

The other Side of the Word: a Sociolinguistic Study of Romanian Agricultural Words

Ana R. CHELARIU

Writer, retired, independent researcher

E-mail: achelariu@verizon.net

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6968-9438>

New Jersey, USA

De partea cealaltă a cuvântului: studiu sociolingvistic asupra vocabularului agricol românesc

Rezumat

O analiză a vocabularului românesc în contextul cultural în care s-a dezvoltat poate duce la o înțelegere mai bună a evoluției civilizației și limbii dacoromâne ca ramură a familiei de limbi indo-europene. Abordarea sociolingvistică a vocabularului unei limbi are menirea de a lărgi câmpul lingvisticii dincolo de limitele fonologiei sau morfologiei. Prin încercarea de a înțelege contextul social în care un cuvânt a fost folosit, și în cazul contaminării cu alte limbi din aceeași familie, indo-europeană în cazul nostru, ca rezultat al cuceririlor sau invaziilor, preferința unei forme noi în defavoarea uneia vechi, sau invers, poate oferi o mai bună perspectivă istorică. Plecând de la rădăcinile indo-europene refăcute, noi soluții etimologice pot ajuta la elucidarea unor izoglose românești cu etimologie neclară.

Cuvinte-cheie: agricultura în Dacia antică, vocabularul agricol în dacoromână, rădăcini proto-indo-europene.

Abstract

Analyzing the Romanian vocabulary in the cultural context of its development could lead to a better understanding of the Daco-Romanian civilization and language as a branch of the Indo-European language family. This socio-linguistic approach of studying a vocabulary has the scope of enlarging the field of philology beyond the limited study of phonetics and morphology. By trying to understand the social context in which the word was used, and in the case of merging with concepts belonging to an invading population with same ancestral heritage, Indo-European in our case, the preference for one form over an older one, or the other way around, can offer a better historical perspective. Starting from the reconstructed Indo-European roots, the etymological solutions could elucidate many of unsolved linguistic problems.

Keywords: agricultural vocabulary in Daco-Romanian, Proto-Indo-European roots, agriculture in pre-historic Dacia.

A general agreement among researchers is that for several millennia, beginning from 6000 BCE the Carpathians, the Balkans and Greece were the most culturally advanced of European societies. The populations flourishing for millennia in these regions prior to the arrival of the Indo-Europeans, practiced on limited scale agriculture and herding, advanced ceramic techniques, and worshiped the Great Goddess. This population of farmers and herders of a non-Indo-European speaking group, arrived between 6500-5500 BCE in Europe from Anatolia through Greece and Macedonia, migrating up north by the Danube Valley. Several Old European Neolithic languages may have emerged from a Thessalian parent, a non-Indo-European language, from which some reflexes might have been preserved in the Proto-Indo-European (PIE), such as the word for bull, **tawro-s* ‘bull’ (Anthony, 2007, p. 147). Although the farmers from Anatolia were already familiar with agriculture and domesticated animals, the pre-Neolithic hunters and gatherers from Western Europe were not. Yet, many Indo-European (IE) cognate word roots securely assigned to PIE (Mallory, Adams, 1997, pp. 139-172) had meanings related to Neolithic economies, cow, bull, calf, ewe, ram, lamb, wool, milk products, ard/plow, and domesticated grain (Anthony, Ringe, 2015).

At about 5800-5700 BCE the farmers of the Criș culture, settled along the Criș river on the Carpathian Mountains by farmers from Anatolia, migrated to the east of the Carpathian Mountains into the Bug-Dnister areas, coming in contact with their neighbors, the Pontic-Caspian population of foragers and hunters. They brought with them domesticated sheep and cattle, probably the source of the first domesticated cattle in the North Pontic region. They cultivated barley, millet, a variety of wheat, (emmer, einkorn, spelt), peas that were not native to Southeastern Europe, plum orchards, etc. A note should be made here on the difficulty linguists have to reconstruct a PIE root for ‘pea’ (Mallory, Adams, 1997, p. 416) in spite of its confirmed presence on the continent for thousands of years. Relevant for this subject is the unexplained Albanian *modhullë* and Romanian *mazăre*, both meaning ‘pea’, to which I have to add the Dacian form found in Dioscoride’s list of plants *mozula*, *mizela* ‘the plant thyme’, showing phonetic similarity, but semantic difference:

mazăre n. ‘peas’ Dacian *μοζουλα* ‘the plant thyme’ in Dioscorides (1934); Thracian **μαζελα* (**mazela*), Albanian *modhullë* ‘peas’ (Orel, 1998), Lith *mazulis* ‘small’, Proto-Albanian **mādzula*, from Proto-Indo-European **meh₂ǵ^h-ulo* ‘a small bean’ (Chelariu, 2023).

The development of these societies was subject of a large migration wave, probably between 4200 BCE and 3900 BCE, formed mainly of IE pastoral tribes. As James Mallory argues, in the millennia following 4500-4000 BCE, a sizeable influx of people from the Pontic region came into Europe. The Indo-European invaders appeared as a warrior-like nomadic population, essentially patriarchal, structured in social classes, who worshiped the sky and the sun.

For many centuries the basic occupation of the population living in the Carpathian Mountains was grassing the herds for meat, milk, leather and wool. Differently from the nomadic pastoralism characteristic to the Middle East, the pastoralism in the Southeastern Europe and the surroundings, was associated with small scale agriculture. The economic complexes from this region primarily based on seasonal movement of livestock between winter and summer pastures, show a strong symbiosis between pastoralism and small scale agriculture, that reveals, perhaps, an old substrata, in which the fighters, warrior-like class is less noticeable. The contact and economic exchanges between the steppe tribes, presumably of Indo-European descent, and the settlers from the southeast and eastern part of Romania, were mainly based on material culture, including: pottery, copperware, cattle, and textiles. As David Anthony argues, the Indo-European infiltration in Europe was successful by way of economic exchanges, in association with specific social interactions consisting of contractual patron-client relations and guest-host agreements enforced by lavish public rituals that impressed their neighbors and lead to building of social and economic bonds.

The agricultural activity performed, albeit on a small scale, in the South-East European area, particularly on the today's Romanian area, presuppose the usage of a certain specialised vocabulary inherited by the Romanian language. Among the agricultural terms in use today there is a few that have no clear etymology and need to be addressed, particularly those listed in the Romanian dictionary (DEXRO) of unknown origin; by comparing and analyzing them with the reconstructed Proto-Indo-European (PIE) roots from J. Pokorny (*Indogermanisches etymologisches wörterbuch* (IEW), 1959) or J.P. Mallory and D. Adams, I hope to bring to light the archaic vocabulary of an ancient occupation in this area.

One of the most familiar words in Daco-Romanian language (DRom here) is *mălai* 'corn flour' found in DEXRO *mălai*, *mălaie*, 'corn flour, regional millet flour', regional 'corn, millet', with an unknown etymology, a remarkable fact considering the large use of this word. Exploring the Pokorny data we find an interesting opening for this enigma in the PIE root (1959, pp. 716-719) *mel-/*mol-/*ml- 'to rub, to crush, to grind' (Mallory, Adams, 1997, p.) *melh₂- 'grind', with cognates in the following Indo-European languages: Lithuanian (Lith) malù; OldIrish (OIr) meilid; Latin (Lat) molō; NewEnglish (NE) meal; Old Church Slavic (OCS) meljō; Greek (Grk) mülē 'mill'; Armenian (Arm) malem, Hittite (Hit)t mall(a); Sanskrit (Skt) mṛṇāti; Tocharian (Toch) B mely- 'grind', Albanian (Alb) mjel 'meal, flour'; Old High German (OHG) malan, Old Icelandic (OIce) mala 'grind'. The semantic association of the verb 'to grind, crush' with the etymon *mălai* 'flour' is convincing, giving a strong hint to the long standing importance of this type of food and the process of making it. An interesting case presents the DRom word *mei* 'millet' from which the flour *mălai* is made of, considered by DEXRO as a loan from Latin *milium*. Further exploration for this Latin form etymology leads

us to the *Etymological Dictionary of Latin* (de Vaan, 2008, p. 379) where we find the following: Lat. *milium* n. ‘millet’ < Proto Italian *melio-*; Grk *μελίνη* f. ‘millet’; Lith *malnos* ‘sweetgrass, a kind of millet’, all related to the PIE **melh₂-*, ‘to grind’ -thus ‘the grain which can/is to be grinded’, a semantic relation pleading for a merger between a PIE form existing in Dacia and the Latin one. The development of this PIE verb **melh₂-* ‘to grind’ in most of the IE languages proves the ancient economic activities in the Daco-Romanian society.

In relation to the ‘grinding of millet’ the Daco-Romanian language offers another word of importance related to the agricultural activities, the noun **grunz**, **grunj** ‘bran, crumbling material’, in Aromanian (Arom) **grundă**, **grundză** ‘bran’ with correspondence in PIE MA **ghrendh-* ‘grind’ (Mallory, Adams, 1997, p. 416); **ghren-*, **ghren-d-*, **ghren-dh-* ‘to rub, stroke roughly’ (Pokorny, 1959, p. 459; Russu, 1981, p. 328); this root has the following cognates in: Lat *frendō* ‘gnash the teeth’; NE *grind*; Lith *grendu* ‘scrape, scratch (off)’; Grk *khóndris* ‘grain’ < **khrondrós*; Alb *grundë*, *krundë* ‘bran’; OE *grindan* ‘grind, crunch’, Eng ‘to grind’; OE *grindan*; Ger *grand* ‘coarse sand, meal, flour, bran’, OHG *grente* ‘in earth full of clay’, OIce *grandi* ‘sandbank, gravel’; Lith *grėndu*, *gresti* and *grėndziu*, *gresti* ‘rub hard, scour, clean’; Russ *grjada*.

In the same semantic group we have the DRom verb **sfărâma** ‘to crash’, and the noun **fărâmă** ‘crumb, bit’ both reflexes of the Pro-Indo-European root **sper-* ‘strew, sow’, with correspondences in Grk *speirō*, Hit *ispāri* ‘strew, sow’; OHG *sprāt* ‘scattering’; Alb *farë* ‘slice’, Grk *spérma* ‘seed’; *σπαρασσω* ‘unravel’ (Chantraine, 1968). The DEXRO and Orel explained **fărâmă** ‘crumb, bit’ in relation to the Albanian noun *thërrime* ‘crumb’ considering it a loan into the DRom **fărâmă**, this in spite of the fact that the DRom verb **sfărâma** in Albanian is **thyej**, and the Albanian **thërrime** may have a different etymology – in the verb **ther** ‘slaughter, stab’, from Proto-Albanian **tsera*, or, **ter-* ‘rub’ (Pokorny, 1959, p. 1071). Thus, taking into consideration the presence of the DRom development **sfărâma** from PIE **sper-* ‘strew, sow’, with correspondences in Grk *speirō*, Hit *ispāri* ‘strew, sow’; OHG *sprāt* ‘scattering’, it is possible that the Albanian form was either a local development of **ther**, or a borrowing from DRom.

Another very common agricultural word in Daco-Romanian is **lan** ‘field’, a loan word, according to DEXRO, from the Ukrainian *lyada*, a form related to the Russian: *ляда* -*yada* (Muradova, 2010, p. 239) meaning ‘regional, an area of cutting down and burning forests when dividing forest lands for crops’, a form with etymology related to the Proto-Slav **lędo*, with cognates in Bulgarian *leda*, *ledina* ‘meadow’, Serbo-Croatian *ladina* ‘wasteland, virgin land’, Slovenian *ledina*, Czech *lada* ‘uncultivated fields’, *lado* ‘wasteland, steam’, Slovak *lado* ‘id’: special attention needs the Polish *ląd* ‘land, continent’ a late borrowing from Middle High German in the 14th century, (< Old High German *lentī*, as in the regional German *Lände*), all forms related to the reconstructed root in Proto-Indo-European

*lendh- ‘open land’, with cognates in OIr lann ‘open land’; OPrus lindan ‘valley’; NE land; Rus ljadá ‘overgrown field’. As we can see from this analysis, the Old Irish form lann ‘open land’ is the closest to the Daco-Romanian form, which suggests the existence of a common Indo-European substratum word.

In the same semantic field, the Romanian language has the noun *plai* ‘field’, of unknown etymology as per DEXRO. Investigating the Proto-Indo-European data this DRom form could be related to the root *p₁lth₂ús ‘broad’ > *pleth₂- related to *pelhak ‘spread out, flat’, and *pleh₂- ‘field’ (Mallory, Adams, 1997, p. 297); also the plăt-, plăd-, plět-, plöt-, plət-, plai- ‘broad, flat, wide spread out’ (Pokorny, 1959, pp. 833-834), roots that could explain very well the DRom *plai* ‘field’. This PIE root proved very productive and had another development in DRom, in the noun *platoșă* ‘shield’, also of unknown etymology. The cognates for this reflex are Lith platús, Grk platús ‘broad’; Av pərəθu ‘broad, wide’; and: OE flōh ‘flagstone’; and Lith plākanas ‘flat’; Grk pláks ‘flat surface’; Sw fala ‘plain’; OCS polje ‘field’.

The well discussed DRom *mal* ‘small cliff (by water), shore’, has other developments such as the words *maldăr* pl. *maldăre* ‘pile, heap, mound’, all reflexes of the PIE *melh₃-, melə-, mlö- ‘to rise up, rising land’; *mel-, melə-, mlō- ‘to appear, come up’ (Pokorny, 1959, pp. 721-722), and the variant *m₁dho/eha ‘clay’, with reflexes in archaic Thracian-Gaete toponyms Malva, Malvensis.

The Daco-Romanian farming vocabulary offers other words that can be included here, such as *hârleț* ‘hoe, mattoe’ explained in DEXRO through the OCS form rylicī, a form that is not found in R. Derksen, *Slavic Etymological Dictionary* (2008), or in T. Wade, *Russian Etymological Dictionary* (1996). In R. Derksen we could find the following forms with somewhat similar semantism: rydlo ‘spade, snout’, OCS rylo ‘spade’, Blg rilo ‘snout’, Russian rylo ‘snout’. To help clarify this DRom word we rely on the PIE reconstructed forms, where we find the root *ġhēs-r- ‘hand’ (Pokorny, 1959, pp. 441-442), *ġherzd(h) ‘to scrape, scratch, slit’, *ġher-, *ġherdh- ‘to grab, grip, seize’ connected with the DRom farm word *hârleț* ‘hoe’, a small scraping instrument used by hand, with the following cognates, particularly the Latin hīr ‘hollow of the hand’; Alb dorë ‘hand’ < *ġhēhrā (Pokorny, 1959, p. 447); Grk kheir ‘hand’; Arm jer`n ‘hand’; Hit kissar ‘hand’; Toch B šar ‘hand’, developments which lead to the clarifying of the DRom *gheară, ghیارă* ‘claw’, also of unknown etymology in DEXRO. From this analysis we could observe that, semantically, the Daco-Romanian form opted for the association of this instrument with hand/claw, whereas the Slavic preference went to that of a pig’s snout, both relating similar action, to scratch the ground.

Another agricultural tool is the DRom *grapă* n. ‘harrow, rake’, with roots in the PIE *ġhrebh- ‘dig, scratch’ (Pokorny, 1959, pp. 455-456), that also developed in

Drom into the more popular form n. *groapă* ‘pit, ditch’. The cognates for this root in other IE languages are: NE grave; Lith grėbti ‘rake’; OCS pogrebŏ ‘bury’; grobŕ ‘grave, tomb’; Alb gropë ‘pit, ditch’; grep ‘hook, fishing rod’. Goth graban ‘dig’, graba f. ‘grave’; OHG grab n. ‘grave’; OHG graban s.v. ‘dig, carve’; MHG grūbeln ds.; Goth. Grōba f. ‘ditch, trench, channel’; OCS greti ‘to dig, scrape’ (Kroonen, 2013). As shown here the Drom language retained both meaning of this concept, that of the tool *grapă*, and that of the hole in the ground, *groapă*.

It is accepted that the Daco-Romanian *gresie*, n. ARom *grease*, *greasă*, MglRom, IstrRom ‘id’, has archaic roots in Romanian vocabulary. Related to the Albanian gërrusë, gërresë, krūs(ë) ‘rasper’, both are reflexes of the PIE *gwréhx-w-on-‘quern’ (Pokorny, 1959, p. 405), *gred-, grad- ‘to scratch’, with cognates in: Olr brāu ‘quern’; Lith girna ‘millstone’, pl. grinos ‘quern’; OCS žrūny ‘quern’; Arm erkan ‘quern’; Skt grāvan- ‘stone for pressing soma’; Toch B kārweñe ‘stone’.

The Daco-Romanian verb *a pisa* ‘to crush’, with the developments in the nouns *pişălog* ‘pestle’, *păsat* ‘pap, mash’, is explained in DEXRO as a loan word from a reconstructed Latin form *pi(n)sare, that in Latin is *pīnsere* ‘to crush’, a form listed by de Vaan (2008) as follows: pinso, -ere ‘to pound, crush’, Proto-Italian *pins- ‘to grind’, *pistlo- ‘pounder, mortar’; the PIE reconstructed root *pi-n-s-‘to grind’, found in Pokorny (1959, p. 796) pis- ‘to grind with’, with IE cognates: Skt. pinasti ‘to crush, grind’, pista- ‘ground’, YAvestan pisant- ‘crushing, bruising’, pistra- [m.] ‘bruise, injury’, MPersan pist ‘flour’, Gr. πτίσσω ‘to winnow grain, bray’, ἀπίστος ‘unground’, Hitt. peš(š)zi ‘rub, scrub’, Toharian A psäl, ToB pīsäl ‘chaff’ (of grain), husk’, Skt. peṣ ‘crush, grind’, YAv. pišaṇt- ‘crushing, bruising’; Lith. paisýti ‘beat (off) chaff from grain’; Ru.pšenó n. ‘millet’ as per Pronk (2013, p. 294), Proto-Slavic *pъseno ‘millet groats’. This root is widely attested in the Indo-European languages, with meanings suggestive of an association with cereal processing, specifically the dehusking of grains by grinding. As a consequence, the PIE from peis-, pis must be admitted to the oldest stratum of core Indo-European agricultural vocabulary. This indicates that the corresponding language community may have been familiar with the technique of dehusking cereals by grinding, and the Daco-Romanian form could be the result of a contamination or merger between an existing archaic form and a Latin one during the process of Romanisation.

The Daco-Romanian noun *arac*, *harac*, ARom *hărac*, ‘pole or rush to support plants, vine, tomatoes, etc.’ can be a reflex of the PIE roots *haer- ‘reed, rush’, with cognates in Latin harundō-arum ‘reed’; Greek áron ‘arum-plant from Aracea family’; Khotanese [East Iranian] arā ‘reed, rush’. The solution given in DEXRO as of Greek origin seems unrelated since Grk haráki means ‘alcoholic beverage’, found also in the name of Haráki, a village in Greece.

The Daco-Romanian *curpen*, *curpăn* ‘vine or other climbing plant, thin branch plant tendrils, name of a plant with tendrils’ with the main semantism ‘curve,

turn', is found in the DEXRO as related to the Albanian form kurpen, both forms a reflex of the Pokorny (1959, pp. 948-949) *(s)kerb(h)-, (s)kreb(h)- 'to curve, turn'; or, *kuerp-, kuerb- 'turn, wind' (Pokorny, 1959, p. 631) with cognates in other languages, Alb kulpër, kulpën 'clematis'; Lat curvus 'curve'; Grk kurtós 'curved'; karpos 'hand root, carpus'; Ir cor 'circuit'; Lth kreīvas, OCS krivŭ 'curve'; Toch A kārṑp- 'climb down, go down', B kārṑp 'turn around'.

Conclusions

The few Daco-Romanian agriculture words discussed here in relation to the PIE roots and the other IE languages establish that in this area agriculture was practiced from ancient times, albeit on a small scale, revealing a coexistence between pastoralism and work on the land, a life style that continued for centuries. The Southeastern Europe economic developments have been influenced by linguistic contacts during cohabitation between the host language and the guest language of the invading speakers, leading to the linguistic process of 'contamination' or 'merger' particularly between languages coming from the group of the Indo-Europeans.

The rich cultural and folkloric data related to the pastoralism and the transhumance in Romanian territory, suggest constant movements of sheep herds between the winter abodes from the valleys, and the summer travel in search of new pastures over large areas of Carpatian Mountains peaks and beyond. During the summer, while the shepherds were away, the people left behind on the valleys, women, children, and elderly, were busy working the land, planting small plants with millet, wheat and legumes, activities that continued for millennia.

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