THE CURRENT DYNAMIC OF NEUTER GENDER IN ROMANIAN

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Abstract

*The choice of the topic is motivated by the observation of the ambiguities that arise in current Romanian language, the only Romance language that has preserved the neuter gender from Latin (in French, Spanish and Italian, there is no neuter gender). Will it disappear from Romanian too? Uncertainty is a first step. This analysis is based on the temporary criteria: the correct variants provided by the explanatory dictionaries (the editions of 1998 and 2009) are compared with the results of surveys performed on two generations: under and over 20 years. The nouns were chosen according to their frequency in Romanian and the errors observed in ads, commercials and interviews. There were used also in the investigation groups of two nouns that have the same singular termination, but different plural forms (*polonic, -e; batic, -uri*).*

Keywords: Romanian, plural form of neuter nouns, ambiguity

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The father of functional linguistic, André Martinet, persistently sustained the idea of the dynamic of the languages as resulting from the observation of real usage and perfectly adapted to describing languages in synchrony. Synchrony is not flat and is not static. It must be looked at profoundly. Language, whichever it is, is changing even as we speak. It is no longer as it was twenty years ago. A language changes because it functions. When a language becomes immobile, it does not work as such, but it becomes a code (see Classical Latin). Here are some precepts that the French linguist formulated in various stages of grounding his theory on *dynamic synchrony*[2] and which his followers from different countries of the world have taken over being concerned with *real usage*, defining concept for the functionalist approach.

The functionalist linguist does not correct the usage, but he/she describes it trying to understand the underlying causes of a variant – of spelling or grammar - considered erroneous by the standard rules of grammar and dictionaries and assesses its chances to integrate into the system. Outlined as a trend, variants do not have an equal chance to do so. They depend on two types of propagation observed by Eugen Coseriu: the extensive one, horizontally, and the intensive one, vertically, the latter leading to regularization[3]. Eventually, it is not the linguists or the defenders of a singular rule that decide, but the speakers who represent a majority with the use of a variant. Hence the relativity included in the concept of *majority system*, which dominated the linguistics of the second half of the 20th century, which granted linguistic variation an important position. "We are unjust to a language if we consider it as a dead butterfly, pinned on a cork[4]", said Martinet in the preface of a work inspired by his theories. Through numerous representatives of functional linguistics, recognized either as sociolinguist, or as functionalists, the long supported idea of the immutable nature of language was completely demolished. The variationist linguistic and its methods - especially the survey methodology - is one of the most fertile research directions of the recent decades. We are invited to give up excessive traditional prescriptivism and adopt a new realistic attitude about the functionality of language.

We can easily see a clear discrepancy between the research done in this respect on French and on Romanian. We refer both to their number and to the attitude towards the reported deviations. What we intend to pursue throughout this analysis is, on the one hand, making people aware of language variation and, on the other hand, changing the intolerant attitude towards the errors of today, which may be a sign of the quality usage of tomorrow.

I begin the analysis by presenting ***the correct variants***, variants taken from: The Explanatory Dictionary of Romanian Language (Dicţionarul explicativ al limbii

[2] Martinet, André, *Fonction et dynamique des langues*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1989; *La linguistique synchronique*, Paris, PUF, 1965

[3] Coşeriu, Eugen, *Sincrony, Diacrony and History* (in Romanian) Bucharest, Enciclopedică Publishing House, 1997

[4] Walter, Henriette, *La dynamique de phonèmes dans le lexique du français contemporain*, Paris, France-Expansion, 1976, p II

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române - DEX), Edition 1998[5] and Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language (Dicţionarul explicativ al limbii române - DEX), Edition 2009[6].

1. *abandon, -uri* (DEX 1998, page 1; DEX 2009, page 1)
2. *ajutor, -oare* (DEX 1998, page 22-23; DEX 2009, page 24)
3. *sobor, -oare* (DEX 1998, page 998; DEX 2009, page 1029)
4. *polonic, -e* (DEX 1998, page 821; DEX 2009, page 846)
5. *batic, -uri* (DEX 1998, page 87; DEX 2009, page 92)
6. *plural, -* (DEX 1998, page 810; DEX 2009, page 835)
   - plural forms are listed only for the adjective *plural, -e, -li, -uri*
   - the plural form *plurale* is listed in the Orthographic dictionary, and the form *pluraluri* is listed in the DER - Romanian etymological dictionary (www.dexonline.ro, consulted 21st April, 2011)
7. *litoral, -uri* (DEX 1998, page 578; DEX 2009, page 596)
8. *succes, -e* (DEX 1998, page 1036; DEX 2009, page 1068)
9. *înţeles, -uri* (DEX 1998, page 541; DEX 2009, page 558)
10. *duet, -e* (DEX 1998, page 323; DEX 2009, page 335)
11. *tabiet, -uri* (DEX 1998, page 1065; DEX 2009, page 1098)
12. *judeţ, -e* (DEX 1998, page 550; DEX 2009, page 568)
13. *nutreţ, -uri* (DEX 1998, page 704; DEX 2009, page 726)
14. *baros, -oase/-uri* (DEX 1998, page 86; DEX 2009, page 90)
    Both dictionaries list both forms as correct.
15. *matinee, -ee* (DEX 1998, page 604; DEX 2009, page 624)
16. *dineu, -ee/-uri* (DEX 1998, page 304; DEX 2009, page 316)
    Both dictionaries list both forms as correct
17. *chibrit, -uri* (DEX 1998, page 169; DEX 2009, page 177)
18. *albuş, -uri* (DEX 1998, page 25; DEX 2009, page 26)
19. *gălbenuş, -uri* (DEX 1998, page 413; DEX 2009, page 429)
20. *vis, -e/-uri* (DEX 1998, page 1164; DEX 2009, page 1201)

In the case of the noun *vis* the two dictionaries distinguish between meanings in the plural:

In DEX 1998 - *vis, visuri* - s.n.(netuer noun): 1. The fact of dreaming; a series of images, of psychic phenomena and ideas occurring during sleep. 2. Reverie/revery, meditation, dreaming. 3. Vain illusion; unattainable thought, idea, aspiration. * burning desire. [also plural form *vise*]

In DEX 2009 – *vis, vise*. 1. The fact of dreaming; images and mental processes that occur in less deep sleep stages. Fig. (figurative) - Surreal atmosphere, image, beauty. 2. *Visuri* - Reverie/revery, meditation, dreaming. Fig. (figurative) - Vain illusion; unattainable aspiration. * burning desire.

Results of the survey:

[5] Romanian Academy, "Iorgu Iordan" Institute of Linguistic "Iorgu Iordan", *Expalnatory Dictionary of Romanain*, 2nd Edition, Bucharest, 1998

[6] Romanian Academy, "Iorgu Iordan" Institute of Linguistic, *Expalnatory Dictionary of Romanain*, 2nd Edition revised, Bucharest, Univers Enciclopedic Gold Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009

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1	*abandon*	*abandon*	7 of 21	→	33.3%	3 of 25	→	12%
		abandonuri	14 of 21	→	66.6%	22 of 25	→	88%
2	*ajutor*	*ajutoare*	21 of 21	→	100%	25 of 25	→	100%
		ajutoruri	0 of 21	→	0%	0 of 25	→	0%
3	*sobor*	*soboare*	11 of 21	→	52,3%	5 of 25	→	20%
		soboruri	9 of 21	→	42.8%	20 of 25	→	80%

A person in the "under 20 years" category abstained.

4	*polonic*	*polonice*	13 of 21	→	61.9%	23 of 25	→	92%
		polonicuri	7 of 21	→	33.3%	1 of 25	→	4%

A person in the "under 20 years" and one in the "over 20 years" category abstained.

5	*batic*	*batice*	10 of 21	→	47.6%	11 of 25	→	44%
		baticuri	12 of 21	→	57.1%	14 of 25	→	56%

A person in the "under 20 years" category selected both variants as correct.

6	*plural*	*plurale*	12 of 21	→	57.1%	3 of 25	→	12%
		pluraluri	10 of 21	→	47.6%	6 of 25	→	24%

A person in the "over 20 years" category selected both variants as correct.

7	*litoral*	*litorale*	10 of 21	→	47.6%	6 of 25	→	24%
		litoraluri	9 of 21	→	42.8%	19 of 25	→	72.1%

Two persons in the "under 20 years" category abstained.

8	*succes*	*succese*	19 of 21	→	90.5%	0 of 25	→	100%
		succesuri	2 of 21	→	9.5%	25 of 25	→	0%
9	*înţeles*	*înţelese*	8 of 21	→	38.1%	3 of 25	→	12%
		înţelesuri	14 of 21	→	66.6%	22 of 25	→	88%

A person in the "under 20 years" category selected both variants as correct. (confusion encouraged by the feminine plural form of the adjective înţelese)

10	*duet*	*duete*	12 of 21	→	57.1%	20 of 25	→	80%
		dueturi	9 of 21	→	42.8%	5 of 25	→	20%
11	*tabiet*	*tabiete*	13 of 21	→	61.9%	4 of 25	→	16%
		tabieturi	7 of 21	→	33.3%	21 of 25	→	84%

A person in the "under 20 years" category abstained.

12	*judeţ*	*judeţe*	20 of 21	→	95.2%	24 of 25	→	96%
		judeţuri	1 of 21	→	4.74%	1 of 25	→	4%

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13	*nutreţ*	*nutreţe*	7 of 21	→	33.3%	2 of 25	→	8%
		nutreţuri	13 of 21	→	16.9%	23 of 25	→	92%

A person in the "under 20 years" category abstained.

14	*baros*	*baroase*	9 of 21	→	42.8%	13 of 25	→	52%
		barosuri	13 of 21	→	61.9%	11 of 25	→	44%

A person in the "under 20 years" category selected both variants as correct.
A person in the "over 20 years" category abstained.

15	*matineu*	*matinee*	14 of 21	→	66.6%	18 of 25	→	72%
		matineuri	7 of 21	→	33.3%	8 of 25	→	32%

A person in the "under 20 years" category abstained.
A person in the "under 20 years" and one in the "over 20 years" category selected both variants as correct.

16	*dineu*	*dinee*	10 of 21	→	47.6%	8 of 25	→	32%
		dineuri	10 of 21	→	47.6%	18 of 25	→	72%

A person in the "under 20 years" category abstained.
A person in the "over 20 years" category selected both variants as correct.

17	*chibrit*	*chibrite*	5 of 21	→	23.8%	2 of 25	→	8%
		chibrituri	17 of 21	→	80.9%	23 of 25	→	92%

A person in the "under 20 years" category selected both variants as correct.

18	*albuş*	*albuşe*	2 of 21	→	9.52%	0 of 25	→	0%
		albuşuri	19 of 21	→	90.4%	25 of 25	→	100%

19	*gălbenuş*	*gălbenuşe*	5 of 21	→	23.8%	2 of 25	→	8%
		gălbenuşuri	16 of 21	→	76.2%	23 of 25	→	92%

20	*vis*	*vise*	19 of 21	→	90.4%	23 of 25	→	92%
		visuri	3 of 21	→	14.2%	13 of 25	→	52%

A person in the "under 20 years" category (4.7%) and 3 persons in the "over 20 years" category selected both variants as correct.

According to the frequency of usage in Romanian, I chose words having the same termination, which have different plural forms:

Words having the termination:

- *-ON*: have the plural termination: *-e: ghidon, balcon, avion, telefon*
  -uri: bon, don, ton, con
- *-OU*: have the plural termination: *-ă: ouă*
  -uri: stilou, sacou, cadou, tablou

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- *-IC*: have the plural termination: *-e: ibric, ilic, polonic, spic*
  -uri: batic, moyaic, nimic, butic
- *-AC*: have the plural termination: *-e: hanorac*
  -uri: bac, rucsac

!!! Advertisment – "*Avem rucsace*" (We sell rucksacks)

- *-AL*: have the plural termination: *-e: original, extemporal, internal, tribunal*
  -uri: deal, bal, litoral, final, festival

!!! Movie title – "*Tribunalurile imperiale*" (Imperial Tribunals)

- *-ES*: have the plural termination: *-e: success, abces, interes, congres, progress, acces*
  -uri: cules, eres, şes, înţeles, fes
- *-ET*: have the plural termination: *-e: pachet, banchet, buchet, buget, portret, robinet, caiet, secret*
  -uri: tabiet, supermarket
- *-EŢ*: have the plural termination: *-e: făcăleţ, judeţ, coşuleţ*
  -uri: dezgheţ, nutreţ, preţ
- *-TOR*: have the plural termination: *-e: calculator, ajutor, televizor, malaxor, zăvor*
  -uri: cor, dor, amor, decor, scor, spor
- *-OS*: have the plural termination: *-e: os, baros*
  -uri: dos, miros, prisos
- *-EU*: have the plural termination: *-e: apogeu, ateneu, dineu, ghişeu, liceu, nucleu, trofeu*
  -uri: antreu, bombeu, careu, cupeu, minereu
- *-OG*: have the plural termination: *-e: catalog*
  -uri: dialog

Semantic differentiation

In this case the analysis takes into consideration nouns which have two or even three forms of plural, forms which have different meaning:

- *raport - rapoarte/raporturi*
- *nivel – nivele/niveluri*
- *cristal – cristaluri/cristale*
- *arc – arcuri/arce*

Two or more forms of plural(sometimes with gender differentiation) have also the following nouns:

- *cap – capi* (masculine)
  - *capete/capuri* (neuter)

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- *ochi – ochi* (masculine)
    - *ochiuri* (neuter)
- *tip – tipi* (masculine)
    - *tipuri* (neuter)
- *piept – piepţi* (masculine)
    - *piepturi* (neuter)
- *bob – bobi* (masculine)
    - *boabe* (neuter) [having the feminine variant – *boabă - boabe*]

All these examples were chosen to show not as much the variation of current Romanian language but especially its tendency toward ambiguity. The question which arises: Will neuter gender resist in Romanian? The frequent mistakes of the young generation (under 20 years) make us consider whether this is the first step towards eliminating this grammatical category.

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