A FULLY DYNAMIC LEXICO-SEMANTIC FIELD: *MOBILE TELEPHONY*

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Abstract

The terms within the lexico-semantic field related to the phone, frequently used in current Romanian, have been transposed from a ultraspecialized field to the common language. These technical terms, although used in media and common language as well, are not (fully) registered in general dictionaries of the Romanian language. The demands of mobile telephony users (and of telecommunications, in general), are more and more complex and involve new services and facilities. Access to these services is provided by multifunctional equipments, whose main characteristic is the use and access, as simply as possible, of multiple functions (and services).

Key words: *communication*, *technology*, *device*, *phone*, *features*

Résumé

Les termes appartenant au champ lexical et sémantique engendré par l'usage fait du téléphone portable, fréquemment employés en roumain actuel, y ont été transférés, par glissement naturel, depuis un domaine initial ultra-spécialisé vers le corpus du langage commun. Les dictionnaires d'usage général du roumain n'ont pas encore enregistré la totalité du nombre de ces termes techniques, bien que ceux-ci fussent utilisés, simultanément, par les spécialistes des média et par le commun des gens. Les utilisateurs de la téléphonie portable (et des télécommunications en général) exigent sans cesse de nouveaux services et de meilleures facilités, dont les structures se font toujours plus complexes. Pour avoir accès à de tels services, il faut nécéssairement disposer d'équipements à multiples fonctions, qui ont pour tâche principale de rendre l'accès à et l'usage desdites fonctions (cela va aussi au sujet des autres services) autant simples que cela se peut faire. Il revient donc au champ sémantique qui nous préoccupe d'être le reflet exact de ce foisonnement.

Mots-clés: *communication*, *technique*, *dispositif*, *téléphone*, *caractères*

1. Technology is developing along with society; the evolution of technology and, at the same time, the intrusion of the new into people's lives have determined the creation (or borrowing!) of certain terms, appropriate for this terminology. Specialists in the fields of science and technology, in general, are those who give a name to a specific (electronic, electric, etc.) object. It is not always that the name given by scientists imposes itself. For instance, the term *anemoscope* is rarely used; the frequently used term, the synonym of *anemoscope*, is *wind vane*.

2. In this respect, it is interesting to note the names given to the *telephone*. At present, *telephone* is a general term, which exists in several European languages: En. (*tele*)*phone*, Fr. *téléphone*, Germ. *Telefon*, Sp. *teléfono*, It. *telèfono*, etc.

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The first telephone connection was made by doctor Alexander Graham Bell in Boston, in 1876. Following the introduction of the carbon microphone, invented by David E. Hughes in 1878 and later, of the carbon granules microphone, as well as the improvement of the device by Thomas Edison, the telephone became useful, spreading and gaining considerable importance. The invention of the transistor (1947) led to the construction of lightweight, compact, easy to handle devices. The progress in electronics has fostered the introduction of some "smart" features of phones, such as automatic redial, caller identification, call waiting, call transfer[1], calendar etc. At the same time, telephone systems (along with computers) represent a major route of access to the internet.

The international word *telephone* (consisting of the compounding elements: *tele-* "far away" and *phone* "sound") designates an instrument designed for the simultaneous transmission and reception of the human voice. It works by converting sound waves of the human voice to electrical pulses, followed by reconversion to sounds. This term referred to the classical phone only, connected via a cable to a power source; gradually, it started to be called, in Romanian, *telefon fix* 'a fixed phone', or just *fix* 'fixed'.

Unlike it, the cordless phone carried by a person was called in Romanian *telefon celular* 'cellular phone', or *telefon mobil* 'mobile phone', or simply *celular* 'cellular', *mobil* 'mobile' and, much less frequently, *portabil* 'portable', that is the cordless phone allowing distance communication over surface areas covering hundreds of square kilometres sometimes, operating at 800-900 MHz; for the implementation of a cell phone system, the geographic area is divided into smaller sections, called cells, commonly represented in the form of uniform hexagrams which are actually irregular and partly overlap; each cell is equipped with a transmitter and a low power radio receiver, which allow the propagation of signals among cell phone users[2].

Thus, the terms *mobil*, *celular*, *portabil*, *fix* changed the class from adjectives to nouns by conversion. Semantically, substantivized adjectives add to their inherent features, the general feature of the new class, that of naming individual objects (or classes of objects) [3].

In other European languages as well, there are different terms for denoting this technical product briefly and effectively. In French, the *mobile phone* is called *le portable*, and the owner can become *accroché à son portable* or, colloquially, *c'est un accro*; in Italian, *il* (*telèfono*) *cellulare*, *il* (*telèfono*) *moblile* or even *il telefonino* (a diminutive); in German: *Handy* (a false Anglicism); in English: *mobile* (*phone*), *cellular* (*phone*), *cell* (*phone*) and *hand phone*.

The Romanian term *celular* 'cellular'[4] originates from the noun *celulă* 'cell' (phone cell), which represents the coverage power of a transmission-reception antenna used in cell/mobile telephony. The interconnection of several cells forms a mobile telephony system. At the beginning of mobile telephony in Romania, in the language of less educated people, as a result of the speakers' tendency to merge words, a new term was coined, namely *molecular*, by analogy with *celular*. *Molecular* is an

[1] Cf. *Enciclopedia Universală Britanică*, vol. 15, 2010, p. 154.
[2] Cf. *Enciclopedia Universală Britanică*, vol. 15, 2010, p. 155.
[3] Cf. DSL, 2001, p. 143.
[4] *Cellular* (*phone*) denotes a small-sized, individual device equipped with a transmitter and a receiver which allows long distance calls, text messaging by means of electromagnetic waves, making and storing pictures, etc.; synonym: *mobile phone.*

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inadequate term, actually a popular etymology. Popular etymology is the result of an unconscious process of retroactive motivation of false etymological associations, a process of retroactive motivation of the word form, by "achieving" the word form under the influence of impressions. In the speech of uneducated persons, the word *celular* has various phonetic variants, one of them being *ciololar*, a ridiculous form, denoting a serious cultural deficit.

Some of the terms referring to the field of telephony/telecommunications are commonly used by specialists, failing to impose themselves to the common speaker. *Cordless* (En.) is a device used in landline, operating without a power cord or cable, within a limited area, but needing rechargeable batteries; it is actually a hybrid phone, with limited autonomy in time and space. The term *cordless* is almost never used in Romanian; instead, its synonym, *DECT*, an abbreviation from *Digital Enhanced Cordless Telephone*, occurs quite frequently – it represents the cordless phone[5], with a *display* (screen), easy to handle and having multiple features, similar to a mobile phone.

The substantivized adjectives (*mobil*, *celular*, even *molecular*) have not caused particular problems because they are similar to some well-known words in Romanian. There are other inappropriate forms of technical words which will certainly be a research topic for linguists.

3. Over the past years, the technical means by which people can communicate have multiplied. For instance, there is communication by phone and/or *online* communication – the latter can also be performed via a mobile phone connected to the internet.

A *smartphone* /smártfəun/ (in Romanian, pl. *smartphone*-uri) is a multifunctional mobile phone with a keypad or a touch screen, which can be used for multimedia files playback, web browsing etc. The translation of this term is *intelligent phone*, but in Romanian, only the term borrowed from English is used: *smartphone*.

An *iPhone* /áifəun/ (in Romanian, pl. *iPhone*-uri) is a multifunctional mobile phone used for storing and playing movies, books, music, for web browsing, etc. (< En. *iPhone*, trade name). An *iPhone* is therefore a mobile phone of the *smartphone* type: it has a *touch screen* /tátʃ skrin/ (in Romanian pl. *touch screen*-uri), that is a *display* allowing the user to interact with that device while touching some parts of the screen with the finger or a stylus (< En. *touch screen*/Fr. *écran tactile*).

In the 21st century, the phone is no longer a simple device meant for distance communication, but, as the name suggests, *smartphone*, it provides a wide range of services, which makes it comparable to a PC. Another (smart!) device has got between the mobile phone and the computer: the *tablet*. It performs the same functions (as a mobile phone), i.e. it is a portable, small-sized computer of the last generation, accessed by *touch screen*, without any keyboard or mouse; with a tablet, the user can access games (and play in real time), read and also talk (as if using a mobile phone) or even send messages.

An *iPAD* /áiped/ (in Romanian, pl. *iPAD*-uri) is a flat, tablet-like computer, having the size and shape of a book, designed and marketed by Apple, used as a platform for storing and playing movies, books, music, for web-browsing (< En. *iPAD*, trade name).

[5] It is not called a *mobile*, although it works, too, when the user moves within a certain space/area.

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A modern device, which has quite recently entered the Romanian mobile telephony market, is *BlackBerry* (pl. *BlackBerrys*; it also has the plural form adapted to the Romanian language: *Blackberry*-uri) /blékberi/ – it denotes a multifunctional mobile phone, with a high-definition display, with an optical camera, a calendar, allowing access to the internet and being mainly used to receive and send emails, thanks to its *quwerty* keyboard (< En. *BlackBerry*, trade name).

A *dual sim* (in Romanian pl. *dual sim*-uri) /dúəl sim/ (cf. Fr. *double carte sim*) represents a mobile phone in which one can concurrently use/introduce two SIM cards.

These devices, known as *accessories* or even *gadgets*, use a set of specifications for a personal *wireless* /uáiəɾles/ network (characterizing communications without using any cables for data transmission), named *Bluetooth* /blútuɵ/, which initializes a way allowing data exchange between devices, such as mobile phones, digital cameras, video consoles, etc, by a secure radio frequency and limited coverage.

Although the features provided and the modern technology used are the same, what distinguishes these "smart phones" is the operating system. The most popular operating systems are: *Android*[6], *Symbian*, *Windows Mobile*[7], *Tizen*, etc. Some of them facilitate better results in multimedia applications (which include a combination of text, audio, video, animation etc. or interactive content forms); some others offer optimal options for internet-related applications (browsing, downloading audio files). There are also systems whose main feature is better security of applications. Therefore, operating systems, together with the facilities they provide, represent guarantees/ criteria lying at the basis of choosing a certain phone model or another.

4. Various technical terms such as *portabil*, *celular*, *mobil* have circulated successively and, at certain times, concurrently, along with the use of this means of communication. In parallel, for a certain period, the syntagm *telefon fără fir*[8] 'cordless phone' was used, but it was eliminated, failing to impose itself in (spoken) Romanian. The use of the adjectives *fix* 'fixed' and *mobil* 'mobile', which may accompany the noun *telefon* 'phone', refers to two different types of devices. Since spoken language avoids long names, the adjectives *mobil*, *celular*, *portabil*, *fix* are substantivized and used as such (to denote those devices). From the standpoint of the mobile phone name, the closest are the terms in Romanian, English and Italian: *mobil*, *celular* (Romanian) – cf. En. *mobile*, *cell*(*ular*), cf. It. *moblile*, *cellulare*.

In jest or by mistake, another term was coined, *molecular* – by replacing the noun *celulă* 'cell' with *moleculă* 'molecule'(cf. *celular* 'cellular').

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[6] It is a software platform and an operating system mainly used for mobile phones (based on the Linux kernel); they were initially developed by *Google*, and later by the commercial consortium *Open Handset Alliance*.

(Cf. http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Android_%28sistem_de_operare%29/01.02.2014)

[7] *Windows Mobile* is an operating system developed by Microsoft for mobile devices or for devices with significant limitations with regard to storage capacity, memory, display resolution, power consumption.

(Cf. http://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Windows_Mobile/01.02.2014)

[8] *Telefonul fără fir* 'the cordless phone' is a game where children stand in a row and retell a word, from one end of the row to another, each whispering the word in the ear of the child next to him. This word may be chosen by the first child in the row or by another person who does not play. The last child in the row announces the word he has heard from the child before him. Most often, the final word is different from the initial one, because of the errors in the retellings from one child to another.

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The term *wireless*, referring to distance communication in general, and internet in particular, has sometimes designated a mobile phone, too.

As a result, the mobile telephony technology, and the (Romanian) lexico-semantic field assigned to it, are fully developing, a fact proved by the increasing number of owners and users of (mobile and fixed) phones, the multitude of services, as well as numerous terms which have recently enriched the language.

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