

Folk Terminology. Linguistic and Spiritual Implications

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Résumé : *La recherche du lexique dialectal est importante pour connaître la spiritualité populaire. Notre recueil se propose, à partir de l'étude, du point de vue ethno-linguistique, des matériels lexicaux de Covurlui à mettre en évidence un certain nombre d'aspects de la spiritualité populaire. On étudie surtout les réalités des éléments linguistiques avec des différents mécanismes du mental populaire.*

Mots-clés : *lexique dialectal, spiritualité populaire, point de vue ethno-linguistique.*

Dialect vocabulary research represents a long-standing preoccupation of Romanian linguists: in 1901, C. Rădulescu Codin provided the Romanian readership with the work entitled *O seamă de cuvinte din Muscal*, with a foreword by renowned linguist Gustav Weigand. Over the years, elements of folk terminology found a home in the pages of an entire series of publications, such as: *Arhivele Olteniei*, *Anuarul Muzeului etnografic al Transilvaniei*, *Codrii Cosminului*, *Comoara satelor*, *Dacoromânia*, *Șezătoarea*, *Fonetică și dialectologie*, *Grai și suflet*, etc. In the 1950s and 1960s, works aimed at studying dialect vocabulary in particular, such as: *Materiale și cercetări dialectale*, *Glosar regional Argeș*, *Lexic regional*, etc. started to be published. The selections entitled *Texte dialectale*, as well as several glossaries of regional vocabulary and lists of regional terms published in *Cum vorbim* and *Limba română* magazines should also be added to the abovementioned list.

The remarkable gnosiological value of the lexical materials in question should be emphasized from the very beginning; such materials allowed for a better knowledge of the dialects and subdialects of the Romanian language, as well as their relations with the literary language. The fact that several regional words, meanings, and phrases had not yet been recorded and had not entered the scientific jargon is also worth mentioning; at the dialectal level, a series of archaic words and meanings have been preserved. [1] The study of dialect vocabulary allows for a better knowledge of the spatial distribution of loan words, as well as the alterations suffered by neologisms. Dialectal lexical materials were particularly useful in drafting some reference works (*Dicționarul Academiei*- The Thesaurus Dictionary of the Romanian Language, edited by the Romanian Academy and the “Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti” Institute of Linguistics, *Tratatul de dialectologie românească*- The Treatise of Romanian Dialectology, etc.).

No research study of the folk terminology used in the Covurlui area has been performed yet; a series of words used in this particular area were mentioned by some publications, such as: *Șezătoarea*, *Cum vorbim*, *Lexic regional*, *Fonetică și dialectologie*, etc. The selections of folkloric material gathered by T. Pamfile and I. Brezeanu, as well as C. Pintilie's monographies [2] are also worth mentioning. On the basis of such sources, the present paper aims at researching the folk terminology used in the Covurlui area, from the perspective of the relations between the language and the mechanisms of folk mentality. The main categories of mytho-folkloric terms are as follows:

- the vocabulary of magic: *a adăpa* (literal: to give water to a horse; here: to poison, to administer a potion to somebody), *a boscorodi* (to cast a spell on somebody), *a bate* (in the phrase *a bate cărțile*- refers to cartomancy: to read the future with the help of playing cards), *bozgoane* (spells, incantations, voodoo), *abraș* (about people: evil, violent; about actions: unsuccessful), etc.;
- the vocabulary used in the rites of passage: *dolia* (dolium), *sălaș* (dwelling; coffin; tomb), *iritic* (regional variant of *heretic*, *unorthodox*), *vedre* (the bearing of gifts in Romanian wedding ceremonies), *capete* (prosphora), etc.;

- medical vocabulary: *fălcariță* (tetanus), *rău de cea* (literal: that kind of evil; refers to epilepsy), *cori* (measles), *inimă* (heart), *samcă* (spasm, involuntary muscle contraction), *orbalț* (erysipelas), etc.;
- religious vocabulary: *alba* (sunrise), *grijanie* (communion), *ispas* (the Ascension), *măcinic* (martyr), etc.;
- the vocabulary of mytho-folkloric beings: *benga* (the Devil), *fapt* (devil; witchcraft, incantation, spell, charm, voodoo), *tartor* (the Chief of the Demons), *mamona* (Mammon), etc.

In the following pages, several mytho-folkloric terms shall be introduced and interpreted from an ethno-linguistic perspective.

A adăpa (literal: to give water to a horse; here: to poison, to administer a potion to somebody). It is somewhat peculiar to encounter this term in the vocabulary of magic; it was recorded in the Galați area, with the meaning of “a face farmece” [3] (to lay somebody under a spell) and it is also used in the field of folk medicine: *adăpat* (charmed; fallen under somebody’s spell) and *adăpătură* (any kind of disease induced by means of spells, with the help of potions) [4] Similar to the verb *a da* (literal: to give), the verb *a adăpa* points to the use of liquid substances that were magically “processed and administered to other people.” [5]

Fapt (witchcraft, incantation, spell, charm, voodoo). As a word with several folk meanings, it refers to an evil magical practice, as well as to a magical element (“that is thrown in the way of the charmed person”), and to a disease. What is interesting is that this mytho-folkloric term displays some semantic evolutions that are worthy to be taken into account: in the Cahul area, it was recorded with the meaning of “naughty child of pre-school age”, while, in the Covurlui area, its recorded meaning was that of “devil”. [6] In the former case, the term abovementioned loses its magical content, while, in the later case, there is a terminological transfer from the vocabulary of magic to the vocabulary of demonic beings.

Inimă (heart). In Matca, this word denoting a somatic element was recorded with the “unexpected” meaning of “diarrhea”. It is interesting to note that the folklorist P. Caraman recorded a curse that preserves in its structure this unusual meaning of the word *inimă* (*Lovi-te-ar inima să te lovească!* - May you be stricken by the heart!). Caraman also commented on this issue, emphasizing the fact that the said meaning exists in Bulgarian as well, the difference being that “in Romanian, the name of the said disease is not a form derived from the noun *inimă*, as it is in Bulgarian, but the noun itself, which is a rather peculiar linguistic fact.” [7]

Iritic (regional variant of *heretic*, *unorthodox*). The term in question was recorded in the Tecuci area [8] and it is, in the researcher’s opinion, a variant of the word *eretic* (heretic, unorthodox). The meaning used in the Tecuci area is that of “suckling”; it is a well-known fact that the literary language uses the term *eretic* to denote the supporter of a certain heresy, a follower of a different religion than Christianity. Some traditional beliefs and practices emphasize the fact that “no one must know the name that will be given to the newly born until the baptism; until that time, the child will be referred to as a Turk. It is only starting from the day following the baptism that the child’s name shall be used.” [9] In fact, the child is considered to be a pagan, a non-Christian or a heretic, until the baptism. Moreover, the infant is referred to in terms of *diavol* (demon), *calvin* (Calvinist), *duh necurat* (unholy spirit), *liliac* (vampire), *necreștinat* (non-Christian), *moroi* (ghost), *nelegiuit* (godless), *nu-i curat* (tainted soul), *pricolici* (werewolf), *strein* (heathen), *pierdut* (unredeemable soul), etc.[10] The researcher believes that the meaning recorded in the Tecuci area is based on beliefs such as the ones abovementioned.

Fălcariță (tetanus). *Dicționarul Academiei* mentions this noun with the meanings of “tetanus” and “toothache” [11], while *Lexic regional* mentions the noun in question with the meaning of “healing

plant” [12], or, to be more precise, “plant used to heal *fălcarită*”. It is common knowledge that I. A. Candrea and Maria Sitaru have mentioned an entire series of names of plants that bear the same name as the disease they treat, such as: *holeră* (cholera), *gălbează* (fluke), *gălbinare* (jaundice), *șopârlaiță* (croup), etc.; however, the term *fălcarită* is not mentioned among them, which renders the recording made in the Covurlui area even more valuable. [13]

Orbalț (erysipelas). As mentioned by the authors of the DLR (The Dictionary of the Romanian Language), this word refers to a disease, namely “erysipelas” [14], but it can also refer to a healing plant, according to ALR II [15] (the second edition of The Romanian Linguistic Atlas). The circumstances are similar to those of the noun *fălcarită*; the difference is that, in addition to the meaning abovementioned, another meaning was recorded in the Corod area (“incantation, voodoo”), which probably appeared as a result of the reduction suffered by the phrase *descântec de orbalț* (incantation used to cure erysipelas) [16]. The same circumstances hold valid for the noun *lamoste* (diarrhea) [17], as well as for another term analysed in the present paper, namely, *samcă*.

Polgan (regional variant of the word *pagan*). It is a variant of the word *păgân* (pagan) and it was recorded in the Tecuci area with the meaning of “ugly and dirty”. [18] *Dicționarul Academiei* mentions multiple meanings of this word: “pagan”, “cruel”, “naughty child”; “ugly”, etc. [19] In general, these meanings display powerful negative connotations, as they are in fact based on the Christian’s attitude towards the followers of a different religion. It is also worth mentioning that the variant *polgan* is not recorded in the DLR, as well as the fact that this mytho-folkloric term has evolved in some areas towards the meanings of “jinx” and “demon” [20].

Rău de cela (literal: that kind of evil; refers to epilepsy). The abovementioned phrase was recorded in the Țepu area, with the meaning of “epilepsy”. The word *rău* (literal: evil; bad) occurs in several folk phrases with interesting implications in the field of traditional spirituality: *a pomeni de rău* (*pe cineva*), (to forebode evil); *a trage a rău* (to tell of some evil that is to come); *a meni a rău* (to tell of evil events that are about to occur); *a fi rău de ochi* (to have the evil eye); [*a fi*] *de rău* (approximately: [this is] not good); *a-i merge rău cuiva* (when everything goes bad for somebody), etc. [21] The phrase *rău de cela* is not recorded with the meaning of “epilepsy” either by I.A. Candrea in his monumental work *Folclorul medical român comparat*, or by Maria Sitaru in her doctoral thesis on folk medical terminology. The absence of the said phrase from reference works in the field renders the information found in the Covurlui area even more valuable.

Samcă (spasm, involuntary muscle contraction). At its origin, this noun referred to an evil mytho-folkloric being. From the viewpoint of the vocabulary of magic, other various meanings draw more interest: “disease” (caused by the abovementioned evil spirit); “charm worn by superstitious people, due to the magical power it possesses to protect them from the disease described above”; “healing plant” (“used especially as a cure for the *samcă* disease”) [22]. In the Corod area, the meaning of “incantation, voodoo” is also used; the researcher believes this is a result of the reduction of the phrase *descântec de samcă* (incantation used to cure the *samcă* disease), for the purpose of linguistic economy.

Sălaș (dwelling). The word is recorded as having multiple meanings in the DLR: “modest dwelling”; “imaginary place considered to be the main residence of saints, supernatural beings and the dead”; “coffin” [23]. The following note is added in reference to the later meaning: “especially in Transylvania and Maramureș”; the lexical materials gathered from the Târgu Bujor area show that this meaning is also recorded in the south-eastern region of Moldavia. [24] This is not surprising, considering the long-standing nature of the word (it also appears in Coresi’s texts), as well as the use of the phrase *salaș de veci* (tomb) in the old Romanian language.

The present paper intended mainly to give evidence of the existence of some regional lexical elements (in the Covurlui area) that are useful for learning about the mechanisms of folk mentality, which is the reason why it did not dwell upon the purely linguistic aspect of the matter, but upon the ethnological one. The author noticed in particular the existence of some elements of medical terminology, as well as elements belonging to the terminology of magical practices, which have proved extremely useful in fulfilling the set aim of the paper. Two large categories of linguistic phenomena can be noticed; the said phenomena are mentioned in a nutshell below:

- words, phrases, collocations, variants that are specific to the researched area (*rău de cela, polgan*, etc.);
- meanings that are specific to the said area (*iritic, fâlcariță, samcă*, etc.).

The present attempt to research the said matter may prove useful, as there is no other research study of the terminology used in the Covurlui area, from an ethno-linguistic perspective; a thorough study of the matter would presuppose much more extended investigations, such as extracting the lexical material on the Covurlui area from existing bookish sources, as well as gathering new linguistic materials through several field surveys.

Notes

1. *** *Tratat de dialectologie românească*, Ed. Scrisul Românesc, Craiova, 1984, p. 270.
2. Pintilie, Costache, *Monografia comunei Matca; Monografia comunei Corod*, works that are kept under the form of a manuscript at the History Museum of Galați.
3. *** *Lexic regional*, Ed. Academiei, București, 1962, II, p. 20.
4. Păsculescu, Nicolae, *Literatură populară română*, București, 1910, p. 319.
5. Bălțeanu, Valeriu, *Dicționar de magie populară românească*, Ed. Paideia, București, 2000, p. 12.
6. Ibidem, p. 120.
7. Caraman, Petru, *Descolindatul în orientul și sud-estul Europei*, Ed. Universității „Al. I. Cuza”, Iași, 1997, p. 420.
8. *** *Lexic regional*, Ed. Academiei, București, 1962, II, p. 95.
9. Candrea, Ion Aurel, *Folclorul medical român comparat*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 1999, p. 274.
10. Scurtu, Vasile, *Termenii de înrudire în limba română*, Ed. Academiei, București, 1966, p. 58.
11. DA, volume II, part I, p. 37
12. *** *Lexic regional*, Ed. Academiei, București, 1962, II, p. 95.
13. Candrea, Ion Aurel, *op. cit.*, pp. 324-330.
14. DLR, volume VII, part II, p. 273.
15. ALR II, map no. 6301.
16. Pintilie, Costache, *Monografia comunei Corod. Glosar*.
17. DA, volume II, part II, fasc. II, p. 88.
18. Bălțeanu, Valeriu, *Dicționar de divinație populară românească*, Ed. Paideia, București, 2001, p. 128.
19. DLR, volume VIII, part III, p. 943.
20. Bălțeanu, Valeriu, *Dicționar de divinație populară românească*, Ed. Paideia, București, 2001, p. 128.
21. Ibidem, p. 144.
22. Bălțeanu, Valeriu, *Dicționar de magie populară românească*, Ed. Paideia, București, 2003, p. 233.
23. DLR, volume X, part I, p. 144.
24. *** *Lexic regional*, Ed. Academiei, București, 1962, p. 93.

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