# LANGUAGES AND CULTURES IN CONTACT: THE FRENCH LANGUAGE AND THE MARITIME TERMINOLOGY

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**Abstract:**
The lexical borrowing is a fertile area of research, because it involves the contact between linguistic systems, cultures and spiritual identities. Through this work we try to demonstrate, using linguistic and statistical arguments, that the French language had a major role in shaping the Romanian maritime terminology in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. The basis of our approach is the premise that, during this period, French had a great influence over the Romanian language, especially in the scientific, technical, political and cultural areas.

**Key-words:**
Linguistic contact, Romanian maritime terminology, French influence, calque, loanword.

## 1. Some observations on linguistic contact

In order to undertake a comprehensive study of a language, we must take into account the forces acting during its evolution. There are two types of factors that can shape a language: internal factors, related to the language system, and external factors, related to the cultural relations that different linguistic communities have with each other. Hence, imitation has played a decisive role in enriching language:

„*More intense and active during the beginning periods of the languages of culture, imitation has, from a linguistic point of view, a dual dimension: first, there is the imitation, within a certain linguistic and cultural community, of a model language already existing in the tradition of the culture in question - we might call this kind of imitation, an internal imitation [...]; secondly, we can speak of an external imitation, determined*



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*by the acceptance of a linguistic model belonging to another language of culture, with a cultural prestige generally accepted in the given historical context."*[1]

This linguistic contact has as a corollary the mutual enrichment of languages, since the vocabulary is an open system, which is constantly enriched with new words, phrases and terms, as the communication needs of its users diversify and change.

E. Coşeriu talks about the phenomenon of linguistic permeability, seen as the willingness of each language to accept the structure transfer from a different language. This permeability particularly affects the "weak points", that is those structures exhibiting certain "voids" in the global expressive possibilities, more specifically, the language transfer is favoured by the "incompleteness of existing paradigms as such." [2]

Some scientific terms appear in our language as early as the seventeenth century, in the chroniclers' writings, in documents, calendars, religious writings, and especially in the works of Dimitrie Cantemir. However, researchers agree on the fact that we cannot talk about a sustained interest in enriching the Romanian language with scientific terms until the arrival of modern culture, towards the late eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth century.[3]

Speaking of lexical loans and the modernization of the Romanian literary language, S. Dumistrăcel also observes that, during this period, many foreign words were borrowed to name the concepts related to new areas and fields, eventually becoming current means of expression and an integral part of the Romanian basic word stock.[4]

Most of these loans were taken from modern Greek, the scholarly Latin, French, Russian, German, Italian, and were found at first mainly in translations of textbooks, fiction and scientific works that have contributed to the modernization of modern literary Romanian language. In our days, the importance of the classical lexical heritage is greater as it underpins international terms, common to many different languages of the world, due to the acceleration of the scientific and technical progress and the intensively frequent cultural and artistic contacts worldwide. This leads to certain processes of convergence between languages sometimes placed

[1] E. Munteanu, 1995, p. 7. (Our translation).
[2] E. Coşeriu,1977, p. 222, *apud* E. Munteanu, *loc. cit.* (Our translation)
[3] N. A. Ursu, 1962, p. 9.
[4] S. Dumistrăcel, 1980, p. 23.



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within large geographic distances, such as the adoption of virtually identical terminological and reference systems based on Greek and Latin.

**2. The influence of French on the Romanian language. Overview**

Throughout the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, the French influence on the Romanian language becomes predominant, taking over some earlier influences, such as the modern Greek reminiscences. The French impact on the Romanian language was so strong, that we can say that, to a very large extent, it has changed its lexical physiognomy.[5]

A linguistic influence of this magnitude can be explained by the linguistic kinship between the two peoples, the Romanian and the French, which is related to a common consciousness, of Romance origin. These two languages in contact are, in fact, in a privileged situation, given the fact that we are dealing with two languages genealogically related, that share many words of Latin origin. The Latin character of the Romanian language and the spiritual affinities that bind us to the Western Romance world naturally brought about an unprecedented level of openness on the part of Romanian to the assimilation of French neologisms.[6]

Moreover, loans are not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a social one, confirming the prestige of the donor language, in this case French. Thus, the cultural prestige of France in the early nineteenth century, and the political, economic and cultural ties between France and Romania played an important role in facilitating the linguistic contacts.[7] This can be explained, as many linguists and historians have pointed out, by the fact that France has been, at the dawn of our modernity, the model for the organization of the Romanian State.[8]

Equally important is the input channel of the new words in language: written or spoken, the two variants being sometimes possible for the same word. The oral loans can be explained by the fact that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, after the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), many sons of noblemen went to study in France and, through them, words and meanings from French entered the Romanian language.

[5] Th. Hristea, 1997, p. 10.
[6] See also P. Gh. Bârlea; R.-M. Bârlea, 2000, pp. 29-42.
[7] See Şt. Munteanu, 1983, p. 143.
[8] See, among others, I. Iordan, 1954, pp. 70-77.



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Al. Graur points out that beginning with the nineteenth century, Latin and Romance words, especially French, have constantly entered the Romanian vocabulary. This influence became stronger with the adoption and implementation of French cultural, moral, social and political values by the Romanian intellectuals of that time.[9] Words that entered our language during the twentieth century, such as: *a demara, a teleporta, a partaja, achiziţie, resortisant, tubular, bilanţier, concurenţial*, etc. illustrate the vitality of this phenomenon, even though nowadays we are facing a predominance of the English influence on the Romanian lexicon.[10]

Another aspect to be taken into consideration when studying the French loans in Romanian deals with the fields in which they can be found. A large number of French neologisms have appeared in common everyday language as expressions of the concepts necessary for everyday life (e.g. *creion, gri, matineu, obstacol, a traversa, tren, coafor, detaliu, frontieră, opinie, etc.*). However, we can observe the fact that the insertion of the terms of French origin took place, at a conceptual level, especially in the scientific, technical, political and cultural areas.[11] We believe not to be mistaken when we claim that most words borrowed from French are scientific and technical terms of various professions (maritime, military, commercial, etc.), and generally terms naming concepts related to a particular sphere of material culture.

The studies and the statistics conducted in this regard are very relevant. For instance, D. Macrea argues that 27 % of all technical and scientific terms are of French origin.[12] Th . Hristea believes that most terms of French origin designate sciences and scientific disciplines, many of them referring to interdisciplinary fields such as pedagogy, docimology, etc.[13]

[9] Al. Graur, 1963, p. 27.
[10] *Cf.* G. Scurtu, D. Dincă, 2011, p. 65.
[11] Doina Butiurcă notices the fact that the Romanian philosophical language is largely based on terms of French origin, ever since 1846, when A.T. Laurian translated A. Delavigne's manual of philosophy. Some of these terms have survived until our day: *analogie, eroare, filosofie, formă, idee, a imagina, logică, sensibilitate, etc.* (D. Butiurcă, 2006). Many neologisms of French origin were also promoted through the journalistic style. Florica Dimitrescu argues, in support of this claim, that the media contains proportionally balanced linguistic samples, belonging to the administrative, scientific, electronic, medical styles, etc. (Fl. Dimitrescu, 1994, p. 214)
[12] D. Macrea, 1982, pp. 72-81.
[13] Th. Hristea, 1972, pp. 185-199.



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Analyzing the functional styles of the Romanian language, Şerbănescu Andra notes that, given the strictness of the terms and of the terminological constructions, the science and technology have a much richer inventory of French neologisms.[14] Florica Dimitrescu, in her study of the 3,749 words of French origin recorded in *Dicţionarul de cuvinte recente* (1982), asserts that the 579 terms of French origin are particularly distributed into the following areas: medicine (96); biology (34); technique (30); physics (24), electricity and seamanship (10), etc.[15]

Following these findings, we conclude that the importance of the French language in defining the lexical Romanian physiognomy and strengthening its Latin character is undeniable.The French influence was a constant means of enrichment and modernization of the Romanian language; a lexical semantic analysis of the Romanian words of French origin shows that the majority of lexical items belongs to the most important branches of science and culture, hence to areas where the highest progress and innovations were recorded.

### 3. The Status of French in the Romanian maritime terminology

Maritime language supposes, given the usage circumstances, a certain multilingualism. Romanian sailors have always been constrained to communicate in a foreign language in order to understand and make themselves understood, and therefore they sometimes tended to imitate, in a "servile" or justified manner, those languages with which they came into contact, whether French, Italian, German, Spanish, English, etc. Because of the many loanwords that have enriched its structure, the maritime vocabulary has a pronounced heterogeneity.

The first Romanian maritime terms were largely drawn from the terminologies of the major maritime powers and referred primarily to the river and inland navigation as the Romanians only recently started to practise sea fishing, being accustomed especially to fishing in the rivers. The terms borrowed at this stage were mostly fishing related terms, coming from the languages of those from which the Romanians have learned fishing: Greeks, Turks, Lipovans, that is those who have a monopoly on sea fishing.

[14] A. Şerbănescu, 1985, pp. 8-12.
[15] Fl. Dimitrescu, 1994, p. 235.



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The terms borrowed from the above-mentioned languages first appeared in spoken Romanian, while the terms borrowed from Western languages, primarily Romance languages, spread in the Romanian maritime terminology especially through the literary language (e.g. *curent, flux, reflux, cap, deltă, port, rechin* etc.). We also want to emphasize the fact that the old lexical influences of Slavic, Turkish and Greek origin contributed to the enrichment of the internal structure of the Romanian maritime vocabulary, but not to its modernization, which was achieved through more recent lexical borrowings of Latin, Romance and German origins.

The French influence on our maritime terminology is rather late, having taken place beginning with the second half of the nineteenth century, however its effects were very strong and even dominant in a certain period, when even the terms of German or English origin came into Romanian via French intermediaries. This phenomenon occured due to the fact that, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the foundations of the modern Merchant Marine and the Navy were set by the officers graduating from the Naval School of Brest. The best example of this linguistic impact is *Manualul Gabierului*, published in 1881, which was merely an adapted translation of the first edition of *Manuel du gabier* of the French Navy.[16]

The French influence is reflected prominently in the maritime terminology through numerous loans on various aspects related to this field: types of ships (*batisferă, cablier, cabotier, costier, escadră, petrolier, corvetă, dragă, dragon, escortor, pasager, şalupă, şalutieră* etc.), parts of the ship (*artimon, babord, banchet, bordaj, bulb, cală, cambuză, carlingă, chilă, coca, damă, derivor, dunetă, etambou, etravă, gabie, palonier, panou, pavoaz, pupa, sabord* etc.), rigging and sails (*balansină, balon, bonetă, capelatură, cilindru, contra-bulină, vergă, ghidon, ghiu* etc.), functions onboard (*aspirant, cadet, comandant, contra-amiral, echipaj, econom, furier, gabier, lampist, magazioner* etc.), bridge and deck mechanisms and instruments (*accelerometru, alidadă, ancorator, anemograf, barograf, barometru, cabestan, ejector, girocompas, periscop, presetupă, servomotor, sextant* etc.), marlinespike seamanship (*bricui, cordon, manevră, nod, voltă, tur, nod* etc.), terms used in the Navy - weapon items (*chiurasă, escadră, escortor, flotilă, torpilă* etc.), meteorology and marine geomorphology (*ciclon, curent, gren, hulă, maree, muson, trombă, canal, ecliptică, ecuator,*

[16] See also M. Bujeniţă, M. Sala, 1966, p. 293.



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*efemeride, flux, golf, litoral, mal, ocean, plajă, pol, rechin, reflux, zenith* etc.), port facilities (*arsenal, debarcader, deroşeză, dig, platformă, ponton, radă, sonetă* etc.)

As shown in the examples above, the contact with the French maritime vocabulary is mirrored in the Romanian maritime terminology, either through the direct loan, the translation or the calque. Some maritime terms of foreign origin, even if few in number, found correspondents in Romanian without having to borrow or imitate foreign terms;[17] in most situations, however, an equivalent in Romanian was difficult to find, and therefore, at the end of the nineteenth century, most Romanian maritime terms are loans or calques from French:

Among the French wordloans from this period, we enumerate:

*acrostol*, from French *acrostole*
*barograf*, from French *barographe*
*compresor*, from *French compresseur*
*elice*, from French *hélice*
*abandon*, from French *abandon*
*ambarcader*, from French *embarcadère*
*amiral*, from French *amiral*
*bonetă*, from French *bonnette*
*bulb*, from French *bulbe*
*cablu*, from French *câble*
*cadet*, from French *cadet*
*derivă*, from French *dérive*
*hamac*, from French *hamac*
*pală*, from French *pale*, etc.

The calques of French origin are also very numerous.

e.g. *afunda*, from French *afonder*.
*afurca*, from French *affourcher*
*aliniament*, from French *alignement*
*contrabraţa*, from French *contre-brasser*
*costier*, from French *côtier*
*crucişător* (în)cruciş*a* + ător, from French *croiseur*
*cuplu maestru*, from French *couple maître*

[17] We refer here especially to terms relating to rigging.



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*distrugător*, from French *destructeur*
*dublu fund*, from French *double fond*
*măr*, from French *pomme*
*suprastructură*, from French *superstructure*.

The French impact on the Romanian maritime language is strongly felt in the phraseological calques, extremely common in the Romanian literary language and particularly in the scientific lexicon:

*e.g.* *ancoră ciupercă*, from French *ancre champignion*
*ancoră plutitoare*, from French *ancre flottante*
*atelier plutitor*, from French *atelier flottant*
*aviso cu roate*, from French *aviso à roues*
*bric cu pânze*, from French *brick à voile*
*chilă falşe*, from French *fausse quille*
*compartiment neetanş*, from French *compartiment non étanche*
*compas solar*, from French *boussole solaire*
*corvetă cu pânze*, from French *corvette à voile*
*curent rectiliniar*, from French *courant rectiligne*
*navă de linie*, from French *navire de ligne*
*opera moartă*, from French *oeuvre morte*
*opera vie*, from French *oeuvre vive*
*picior de câine*, from French *jambe de ch*ien
*rău de mare*, from French *mal de mer* etc.

Even if some maritime terms were taken from other languages, such as English, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, etc., a thorough etymological analysis reveals the fact that some of them, in fact, entered the Romanian language through French, which leads us to believe that most Romanian maritime neological terms from the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century came from French.[18]

e.g. *afeliu*, from French *aphélie*, German *Aphelium*, cf. Greek *apo* „departe”, *helios*
„soare”
*amiralitate*, from French *amirauté*, Italian *amiralita*, German *Admiralität*

[18] Followed, in the second half of the twentieth century, by the influence of the English language, especially in the field of sport boats and commercial vessels.



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*brigantină,* from French *brigantine,* Italian *brigantino*, English *brigantine*, German *Brigantine*
*scafandru,* from French *scaphandre,* Italian *scafandro,* cf. Greek *skaphe* „barcă", *aner* „om"
*sistem,* from French *système*, Italian *sistema,* English *system*, Latin, Greek *systema, etc.*

**4. Conclusions**

In the context of an extremely rich and heterogeneous neologistic lexicon, the words of French origin have entered the Romanian vocabulary since the eighteenth century and continue to show strength today, so that the French contribution to the formation of the modern Romanian language by innovating its vocabulary, both in the common language and the specialized languages, is undeniable.

The study of the Romanian maritime terminology of French influence gives an interesting picture of the socio-cultural and linguistic relations between the two Romance languages, Romanian and French. The neologisms borrowed from French seem to have a privileged status, being dominant in the second half of the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In support of our thesis, we conceptually structured the research field from an onomasiological perspective and illustrated the external means of enriching the Romanian maritime language, namely the loan and the calque.

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