ENGLISH LOANWORDS IN THE ROMANIAN LANGUAGE OF DRUGS

Ileana Silvia CIORNEI
University of Piteşti

Abstract: *The extensive use of drugs in the present-day society led to a specific type of language used by drug producers, dealers and users, having mainly a cryptic and an euphemistic character. The extreme development of the drugs slang in English determined a considerable influence over other languages through direct borrowings or other diverse adaptations.*

Keywords: *Slang, cryptic, loanword.*

The oldest written document about the use of drugs is a clay slate from Sumer in the Middle East. It dates back to 2000 B.C. and contains a list of numerous medicine drugs. An Egyptian papyrus dated 1550 B.C. lists more than 800 recipes, including about 700 drugs. China, Greece and Ancient Rome used many drugs: the Romans and the Greeks used opium to ease pain; all ancient people knew lethal toxic recipes, which contained many plants or minerals. Traditionally, each people or ethnical group knows ritual magic potions, which determined, after consuming it, diverse physical transformations from trance and divination to hallucination, the most well known being the shamans or the magicians. The legendary Pytii, the priestesses from Delphi, were supposed to inhale mercury vapors and chew laurel leaves in order to pass on divine predictions.

Between 1500 and 1600, doctors and men of science made important discoveries in pharmacology and other domains of science. Paracelsus made the first research on minerals used in the treatment of some diseases. During human history the use of certain substances as drugs or medicines evolved in different stages and the XX-th century registered the proliferation of the abusive drug use as one of the most destructive scourges, which is about to reach the dimensions of an epidemics; there are about 20 million drug users, most of them under 30 years, belonging to diverse social categories.

The origin of the word *drug* makes the object of some controversies, some authors consider that it comes from the Persian word *droa* = aromatic smell, others from the Hebrew word *rahab* which means perfume, while others from the Dutch word *droog* which designates all substances sold by chemists.

In English *drug* means drug or medicine while Romanian adopted the term *drog* having a clear different meaning from that of medicine (*medicament*).

The use of drugs is an important part of the life of American culture, mainly among the young communities. Statistics have shown that drugs like cocaine, marijuana or inhalants are the most frequent drugs used by young people. Starting with 1980, which registered the greatest number of drug users, figures had very little variations.

Consequently, English developed an extremely rich vocabulary having mainly a cryptic and euphemistic character. *Thesaurus of Slang*, Esther and Albert Levin, 1994, registered a great number of terms with reference to the domain: drug addiction – 11, to buy drugs – 16, drugged – 120, overdose – 15, drug dealer – 46, drug user – 84

BDD-A5796 © 2010 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 17:02:13 UTC)

(differentiating among the takers of various drugs, the way of ingesting, the frequency), amphetamines – 72, amylnitrite – 17, barbiturates – 34, cocaine – 94, hashish – 19, heroin – 127, LSD – 25 (one of them *Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds* created and popularized by The Beatles), MDMA (Ecstasy) – 7, morphine – 39, opium – 43. Marijuana holds the record with 217 terms denoting origins, varieties and way of ingestion, effects, colour and other associations.

The extensive development of the drug slang in English determined a considerable influence over other languages through direct borrowings, or other adaptations (calques or translations).

Dicţionar enciclopedic de droguri, an early edition (1991) appeared in the Home Office Printing House, included besides the scientific terminology of psychotropic substances, plants, substances and products, which are not subject to international regulations with reference to drugs. The dictionary includes many English loanwords which fall into borrowings, calques, and translations: *clean* = a person who does not use or traffic drugs; *chippy* = a person who takes small doses of drugs or who uses it occasionally; *hash* = hashish (the resin obtained by the processing of the inflorescence and young stems of Cannabis indica – The Indian hemp, sold as brown or greyish green tablets; *haze* = LSD 25 (Lysergic acid diethylamide); *dealer* = drug trafficker; *pushers* = small drug traffickers; *gun* = the slang term used for denoting the syringe used for injecting the drug; *lightning* = amphetamine. Translations from English are numerous: *cal*, *cal alb* = heroin (<engl. *horse*); *călătorie* = being under the influence of drugs (<engl. *trip*); *gândac de bucătărie* = joint butt (<engl. *roach*); *iarbă* = term used for Cannabis indica and its derivative marijuana (inflorescence and leaves of the dried plant usually rolled and smoked in a cigar) from Engl. *grass*, *weed*; *super bombă* = *cocaine paste* (<engl. *crack*); *veste galbene* = Nembutal capsules, being yellow as a rule (engl. *yellow jackets*); *miere* = cannabis powder (<engl. *honey*); *praf* = heroin (<engl. *dust*) and its derivative *prăfuit* = drugged (<engl. *dusted*); *a planeta* = to feel on a cloud under drug effect (<engl. *floating*, *to feel high*). Calques: *harpon* = needle used for drug injection (<engl. *harpoon*); *fixaţi* = drug users (<engl. *fixed*).

Dicţionar de droguri, Jenică Drăgan, appeared in 2000, completed the terminology of the first editions and included a variety of substances and products having stimulating, sedative, aphrodisiac and hallucinatory properties, acting on the nervous central system. English loanwords denote drugs, their varieties, drug use, drug traffickers, ways of ingestion and effects. The dictionary abounds in English terms: *bazooka* = cocaine paste; *nose candy, lady* = cocaine; *broccoli*, *bush* = marijuana; *angel dust* = cannabis and mint; *Ferrari* = heroin (formed by metonymic substitution, due to the fact the emblem of Ferrari brand is represented by a horse, the slang term for heroin), *aunty*, *hairy* = heroin; *lemonade* = low quality heroin; *Moon*, *Big Chief* = mescaline; *eye-openers* = amphetamines (due to the fact that they chase tiredness); *Mexican reds* = Seconal pills; *joint* = Cannabis cigar; *skunk* = a variety of cannabis having a strong odour; *speedball* = a mixture of cocaine and heroine; *Special K* = a popular new drug, which borrowed its name from a cornflakes brand, based on ketamine, an anesthetic; LSD-25, a very popular drug among young people as it is very cheap and easy to get, the most powerful known hallucinogen, used in the ‘60s by the hippies which enjoyed much publicity until its harmful effects became known is mainly denoted by its English terminology: *acid head*, *anarchy*, *animal*, *Black Ant*, *Bart Simpson*, *Batman*, *Private Dick*, *Red Strawberry*, *Smiley*, *Little Miss Piggy*; *mojo* = drugs; *flash-back* = syndrome characterized by hallucinations and unpleasant sensations, pains and fear; *kick-party* = a party where a person stays clean in order to

BDD-A5796 © 2010 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 17:02:13 UTC)

survey the others; *rave parties* = Ecstasy and other hallucinogenic drugs parties; *kilo-man* = drug trafficker, selling drugs by the kilogram; *peddler* = itinerant drug seller; *high* = the euphoric state induced after taking a psychedelic drug; *shot* = intravenous injection of a drug; *sniff* = nasal ingestion of a drug (usually cocaine) from Engl. *sniff* = to inspire the air through the nose; *Jones* = a drug addict; the term *junkie / junker* used initially in English to denote a heroine, morphine or cocaine addict (with the needle habit) has been borrowed in Romanian with a wider meaning that of a "drug user". Translations and calques are also numerous: *ulei* = hashish (<engl. *oil*); *doamna albă* = heroin (<engl. *white lady*); *marfă* = drugs in general (<engl. *stuff*, *merchandise*); *agent de voiaj* = LSD-25 seller (<engl. *travel agent*); *agățat* = drug user (<engl. *hooked*); *vibrație* = similar atmosphere, reactions with sexual overtones among beatniks, hippies (<engl. *vibrations*) (PARTRIDGE, 2002).

Phraseological units appear as translations of the original ones: *vânarea dragonului* = inhaling heroin vapours from an aluminium foil (<engl. *chase the dragon*); *a face o linie* = to ingest nasally a dose of cocaine (<engl. *to make a line*, *to go down a line*).

Both dictionaries may be regarded as valuable linguistic tools in the domain of drugs; they also served the social purpose of making public the language of a category indulging in harmful, dangerous and illicite activities. They are extremely valuable since although drug language appear in more and contextual backgrounds (media, sociological and medical reports), the official discourse stays extremely poor. Explanatory dictionaries include the word *drog*, the verb *a se droga* = to use drugs, and the participle *drogat* = drugged. The verb *a se droga* is defined as "to administer or to take drugs" and the entries of different drugs are treated very shortly. The incomplete and scientifically justified definitions are most likely the result of the concern over tabu subjects before 1989 (Rodica Zafiu, România Liberă, 2002). The period following 1989 saw the appearance of calques and adaptations like *toxicomania*, *toxicoman*, *drogoman*, *cocainoman*, *drogo-dependență* = drug-addiction, while the journalistic discourse used drug language: *dealer*, *ecstasy*, *iarbă*, *prafuri*, *joint*, *prăjit*, *pastilat* being among the most frequent.

Over the last two decades, the language of the respective subculture developed extensively in order to comply with its cryptic and euphemistic needs; it also proved imagination and skill in coining new terms, starting from the borrowed ones. Slang dictionaries were published (Ana Dolores DOCA, George VOLCEANOV, 1995) while slang dictionaries online (123urban) include much drug slang in use.

New English loanwords appeared: *superpot* = cannabis and alcohol; *cookie* = cocaine cookies; *blunt* = hollowed out cigar filled with marijuana; *pot* = hashish; *zen* = LSD-25; *Harry*, *Harry Potter* = narcotics sold as tablets; *hero* = heroine or *coc* = cocaine (formed by clipping) translations and calques; *pulbere* = cocaine (<engl. *dust*); *zăpadă* = cocaine (<engl. *snow*); *fulg* = o dose of cocaine (<engl. *flake*); *broasca verde* = LSD-25 (<engl. g*reen frog*); *prăjit* = drugged (<engl. *fried*); *rupt* = drugged (<engl. *torn-up*, *twisted*); *chocolate* = cannabis; *sirop* = codeine (<engl. *syrup*); *şcolar* = hashish (<engl. *schoolboy*); *cristal* = amphetamine (<engl. *crystals*); *superbombă* = high quality heroine (<engl. *supercharge*); *Maria Ioana* = marijuana (<engl. *Mary Jane*). Some initial borrowed slang words have been replaced by others according to the needs and imagination of the speakers, through metaphorical associations: thus *gândac de bucătărie* (<engl. *roach*) became *greiere* (engl. *cricket*); *proiectul verde* or *vegetală* denote marijuana, borrowed initially as *green*, *bush* or *broccoli*, (called also in English *alfalfa* or *oregano*); the loanword *skunk* became *bălegar* (Rom. *manure*) = marijuana

BDD-A5796 © 2010 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 17:02:13 UTC)

exhaling an unpleasant odour; *Special K* = ketamina becomes *Vitamina K* (vitamin K) and eventually *Mihai Albu* (association between the colour of the drug and the name of a fashion designer).

New verbs were created according to Romanian grammatical patterns: *a te ciuperca* = to use drugs (<engl. *shroom user*, *shroom dop* = person who takes drugs) from the hallucinatory properties of many mushrooms); *a te pastila* = to take Ecstasy pills, pill = Rom. *pastilă*); *a te prăji* = to take drugs (<engl. *fried* = drugged) which gave the corresponding participles *ciupercat*, *pastilat*, *prăjit* = drugged.

Some of these terms formed cognates: the borrowings *fix* = intravenous injection of drugs and *fixing* (<engl. the activity of injecting a drug) gave the verb *a fixa* = to inject a drug intravenously and *fixat* = a drug user who injected the drug; *sniff* = nasal inhalation of a drug, *sniffer* = the person who inhales drugs and *sniffing* = the activity of ingesting a drug nasally gave the verb *a sniffui* = to inhale drugs; *trip* = the euphoric state induced by the use of LSD-25 and then of any drug and *tripper* = a person under the influence of drugs gave the verb *a se tripa* = to take drugs. Meanwhile, the term extended its meaning and denotes a person who involves himself / herself in an exaggerate way in a certain activity.

The language of drugs proves to be the linguistic representation of a subculture, which expresses its own concepts and symbols in a specific way. Taking into account its social and moral implications, honesty and a clear representation of a phenomenon might help in its understanding.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Partridge, Eric, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 8-th edition, Routledge, New York, 2002

Lewin, Esther; Lewin, Alber, *Thesaurus of Slang*, Wordsworth Editions Ltd., Hertfordshire, 1994

Volceanov, George; Doca, Ana Dolores, *Dicţionar de argou al limbii engleze*, Nemira, Bucureşti, 1995

Drăgan, Jenica; Popescu, Constantin, *Dicţionar enciclopedic de droguri*, Ministerul de Interne, Serviciul Editorial, Bucureşti, 1991

Wentwoth, Harold; Flexner, Stuart Berg, *Dictionary of American Slang*, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, New York, 1967

Zafiu, Rodica, *Diversitate stilistică în limba română actuală*, Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti, Bucureşti, 2001

Volceanov, George, *Dicţionar de argou al limbii române*, Editura Niculescu, Bucureşti, 2007.

BDD-A5796 © 2010 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 17:02:13 UTC)