actions etc. very different from each other: ex. *lac* (întindere de apă stătătoare) – *lac* (de exemplu, de unghii);/ *lake* (stretching standing water) - *lake** (eg. for nails, in Romanian);
3) certain categories of objects, actions, qualities etc. have not one word to name but a combination of two or more words: ex. *Floarea-soarelui* (*Sunflower*); *gospodărie agricolă colectivă(collective agricultural enterprise*) etc.

The first case is that of *synonyms*, classified into three classes:
a) relative synonymy, ex. *timp = vreme*; (time).
b) total synonymy, ex. *a sporovăi = a trăncăni = a pălăvrăgi*; (*gibber=chatter = gossip*).
c) contextual synonymy, ex. *a trece = a se scurge*, în contextul: *timpul trece încet*. (*pass = drain* in context: *the time passes slowly).*

The main reason that led to the emergence of synonyms is, according to the researcher, the borrowed of foreign words by contact with populations who spoke all sorts of languages.

The second case is that of *homonyms*, which comprises two types:

a) total homonymy: ex. *lac* (întindere de apă stătătoare) – *lac* (de exemplu, de unghii) are two identical shapes in all their forms(*lacului*, *lacuri*, *lacurile*, etc.) (lake, lakes);

b) reduced homonymous, ex. *rîs* (de bucurie) -laugh (with joy)- and *rîs* (animal), were similar in the singular form (un *rîs*, *rîsului* etc.), (laughter, laughter, etc.), but differ in the plural (*rîsuri – rîși*).

BDD-A24489 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:18 UTC)

The borrowing is in this case one of the reasons for this phenomenon. Usually, an old word, inherited from Latin, add one or more new words, taken from various other languages. There are four similar Romanian words – *mai* : 1) ex. *mai bun*, lat. *magis*; 2) *maiul* (unealtă de nivelare), lat. *malleus*; 3) luna *mai*, lat. *maius*; 4) *mai* (ficat), din ungurește.

The third case is that of *jointing words*, which has two manifestations:

a) voluntary ex. we can say *o sticlă de vin Fetească (a bottle of wine Fetească*) or a *Fetească*;

b) obligatory (because the reduction occurred from the language from where the word was borrowed), ex. fr. *pain biscuit* (pâine – *pain* - de două ori – *bis* - coaptă – *cuit* -) > *biscuit*.

About the "birth" and "journey" of words

In the chapter "How were born the words of the Romanian language" Sorin Stati tries to provide an answer for the first problematic question of the " story of word". Sorin Stati considers that the Romanian vocabulary base is composed of Latin elements. "The Latin prototype" can be recognized in the genetics of the words of the Romanian language. The spoken words of the Roman colonists, called *inherited words*, form the majority of the most important elements of our vocabulary ("the main lexical fund" or "basic vocabulary"). With the inherit terms we call the relations between people, body parts and organ function, the animals and plants important actions of the forces of nature, different notions of home, work, etc. Also, at the "birth" of the words of the Romanian language contributed other influences, such as Slavic, Hungarian, German, Italian, English, etc.

An essential feature of the words is, considered Sorin Stati, that they "travel": first, traveling with the population who use the words, secondly, traveling with the items they naming.

The question How to "invent" a word (1964: 62; 66) receives answers that consist of various concrete examples: for example the term *daltonism* was named like his inventor, Dalton; The word *robot* was invented by the Czech classic writer Karel Capek in 1920, who used it in his play *R.U.R.* (*Rational - Universal - Robot*) etc.

In order to answer at the question "Why the words are changing?", the researcher talks about a number of different aspects. The first fact is the process of change of the sound shell of words. From Latin to Romanian, at the phonetic aspect, many changes occur at the level of the word: some sounds disappear, others are transformed and others are added. The phonetic changes do not occur suddenly and simultaneously to all the speakers of a language. Another process, who answered to our question is closely linked to the meaning of a word. For example, says Sorin Stati, in the case of the term *-sos-* , considering its old meaning , designate only *salty sauce* (the origin of the word is the expression *aqua salsa = salty water*); today, the meaning of the word has expanded, including any kind of sauce, regardless of taste.

A "biography" of the word

The second part of the study, "The words and the life" (S. Stati 1964: 117; 177), has the point of interest the relation between word and social environment where it was "born", was developed and "died". The words, by their meaning, reflect the reality, in all its richness, our knowledge about reality. The words used by the modern

BDD-A24489 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:18 UTC)

man to describe objects and phenomena are usually very old, and keeps the specific genetic code of the primitive thinking of their creators. The etymology of a word is the most comprehensive opportunity to learn its "story". Thus, Sorin Stati propose a crossing through history, trace the "story" wire of the Romanian words, their origin being diverse. The first period analyzed is the ancient Rome. The beliefs and the superstitions of people have also led to the emergence of words. The names received by children at birth were chosen by tradition, but they were carriers of meanings. The greco-Latin antiquity is also rich in terms with interesting stories. Also in close connection with Roman antiquity is the issue of the name of the first five days of the week. In the middle of the sixteenth century appears the first newspaper in Venice. The price of a copy was a *-gazetă-* (the name of a Venetian coins). The publication was called also *gazette*.

Another area that has contributed to the development of the Romanian vocabulary was that of the science. The arithmetic was defined as the science of numbers since antiquity; in fact her name is based on the Greek noun *arithmos* (number). Chemistry is another area that influenced the emergence of new words such as *-alchimie-* (from the Arabic word *al-kimiya*, which meant philosopher's stone) etc. An amusing example we meet in zoology: the term *-cochet(a)-* (*coquettish)* is a word borrowed from French; the mens who held at their image were compared with some *cocks* (*Coquet*, diminutive from *coq* = *cock*). In parallel with science is put art (music, plastic arts, literature).

The Story of the Word in the "land of the Muses"

An explanation of the "the word ... word" is given to us in the paper from 1967, the theme of the volume being announced from the title: the words from "the country of the Muses". After a careful presentation of the nine Muses (Kleio, Euterpe, Talia, Melpomene, Terpsichore, Erato, Polimnia, Urania, Caliope), the Romanian linguist discusses various words specific for the arts represented by each of the Muses. The volume takes the form of an epic paper, in which the author is the main character and he travels through the world of the old words, finding their "stories".

Stopping at a discussion about "the chosen of the Muses, the poets," Sorin Stati says that a number of Greek words in our language came in forms such as: *poet*, *poem*, *poetry*, *poetic*, and etymologically develops the idea of "*doing*", "*to compose*".

The linguist reminds us about the story that underlies the emergence of two controversial words: *masochism* and *sadism*. With the Austrian novelist Sacher of Masoch (end of the XIX century) we pass from moral pathological to the medical pathological: the perverse eroticism of Masoch's character bears his name - *masochism*. For the second word, *sadism*, we have another famous novelist, the Marquis de Sade (1740-1814), with various novels.

An interesting aspect regarding the diminutives is presented to us in the "The camouflaged diminutive": even though different, the words *opera* (lyric-dramatic genre) and *operetta* ("small or short opera") are connected, the second is the diminutive of the first. Incidentally it is known in this case also who coined the word: Mozart, who introduced the word *-Operette*.

Sorin Stati says that "any artwork can not be discussed other than in words" (S. Stati, 1964: 12); However, in the two volumes that we've reviewed in this article, the linguist demonstrates us, that, in fact, the word itself is an artwork. Presented as a story, having the structure of a novel, the analyzed volumes manage to keep a cargo of high

BDD-A24489 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:18 UTC)

scientific value, through the theories presented, Sorin Stati bringing another major contribution to the evolution of linguistics as a science.

Bibliography

Băiceanu, Lucian, *Perspective lingvistice: teoriile lui Sorin Stati privind semantica*, Academia Română – Filiala Iaşi, Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide", *Al. Andriescu - 88*, volum îngrijit de Gabriela Haja, Iaşi, Editura Universităţii „Alexandru Ioan Cuza", ISBN 978-606-714-035-4, p. 293, 2014.
Frâncu, Constantin, *Geneza limbii române și etnogeneza românilor*, Ediția a II-a revizuită, Casa Editorială Demiurg, Iași, 1999.
Stati, Sorin, *Cuvinte româneşti. O poveste a vorbelor*, Editura Științifică, București, 1964.
Stati, Sorin, *Călătorie lingvistică în ţara muzelor*, Editura Științifică, București, 1967.

BDD-A24489 © 2015 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.25 (2026-11-07 16:08:18 UTC)