Bulletin of the *Transilvania* University of Braşov
Series IV: Philology and Cultural Studies • Vol. 13(62) Special Issue
https://doi.org/10.31926/but.pcs.2020.62.13.3.3

What it means to be a lexicographer

Victor CELAC[1]

In this paper I will present some reflections and analyses, and draw some conclusions, based on my own activity as a linguist and lexicographer. I will speak neither about bilingual or multilingual lexicography, nor about specialised, terminological dictionaries (that is lexicons concerning different domains: juridical, scientific, medical, IT, etc.), because I have no work experience in this respect. I will speak about general, purely linguistic (non-terminological) dictionaries. There will be two main directions: i) Linguistic dictionaries which deal with contemporary language, intended for the general public. Mono-volume dictionaries like the well-known DEX represent this type. The main characteristics of this type of dictionaries are related to their synchronic, explanatory, and normative approach(es); ii) Linguistic dictionaries, which treat the language in variation from different points of view: diachronic, dialectal, stylistic, etc. This type is intended mainly for the specialists, and it is represented by multi-volume dictionaries like DA/DLR, DELR and others. Their main characteristics are linked to their variational (diachronic or historic, dialectal, etc.), explanatory and etymological approach(es). The main axis of variation considered is diachronic or historic, and that is why this type of lexicography is usually labelled as diachronic or historic lexicography. But personally I prefer to label it as variational lexicography*. "Variational" includes "diachronic", as well as the variation in respect with other axes. I will focus my attention mostly on the theoretical and methodological principles defining the approaches that differentiate the two main types of linguistic dictionaries mentioned above.*

Key-words: *linguistic dictionaries, lexicography, variational lexicography, etymology.*

1. A brief presentation of DA/DLR and DELR

Dicţionarul limbii române (DA/DLR) is known as the "treasure" of the Romanian language. This is the largest and most comprehensive dictionary of Romanian.

It was elaborated and published during roughly a century (1906–2010), in several volumes. The first volumes (*A–De; F–Lojniţă*) were coordinated by Sextil

[1] Institute of Linguistics "Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti", Bucharest, Romanian Academy, victor_celac@yahoo.com.

Puşcariu (1877–1948). They are usually called the *old series* and are known by the siglum DA (*Dicţionarul Academiei* [*The Academy Dictionary*]). The next volumes (D–E, L–Z) were coordinated by Ion Coteanu (1920–1997), Iorgu Iordan (1888–1986) and Al. Graur (1900–1988), then by Marius Sala (1932–2018) and Gh. Mihăilă (1930–2011). This part is known as the *new series* under the siglum DLR (*Dicţionarul limbii române* [*The Dictionary of Romanian Language*]).

Being a historical dictionary, *Dicţionarul limbii române* offers a historical and etymological perspective on the Romanian vocabulary, rather than presenting merely current usages of the words (like DEX and other dictionaries meant for the general public). Therefore, DA/DLR contains the Romanian language in all its varieties. Ideally, each article of DA/DLR presents a biography of the concerned word, by showing its formal and semantic development across time and space. Therefore, it shows the meanings of a word in their historical order. This dictionary includes not only the words representatives for the current standard Romanian. It also treats the words and word meanings that are no longer used at present, or are used only in a very limited dialectal area, etc.

Unlike the dictionaries of present-day Romanian, in one volume, each definition in DLR is accompanied by numerous real usage quotations, extracted from all sorts of texts, beginning with the first or oldest attestations. In each case, the first quotation shows the oldest recorded instance of the respective word meaning that the lexicographers were able to identify. In the case of the words and senses no longer in current usage, the last quotation is, normally, the last known recorded usage. The quotations allow the reader to get an approximate sense of the time period in which a particular word or meaning of a word has been in use, and helps him to ascertain information about how the word is used in context, beyond any explanation that the dictionary editors could provide otherwise.

DLR has many similarities with the celebrated *Oxford English Dictionary* (known by the siglum OED; its primary editor was James Murray; first edition: 1884–1928; second edition: 1989; published in 20 volumes), and with the *Deutsches Wörterbuch* [*German Dictionary*], begun by the Brothers Grimm (published in 33 volumes between 1854 and 1961).

Dicţionarul etimologic al limbii române (DELR) [*The Etymological Dictionary of Romanian Language*] is a relatively recent project. Three volumes have been published until today: I: *A–B* (2011), II/1: *Ca–Cizmă* (2015), II/2: *Clac–Cyborg* (2018).[2]

[2] See Celac 2012 for a detailed description of the first volume of DELR.

2. What does it mean to be a researcher?

Generally speaking, irrespective of the domain of the research, a researcher is somebody who looks with wonder and amazement at the things which do not cause any wonder or amazement in other, normal, people.

For instance, most people do not wonder why the objects, which are not held by anything, or are not attached to anything, or are not staying on anything, fall until they are stopped in their falling by the surface of the earth or by other surfaces or objects. Similarly, for common people it is not important to know exactly why, in many regions of the northern hemisphere, in the winter the weather is usually cold or very cold, and in the summer the weather is usually warm, or why water turns into ice when its temperature falls under zero degree. Again, most people do not wonder why milk and water can be mixed together easily, while oil and water cannot be mixed that easily. Most people are not interested in producing a full classification of the plants, of the animals, of the rocks in a region, or of the words in a language. For most people, there seems to be no concrete utility in getting the answers to such questions, or in producing such classifications.

The same cannot be said about researchers. One can presume that the first people who wondered about the falling of the objects, or about the freezing of water, or about the meaning of words, were the first scientific researchers.[3]

As a linguist and a lexicographer, I often wonder spontaneously about the meanings of certain words, about the peculiarities of the semantic evolution of other words.

There is a small list of concrete situations, which can cause one to wonder, or, at least, they had this effect on me, when I first thought of them:

– Why are there two words in Romanian, *inapt* and *inept,* which seem to have something in common, but their meanings are different? (The situation is similar with English *inapt* and *inept*, French *inapte* and *inepte*).
– Why does the word *şopârlă* mean 'lizard, a reptile' in Romanian, but it also means 'subversive and encoded allusion or hint, sort of innuendo'? (This case is discussed below, cf. 4.).

[3] For example, Richard Dawkins, in the *Preface* to his book *Selfish Gene* (first edition: 1976), speaks about the basic feeling of *astonishment* which characterizes the perception about his own scientific investigation: "We are survival machines-robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes. *This is a truth which still fills me with astonishment.* Though I have known it for years, I never seem to get fully used to it. One of my hopes is that I may have some success *in astonishing others*" (Dawkins 2016, 4; emphasis added).

– Why is the word *puşculiţă* used in contemporary Romanian mostly with the meaning ‘container for saving money in, with a slit in the top through which coins are dropped’, whereas it is a diminutive of *puşcă* ‘rifle’, and logically it should mean only ‘little rifle’?
– Why does the verb *hotărî* mean ‘to decide, to conclude’, whereas it is a derivative from *hotar* ‘border, boundary’? (In fact, as we can see in historical dictionaries, the verb *hotărî* meant originally ‘to trace a border [= *hotar*], in order to delimit, to demarcate a territory’.)
– Why does the verb *împrăştia* mean ‘to spread, to disperse’, whereas it is a derivative from *praştie* ‘sling, sort or rudimentary catapult’? (In fact, the verb *împrăştia* meant originally ‘to throw something around with a sling [= *praştie*]’.)
– Why does the verb *presăra* mean ‘to sprinkle, to scatter or pour small drops or particles of a substance over something’ (it may be used for every sort of granular substance: salt, sugar, flour, sand, gravel, cement, earth), whereas it is a derivative from the verb *săra* ‘to sprinkle salt over some aliment; to season or preserve with salt’ (< *sare* ‘salt’), and logically it should mean only ‘to sprinkle salt over some aliment’? (In fact, the verb *presăra* meant originally only ‘to sprinkle salt over some aliment’; the current meaning was created by secondary semantic extension.)

I will add some other examples from the domain of phraseology:
– Why do we say in Romanian *a spăla putina*, literally ‘to wash the barrel’, meaning ‘to run furtively, in order to escape some danger or responsibility’?
– Why can everybody knowing Romanian say and understand the idiom *a îngheţa bocnă*, meaning ‘to freeze completely’, but nobody seems to be able to say what exactly the word *bocnă* means?[4]

3. A look at the arrangement of meanings

This section focuses on the arrangement of the meanings of polysemous words in various dictionaries, and what it conveys about the word and the lexicographers’ approach. The discussion will be illustrated by three distinct cases of polysemy, i.e. *condiție* (cf. 3.1), *portar* (cf. 3.2), and *illiberal* (cf. 3.3).

[4] Of course, every language has its own, specific, idioms, whose origin and motivation are rather obscure, like English *to rain cats and dogs* ‘to rain heavily’ or *to kick the bucket* ‘to die’.

3.1. A case of polysemy: *condiţie*

The Romanian word *condiţie* has nearly the same meanings as the English *condition* and the French *condition*. Among the meanings of this word, there are the two following main senses:

1. 'Something demanded as a prerequisite to grant or perform something else' – we can say in Romanian: *există o* ***condiţie*** *pentru îndeplinirea cutărui lucru* 'there is a condition for fulfilling something'.

2. 'Mode of being, state, position, nature, etc.' – in this sense, we can say: ***condiţie*** *medicală bună* 'good health condition', or ***condiţie*** *socială bună* 'good social condition', or ***condiţie*** *umană* 'human condition', or *tabloul este într-o* ***condiţie*** *bună* 'the painting is in a good condition'.

It may seem interesting enough to look closely at this situation in order to see how one could explain this polysemy. It is an example of a borrowed word in Romanian (as it is in English and in French). It is an "international" or "cultural word", which has cognates in many European languages. Its ultimate origin is Latin *condicio.* If you work on a Romanian explanatory dictionary, and you want to produce a satisfactory semantic description of this word, you may want to be sure you understand correctly the main motivations of its different meanings. For instance, you may want to ask yourself: "Which is the original meaning, and which is the secondary meaning of the Romanian word *condiţie*, and of its cognates in other languages?" To this end, you have first to know the treatment of this word in older Romanian dictionaries, to look closely at the Romanian textual occurrences of this word, and also you have to study carefully the reference dictionaries of French, of English, of Latin, and possibly of some other European languages.

For the moment, it seems to me that the description made by OED *s.v. condition* is the most adequate. This article has two major semantic groupings, each containing plenty of secondary or subordinated meanings:

I. A convention, stipulation, proviso, etc.

I.1. Something demanded or required as a prerequisite to the granting or performance of something else. [...] *on condition that*. [*to put a condition*, etc.]

II. Mode of being, state, position, nature.

II.9.a. A particular mode of being of a person or thing; state of being. [...]

II.9.e. A state of health, esp. one which is poor or abnormal; a malady or sickness [...].

II.10.a. State in regard to wealth, circumstances; hence, position with reference to the grades of society; social position, estate, rank. [...]

I will not discuss further this word and will not assess its treatment in different dictionaries. I will only notice that, across Romanian dictionaries, this word is treated rather differently – for instance, not all dictionaries have all the meanings of this word, and the meanings which exist in several dictionaries are not always listed in the same order. These differences in lexicographical treatment are rather justifiable. As I have already mentioned, an explanatory dictionary of contemporary language will normally give only the meanings that are known and used today, and it will begin with the most frequently used meaning, whilst a historical and etymological dictionary will give all the meanings used across time and space, and will present them in chronological order, possibly, in some logical connection with the meaning of its etymon.

3.2. Another case of polysemy: *portar*

The next example concerns the Romanian word *portar.*[5] In DLR, in DEX, and in some other reference dictionaries of Romanian, it has mainly the next three meanings:

1. 'Employee in charge of the entrance of a hotel, apartment complex, or other large building, porter';

2. 'Player in soccer and some other team sports, whose special role is to stop the ball (or puck, in hockey) from entering the goal';

3. (In Medieval Moldavia and Walachia) 'Dignitary in charge of the reigning prince residence (defense, administration, etc.)'.

As etymological indication, the cited dictionaries offer a concise formula, which explains only the form of the word: "*poartă* + suf. *-ar*" (it is a derivative from *poartă* m meaning 'gate' and 'goal' [in some sports]", with the suffix *-ar*).

It is natural that all three meanings be registered in DLR, the great historical dictionary. Moreover, they need, without any doubt, to be registered also in DEX, or similar mono-volume dictionaries, intended for the general public. The first two meanings refer to the realities of the present. Concerning the third meaning, it is a historicism – it refers to the realities of the past, but it is still used in the texts of historians and also it appears in several texts of classical Romanian writers.

Let us ask now which order of the three meanings will be suitable for the mentioned dictionaries. Concerning DEX, the order given above is already the most appropriate. But not the same order of meanings will be appropriate for DLR. As a historical dictionary, DLR wants to trace the history of words and meanings, so it

[5] This case is discussed, with supplementary data and details, in Celac (2020, 47–48).

will give the meanings in their chronological order (and will illustrate each meaning with quotations available across all the historical periods when the meanings circulated):

1. 'Dignitary in charge of the reigning prince residence...', attested since the most ancient Romanian textual sources – from the 15th century, in some Slavonic documents, then appearing massively in Romanian chronicles and other sorts of texts.

2. 'Employee in charge of the entrance of a hotel, apartment complex, or other large building, porter' – attested sporadically since the 17th century, only in some translations, then, massively, since the 19th century, when it started to refer to the current realities of the Romanian society.

3. 'Player in soccer and some other team sports, whose special role is to stop the ball (...) from entering the goal' – attested in Romanian since 1921, so to speak, approximately since the historical moment when the team sports including the position of *portar* [= goalkeeper] started being practiced in Romania.

As for the etymological treatment of this word, we can agree that etymology as a linguistic domain of research has to deal not only with the forms of the words, but also with their meanings. Moreover, the modern etymological approach has to connect the origin of a lexical element (word, meaning of a word, phrase or expression, etc.) with the historical context and cultural background, which generated it (cf. French *milieu créateur*). Therefore, we can agree again that the concise etymologic formulas as that cited above – "*poartă* + suf. *-ar*" – are insufficient, because they are limited exclusively to the formal side of the words and they tell us nothing about the origin of the meanings.

The most ancient meaning of *portar*, 'dignitary in charge of the reigning prince residence...' is a semantic calque or loan translation of the Turk *kapucı/kapıcı* 'armed guard at the Sultans Palace in Istanbul; Ottoman dignitary'. It is worth noting that the Sultans Palace in Istanbul was named *Topkapı*, and that both *Topkapı* and *kapucı/kapıcı* are derivatives from *kapı* 'gate' – and Romanian *portar* 'dignitary...' is similarly derived from *poartă* 'gate'. That is why Romanian *portar* 'dignitary...' has to be considered a semantic calque or loan translation of the Turk *kapucı/kapıcı.*

The next meaning of *portar*, 'employee in charge of the entrance of a hotel, apartment complex, or other large building', as it occurs sporadically, since the 17th century, in some translations, may be a loan translation of terms such as the Latin *ostiarius*, the Medieval Latin *portarius*, the Old Greek θυρᾶωρός, the Byzantine Greek ὀστιάριος, the Modern Greek θυρωρός, the Slavonic *vratarŭ* (according to the languages from which these old translation were made). Moreover, it is important to stress that Romanian *portar*, with this meaning, began to be usual,

referring to the Romanian realities, only since the 19th century, and this happened under the influence of the French *portier*.

Finally, the third meaning of our word, 'player in soccer and some other team sports, whose special role is to stop the ball (...) from entering the goal', attested since 1921, is a loan translation from some languages that have terms with the same meaning, as derivatives (or at least having aspect of the derivative words) coined from the substantives which mean both 'gate (generally speaking)' and also 'space into which the ball has to be sent in order to score, goal (in some team sports)': German *Torwart* s.m. (cf. *Tor* s.n.), Italian *portiere* s.m. (cf. *porta* s.f.), Spanish *portero* s.m. (cf. *puerta* s.f.), and maybe also Russian *вратарь* (cf. *врата* [= *ворота*]).

As we can see, each of the three meanings of the Romanian word *portar* needs a separate etymological discussion, in close relation with the historical context or cultural background, which generated them. A good etymological dictionary has to explain the origin, the age, the circulation of each of the three meanings. It cannot limit itself to a concise etymological formula like "*poartă +* suf. *-ar*", which says nothing about the origin of the meanings.

3.3. Another case of polysemy: *illiberal*

In order to insist on the importance of the *milieu créateur* in etymology, I would like to discuss briefly the example of the English adjective *illiberal.* In the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1999), it has two meanings:

1. 'Opposed to liberal principles'.
2. Archaic. 'Ill-bred or unrefined'.

A concise etymological formula of this word may be: "Borrowed from French *illibéral*", but it still seems to be limited to the formal side of the word under discussion. In order to do more than this, we need to observe the chronology of the two meanings, in close connection with the political and cultural context in which each meaning has been created.

The first meaning has been in existence since the 19th century (according to OED), and it refers to the political life. It may be illustrated by means of a quotation such as: *I am a violent* ***Illiberal****; but it does not follow that I must be a Conservative* (1871, Ruskin, in OED), and also by an usage which may suggest a recent and supplementary semantic evolution (not registered in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (1999), nor in OED): *An* ***illiberal*** *democracy [...] is a governing system in which*

although elections take place, citizens are cut off from knowledge about the activities of those who exercise real power because of the lack of civil liberties.[6]

The second, archaic meaning has existed since the 16th century (according to OED). It may be further explained by adding some synonyms from OED like: *ungentlemanly, base, mean, vulgar, rude, sordid*; and a fine quotation like: *Are you sufficiently upon your guard against awkward attitudes, and* ***illiberal****, ill-bred, and disgusting habits; such as scratching yourself, putting your fingers in your mouth, nose and ears?* [1750, Lord Chesterfield's *Letters to his son* (ap. Crystal 2007, 78)].

It is interesting to notice that each of the two meanings of *illiberal* should be related with the corresponding meanings of its antonym, *liberal*: 1. (as opposed to *servile*) 'worthy of a free man; pertaining to or suitable to persons of superior social station, to gentlemen' *vs.* (as opposed to Conservatives, and to other political orientations) 'favorable to constitutional changes and legal or administrative reforms in the direction of freedom or democracy'.

4. Explaining new meanings of words

Another example I will discuss is that of the Romanian word *şopârlă*. By means of this example, I want to show that the synchronic perception of the linguistic data sometimes may be very different from their real explanation, based on research carried out from a genetic and diachronic perspective upon the same data.

The original meaning of *şopârlă* is 'lizard, a reptile...'. In addition, *şopârlă* also means in contemporary Romanian 'subversive and encoded allusion or hint, sort of innuendo, referring mainly to the former communist ideology or to some negative realities of the respective historical period'. It is used often as part of some expressions like: *a băga o şopârlă, a strecura o şopârlă, a umbla cu şopârle* (literally) 'to put in, to slip in a lizard, to go around with lizards'.[7]

[6] At <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Illiberal_democracy>. Accessed on 29 December 2019.

[7] During the former communist regime in Romania, it represented a way of shunning or bypassing the interdictions (laid by the authorities) to mention in any way different sensible themes and subjects-taboo: economic precariousness; lack of freedom; different spiritual and religious aspects etc. (See Popescu 2016 for some valuables considerations concerning the concept of taboo, in reference, *inter alia*, to the realities of the former totalitarian Romanian regime. This type of taboo is labeled by the cited author as *destructive taboo* [= "le tabou destructif", Popescu 2016, 172–173]).

Anyway, this notion – *şopârlă* 'subversive and encoded allusion or hint...' – should be considered as one of the most defining feature of the gloomy and dreary atmosphere of the last decennia of the communist regime in Romania – with its nearly total lack of individual liberties, with its economic precariousness, with its systematic and strict censorship, and with the huge cult of personality to the former leader Nicolae Ceauşescu. It represented an evasive strategy which allowed people to say partially the truth, taking fewer risks than saying the truth directly. It could be found nearly

In order to explain the creation of this new meaning – *şopârlă* 'subversive and encoded allusion or hint...' – one can always postulate a simple figurative semantic change from *şopârlă* 'lizard, reptile'.

Anyhow, in my opinion, in a dictionary of contemporary Romanian (like DEX), *şopârlă* should have these two meanings:

1. 'Lizard', which is the original and very ancient meaning, attested since the 15th century.

2. (Figurative) 'Subversive and encoded allusion or hint...'. This second meaning is far more recent in Romanian – its earliest occurrence in textual sources found by me dates back to 1977 (in a novel by Marin Sorescu). This meaning circulated certainly also before 1977.[8] I suppose it was created around 1950 or so, not earlier.

This lexicographical presentation could be taken, *per se*, as an etymological indication for the second sense. It is a manner to say clearly enough that the second sense is a figurative semantic change from the first sense. From the synchronic point of view, this seems very plausible. But, after researching this case from the genetic and historical or diachronic point of view, I have gathered some arguments that the true etymological explanation of *şopârlă* meaning 'subversive and encoded allusion or hint...' could be different.

On the one hand, there are, in Romanian, several words like:

– *şovâlc* (interjection which imitate limping or hobbling way of walking);

– *şovâlcăi* vb. 'to limp, to hobble';

– *şovâlcăială* s.f. 'limping, hobbling';

– *şovârca* vb. 'to fool around; to avoid or neglect (a duty or responsibility); to lie; to hesitate';

---

everywhere: in some radio and TV transmissions, in the press, in theatrical and entertaining shows, in literature, and also at the basic level in everyday conversations. There is an example – an allusion to the critical economic precariousness of the last years of Ceauşescu regime in Romania: *Ce găsesc eu când deschid frigiderul ? – Mult frig!* 'What can I find when I open my fridge? – A lot of cold!' (from the repertory of *Divertis*, a Romanian humoristic group).

[8] There is a humoristic sketch by the renowned Romanian actor Toma Caragiu, *Şopârliţa liberă* [*Free little lizard*] (1969). The title in itself is a clear allusion to the radio station *Free Europe*, considered hostile and subversive by the communist authorities of the epoch. Two quotations from this sketch will be very conclusive: *Conspectând istoria [...], am aflat că oameni din cele mai vechi timpuri umblau cu şopârle* [...]; *Sorcova, vesela, / Să sperăm că ne-om lăsa / De şopârle şi fitile / Crocodili şi-alte reptile! / Ai de spus ceva în viaţă, / Spune-o cu curaj în faţă, / De la tinereţe, pân-la bătrâneţe!* [*I have learned from history* [...] *that people, since ancient times, used to go around with lizards* [...] [The following are some improvised lines on the basis of a ritual Romanian popular song named *Sorcova*] *Sorcova, joyful, / Let's hope that we will give up / Lizards and squibs, / Crocodiles and other reptiles! / If you have something to say in your life, / Say it straightforwardly and courageously, / From childhood to old age!*].

– *şovârcăi* vb. ‘to avoid some danger; to try hiding the truth; to search for some fake pretexts’;
– *şopârcăi* vb. ‘to use subterfuges or deceiving stratagems’;
– *şopârcăieli* s.f. pl. ‘lies, deceiving stratagems’;
– *şopârcărie* s.f. ‘lie’.

Most of these lexical items are attested since the 19th century, and their diffusion is limited to some regions of Romania (see DLR for details). Etymologically, they have nothing in common with *şopârlă* ‘lizard, reptile’. As it is suggested in DLR, the forms in *şov-* are original, and they are etymologically connected with the verb *şovăi* ‘to hesitate, to waver’.

On the other hand, the substantive *şopârlă* ‘lizard, reptile’ has a lexical variant *şopârcă* (much less known than *şopârlă*; this variant, *şopârcă*, is explained etymologically in DLR as a contamination between *şopârlă* and *năpârcă* ‘viper’).

Taking into consideration all these elements, I suppose that *şopârcă* ‘lizard’ (the variant of *şopârlă* ‘lizard’) was attracted semantically by the verb *şopârcăi* ‘to use subterfuges or deceiving stratagems’, and the substantives *şopârcăieli* [pl.] ‘lies, deceiving stratagems’, *şopârcărie* ‘lie’. This semantic attraction consisted in adding to *şopârcă* the meaning ‘lie, stratagem, subterfuge’. Then the generally known form *şopârlă* (whose variant is *şopârcă*) acquired the same new meanings. Finally, during the communist epoch, the new meaning of *şopârlă* was coined, i.e. ‘subversive and encoded allusion or hint...’. It was based on a stratagem or a subterfuge, but it was used not to lie, but to bring to light some truth, inconvenient for the political authorities.

Nevertheless, one can ask why it is not preferable to consider that *şopârlă* ‘subversive and encoded allusion or hint...’ is a simple figurative semantic change from *şopârlă* ‘lizard, reptile’. Why should we prefer that complicated scenario of semantic contamination in several steps, i.e. *şopârcăi, şopârcăieli, şopârcărie* inducing to *şopârcă* ‘lizard’ the meanings ‘lie, stratagem, subterfuge’, then the same meanings being transferred to *şopârlă*, and so on? In my opinion, the simpler explanation (semantic figurative evolution from *şopârlă* ‘lizard, reptile’ to ‘subversive and encoded allusion or hint...’) is not totally impossible, but still it has the problem that it implies a transfer from the realm of living creatures (which a reptile is) to the field of abstract notions (‘subversive and encoded allusion or hint...’). It is true that often the names of some living creatures are transferred figuratively to other living creatures, to human beings, or to objects. For instance, in English, *fox* means figuratively ‘a cunning or sly person’, *mouse* means analogically ‘a small handheld device that is dragged across a flat surface to move the cursor on a computer screen’; in Romanian, *peşte* means not only ‘fish’ (which

is its basic and original meaning), but also ‘pimp, procurer, pander’. We can find many more similar semantic shifts, but I did not yet find an example of a semantic shift going from the name of an animal to the name of an abstract notion.

In many cases, it is very interesting to imagine a connection between the meanings of the current Romanian word and the meanings of its etymon.

For instance, the Romanian adjective *rece* means ‘cold’. It is inherited from Latin *recens*, which means something else: ‘fresh, recent’. Sextil Puşcariu, an important Romanian linguist and lexicographer, has commented this case:

> *„Adjectivul* rece *datoreşte înţelesul său în româneşte întâmplării că se găsea mai adesea în tovărăşia substantivului* apă*. În latineşte,* recens *– din care derivă* rece *al nostru – însemna cu totul altceva. Precum arată neologismul* recent *– care e un dublet al lui* rece *– sensul originar era cel de „proaspăt”. Se zicea, deci,* aqua recens *care însemna „apă proaspătă”, adusă de curând de la izvor, şi, de aceea, „având o temperatură scăzută”. Dacă accidentul fatal în istoria cuvântului* rece *ar fi fost întovărăşirea lui cu* panis*, în loc de* aqua*, sensul lui* rece *ar fi fost în româneşte, tocmai dimpotrivă, cel de „cald”, căci pâinea proaspăt scoasă din cuptor are o temperatură ridicată*”. [The adjective *rece* ‘cold’ owes his meaning in Romanian to the accident that it was used often in association with the noun *apă* ‘water’. In Latin, *recens* – which is the etymon of the Romanian adjective *rece* – had a totally different meaning. Like in the case of the neologism *recent* – which is a doublet of *rece* – its primary meaning was ‘fresh’. So, one said *aqua recens*, meaning ‘fresh water’, brought recently from a spring, and therefore, at a low temperature. If the fatal accident, in the history of the word *rece*, was represented by its association with *panis* ‘bread’, instead of *aqua*, the meaning of *rece* would be, in Romanian the reverse ‘hot’, since fresh bread, taken out from the oven, has a high temperature] (Puşcariu 1940, 22–23).

Puşcariu states that originally (that is, at the very ancient epoch of the formation of the Romanian language, maybe somewhere in the first millenary) the adjective *rece* was used mainly in reference to *water.* In these old times, the meaning of the collocation *apă rece* was ‘fresh water’, not ‘cold water’. A sort of contingency motivated the semantic shift: *the fresh water* is usually *cold.* Therefore, the meaning of *apă rece* passed from ‘fresh water’ to ‘cold water’. Then, the new meaning of *rece*, i.e. ‘cold’, became the basic meaning of the word, being used in every sort of collocations, not only in connection with the objects, which are cold in virtue of their freshness.

What are the implications of this historic and diachronic analysis for a lexicographical presentation? First, it depends on the type of dictionary. A

dictionary of contemporary Romanian (like DEX) does not have to bother itself (nor its readers) with such intricacies of the word's biographies along centuries or millennia. It has simply to define the modern usage of the words. The same cannot be said of the historic and etymologic dictionaries. At this level, one should expect a very different presentation – that is, exactly a presentation of the biographies of the words, with all meanders and intricacies, with regard to the meanings of the word, the forms, and its stylistic, diastratic or diatopic variation, etc.

In the case of *rece*, I can easily imagine a lexicographical presentation inspired by the above analysis. The two main meanings (i.e. the meaning supposed to be original and the basic meaning in modern Romanian) could be described as follows:

1. (Speaking of some aliments or substances as *water, wine*, etc., in opposition with *warm* and with *stale*) 'Which has or is at a low or relatively low temperature, *by virtue of its freshness*'.

2. (By extension; speaking of all sort of aliments or substances, in opposition with *warm* or *hot*) 'Which has or is at a low or relatively low temperature, *irrespective of its freshness*'.

5. Ghost words and ghost meanings

Among my fellow linguists, I have heard sometimes this adagio: "Dictionaries are made up from other dictionaries". That is a way to suggest several ideas all at once, namely that the lexicographical work assumes systematically looking back very carefully at the achievements of one's predecessors. It may also presuppose that present lexicographic activity may have little originality. For me, it counts also as a strong warning: *Everything that a lexicographer of the present transfers from the older dictionaries in his own work, has to be plainly and totally assumed*. The research or the argumentation, which led our predecessors to certain results, published in a dictionary, has to be systematically remade or retrieved by the lexicographers of the present. Nothing should pass from an older dictionary in a newer one without being checked, in order to prevent conveying errors.

Let us see now exactly what kind of errors one may encounter. There is a beautiful name for most of them: *ghost words*. A ghost word is a pseudo-word introduced in a dictionary or similarly authoritative reference work. Sometimes it may be a pseudo-meaning of a real word. A ghost word is, by definition, absurd and meaningless. However, by virtue of the authority exerted by the reference work containing it, a ghost word may pass in other dictionaries, as a part of venerable tradition. Moreover, it may acquire an etymological explanation (unreal and

fanciful, of course), and, in rarer cases, it may be adopted as part of the etymological explanation for other, real words! A ghost word will have originated from an error, such as a misinterpretation, or mispronunciation, or misreading, or from typographical or linguistic confusion.

As examples of ghost words in English, one can cite the verb *to morse*, a simple misreading for *to nurse*, and *kimes*, a misprint for *knives*. One of the most interesting ghost words is *dord*, introduced and defined in Merriam Webster (second edition, 1934) as 'density' (in Physics and Chemistry). In fact, it is a misreading of a notation which said: "D or d, cont./density". This was intended to add 'density' to the existing list of words that the letter "D" or "d" can abbreviate. The phrase "D or d" was misinterpreted as a single, run-together word: *dord*, which was put in the dictionary with the meaning 'density'.[9]

As for Romanian dictionaries, I will now present the case of the ghost meaning of the substantive *admoniţiune.* (This case was treated and solved in Vasilescu 2017, 70–71. The analysis presented here originates from this published paper). Simply speaking, *admoniţiune* is a term corresponding to English *admonition* 'an act or action of admonishing; authoritative counsel or warning' and to French *admonition* 'admonition'. An admonition can be made by a teacher, by a judge, or by somebody else detaining an adequate position.

In several Romanian dictionaries of the second half of the 20th century, the word *admoniţiune* is registered with two following meanings:

DN (1961 and all other editions): 1. (Jur.) 'Cercetare făcută de judecător' ['Investigation made by a judge']. 2. (Rar) 'Admonestare' ['Admonition'].

DEX (1975 and all other editions): 1. 'Cercetare făcută de judecător'. 2. (Rar) 'Admonestare'.

DEXI (2007): 1. (Jur.) 'Cercetare făcută de judecător'. 2. 'Admonestare'.

The second meaning corresponds well to the meaning of the English and French cognates (*admonestare = admonition*). Nevertheless, the first meaning is posing a problem. It may seem a total mystery: Why should Romanian word *admoniţiune*

[9] For further details, examples, and bibliography concerning English, see Bryson 1991, 71, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ghost_word>, and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dord>. – For the ghost words in Romanian dictionaries, see Avram 1997, 20–22 and Sala 1999, 84. – In French historical linguistics, there is an on-going project, at the ATILF Laboratory, in Nancy: *Base des mots fantômes* <http://www.atilf.fr/MotsFantomes/>. This project aims to build up a substantial inventory of the ghost elements in main historical dictionaries of French, and to elucidate thoroughly each case. Since the French Lexicography has a very long, rich, and venerable tradition, there will be no surprise to discover that the number of the ghost words haunting it is considerable.

signify ‘investigation made by a judge’? The explanation was found by means of consulting older Romanian dictionaries:

DA (1906): ‘admonestare’.
Şăineanu (1929): ‘admonestare’.
Scriban (1940): ‘admonestare’.
CADE (1931): 1. ‘Certare din partea judecătorului’. 2. ‘Înştiinţare făcută cuiva de a-şi îndrepta purtarea, sfat dat cuiva de a lăsa calea greşită pe care a apucat’.
[= 1. ‘Admonition from the part of the judge’ 2. ‘[= Admonition]’].

It is important to notice that in CADE the word *certare* ‘admonition’ (in the definition of the first meaning) is used. This word is written on two lines: *cer-tare.* It becomes clear from here that the lexicographers of DN (1961) have consulted CADE (1931). They have misread the word “*cer-tare*” [= admonition] as “*cercetare*” [= investigation]. The two Romanian words may have some formal resemblance, but this fact does not excuse the misreading. This fact excuses even less the perpetuation of this ghost meaning in several Romanian dictionaries, including the last edition of DEX (2016).

6. Final remarks

The activity in the field of *lexicography* has many very practical, concrete, and “non-theoretical” aspects. However, the permanent connection with its theoretical counterpart is absolutely necessary, that is, the connection with *lexicology*.

To be a lexicographer means to me, in the first place, to have permanently in mind that curiosity about the life of words. It is impossible to explain something about the history of words from a purely synchronic perspective. The necessary perspective is etymological and diachronic or historic. I have a strong belief that every lexicographer who works on a synchronic general dictionary (like DEX) will be much helped by having a diachronic view of the language he wants to describe. In other words, a Romanian lexicographer working at present on a synchronic and explanatory dictionary of current Romanian, will have much to gain from being well familiarised with the peculiarities of Old Romanian, that is, with the most ancient texts like *Scrisoarea lui Neacşu*, the religious writings of Coresi, the ancient Moldavian and Wallachian chronicles, etc. I know that this point of view may seem bizarre, and maybe in the future, on some occasion, I will attempt to argue and motivate it further.

Another important characteristic of a lexicographer is to be permanently vigilant, to take nothing for granted. He has to respect the authority of his predecessors, and yet he has to verify every small bit of data he includes in the dictionary he signs.

At present, the lexicographer has some exceptional advantages, in comparison with the lexicographers of the past. I am referring to the abundant ways of documentation of all sorts provided with the help of the Information Technologies, and especially, of the big electronic textual corpora, which helps us to quickly and efficiently gather large amounts of data concerning the circulations of the words in real contexts, in different varieties of the language. These great advantages must encourage every lexicographer of the present (even the beginners) to revisit and reassess the achievements in this research field transmitted by our venerable predecessors. This way of thinking is consonant with the ideas of the following beautiful quotation, and I am very pleased to close this paper with it:

> Beginning students are sometimes discouraged by the belief that 'all the easy stuff's already been done. What's left is really hard.' But when that 'easy stuff' is examined closely, it often turns out that it is only half-done, and that the conclusions do not follow from the premises (which often are not made explicit), or that the assumptions they are based on are no longer considered tenable. A surprising amount of the 'easy stuff' needs to be re-done. (Green and Morgan 1996, 17, quoted in Buchi and Schweickard 2011, 633).

Acknowledgements

A previous version of this paper served as basis for a lecture that I delivered at the Transilvania University of Braşov, on 15 January 2020. I wish to thank Professor Marinela Burada and Dr. Raluca Sinu for the invitation to deliver that lecture at their university, and also for the revising and proofreading this paper. And last but not least, I wish to express here all my gratitude to my colleague Mihaela Popescu (Institute of Linguistics "Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti", Bucharest) for her consistent help in preparing this text.

Sources

CADE – Ion Aurel Candrea, Gheorghe Adamescu. 1931. *Dicţionarul enciclopedic ilustrat*. Bucureşti: Cartea Românească.

DA – *Dicţionarul limbii române* [old series]. 1913–1949 [letters *A–C, D–de, F–I, J–lojniţă*] [DA and DLR were reprinted in 2010, in 19 volumes], coord. by Sextil Puşcariu *et al*., Bucureşti: Academia Română/Socec/Tipografia Ziarului „Universul".

DELR – *Dicţionarul etimologic al limbii române,* coord. by Marius Sala, Andrei Avram, Ion Giurgea, Cristian Moroianu *et al*., Vol. I: *A–B* (2011), vol. II/1: *Ca–Cizmă* (2015); vol. II/2: *Clac–Cyborg* (2018). Bucureşti: Institutul de Lingvistică „Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti"/Editura Academiei Române.

DEX – *Dicţionarul explicativ al limbii române*, coord. by Ion Coteanu, Luiza Seche, Mircea Seche. 1975 (other editions: 1996, 2009, 2012, 2016). Bucureşti: Academia Republicii Socialiste România/ Institutul de Lingvistică din Bucureşti/ Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România.

DN – Florin Marcu and Constant Maneca. 1961 (other editions: 1966, 1978, 1997, 2002, 2006, 2008, 2013). *Dicţionar de neologisme*. Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică.

DLR – Iorgu Iordan, Alexandru Graur, Ion Coteanu, Marius Sala, Gheorghe Mihăilă (coord.) *et al*. 1965–2010 [letters *D, E, L–Z*] [DA and DLR were reprinted in 2010, in 19 volumes]. *Dicţionarul limbii române.* Serie nouă. Bucureşti: Academia Română/Editura Academiei Române.

DEXI – Eugenia Dima (dir.) *et al.* 2007. *Dicţionar explicativ ilustrat al limbii române*. Chişinău: Arc & Gunivas.

OED – Simpson, John Andrew (dir.) *et al.* [first edition: 1933]/ 1989. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. Second edition. Oxford: Clarendon.

References

Avram, Andrei. 1997. *Contribuţii etimologice*. Bucureşti: Univers Enciclopedic.

Buchi, Eva and Wolfgang Schweickard. 2011. "Ce qui oppose vraiment deux conceptions de l'étymologie romane. Réponse à Alberto Vàrvaro et contribution à un débat méthodologique en cours." *Revue de linguistique romane* 75: 628–635.

Bryson, Bill. 1991. *The Mother Tongue. English And How It Got That Way*. London: Harper Collins.

Celac, Victor. 2012. "Observaţii privind tratarea dialectelor limbii române, problema datării lexemelor şi valorificarea surselor în noul *Dicţionar etimologic al limbii române*". *Fonetică şi dialectologie* 31: 205–226.

Celac, Victor. 2020 "Analyse et intuition dans la recherche étymologique du roumain." In *Lingvistică romanică III. Conferinţele Catedrei de Filologie şi*

Lingvistică romanică (2019), ed. by Coman Lupu, Simona Georgescu, and Camelia Uşurelu, 39–55. Bucureşti: Editura Universităţii din Bucureşti.

Crystal, David. 2007. *The Fight for English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dawkins, Richard. 2016. *The Selfish Gene*. Fourth edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Green, Georgia M. and Jerry L. Morgan. 1996. *Practical Guide to Syntactic Analysis*. Stanford: Center for the Study of Language and Information.

Popescu, Mihaela. 2016. "Le tabou linguistique. Considérations générales". *Studii şi Cercetări Lingvistice* 67 (2): 169–177.

Puşcariu, Sextil. 1940. *Limba română*. Vol. I: *Privire generală*. Bucureşti: Fundaţia pentru Literatură şi Artă „Regele Carol II".

Şăineanu, Lazăr. 1929. *Dicţionar universal al limbii române*. Sixth edition. Craiova: Editura „Scrisul românesc".

Sala, Marius. 1999. *Introducere în etimologia limbii române.* Bucureşti: Univers Enciclopedic.

Scriban, August. 1939. *Dicţionaru limbii româneşti*. (*Etimologii, înţelesuri, exemple, citaţiuni, arhaizme, neologizme, provincializme*). First edition. Iaşi: Institutul de Arte Grafice „Presa Bună".

Vasilescu, Florin. 2017. "Inadvertenţe în dicţionarele limbii române". *Limba Română* 66 (1): 66–78.