

ROMANIAN CALQUES: AN ALPHABETICAL GLOSSARY AND LINGUISTIC STUDY

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Abstract: This article presents a comprehensive glossary of calques in the Romanian language, aiming to document and analyze the most widespread and influential loan translations derived from various source languages, primarily French, Latin, and English. Calques—defined as phrases or expressions translated literally from a foreign language—represent a significant aspect of linguistic borrowing in Romanian, especially during periods of intense cultural and political contact. The glossary is structured thematically and includes semantic, etymological, and pragmatic annotations for each entry. Through this lexicographic compilation, the article highlights patterns of structural influence, semantic shifts, and the sociolinguistic motivations behind calquing, particularly during the 19th-century modernization and the post-1989 Anglicization. The study contributes to the fields of contact linguistics and Romanian lexicology by providing both descriptive and analytical perspectives on how calques reflect historical language ideologies and ongoing language change.

Keywords: glossary, calque, language, evolution, cultural exchange.

1. Introduction

Language is a living organism, shaped and reshaped through centuries of contact, cultural exchange, and innovation. One of the most telling signs of linguistic interaction is the phenomenon of calquing—the direct translation of foreign expressions into native terms. Romanian, a Romance language with deep Latin roots, has seen a significant influx of calques, particularly from French, Latin, Russian, and English. This essay explores Romanian calques through a detailed glossary and an analysis of their historical, social, and linguistic implications.

Language contact has always played a crucial role in shaping the lexicon and structure of any language. In the case of Romanian, a Romance language surrounded by Slavic and other non-Romance languages, this contact has led to a rich and diverse vocabulary. One significant phenomenon resulting from language contact is the use of calques — expressions or words borrowed from another language by literal, word-for-word or root-for-root translation.

Calques reflect political influence, cultural exchange, or technological adoption. Romanian has adopted calques from Latin, French, Russian, English, German, and other languages throughout its history. This essay explores the nature of Romanian calques, their sources, their impact, and concludes with a glossary of notable Romanian calques arranged alphabetically.

2. Definition and Linguistic Context

A calque (or loan translation) is a word or phrase borrowed from another language by literal, word-for-word translation of its components. Unlike loanwords (borrowed terms that retain their original phonetic structure), calques are entirely 'naturalized' into the target language.

There are generally five types of calques:

- Lexical calques – individual words or idioms.
- Structural calques – syntactic patterns.
- Semantic calques – meaning expansion of an existing word.
- Phraseological calques – idiomatic expressions.

- Loan-translations – literal translations of multi-word phrases.

In Romanian, calques reflect both its Latin heritage and its various historical influences, particularly from Slavic languages, French (especially in the 19th century), and more recently, English.

3. History and Origin of Romanian Calques

Romanian developed under the influence of Latin but was isolated from other Romance languages, allowing Slavic and later Turkish and Hungarian influences to leave their mark. During the 19th-century national awakening and modernization, French was the prestige language, introducing a wave of both lexical borrowings and calques. Later, in the 20th century, Russian (during the communist period) and English (during globalization) added layers to Romanian vocabulary through calques.

3.1. Latin Influence

Romanian descends from Vulgar Latin, and many Latin expressions persist in calqued forms, often reintroduced via French or Italian.

3.2. Slavic and Hungarian Influence

Centuries of proximity to Slavic populations introduced calques from Bulgarian, Russian, and Serbian. Hungarian, particularly in Transylvania, contributed various structural and lexical calques.

3.3. French Influence (19th Century)

The 19th century marked a "Francization" of Romanian during the modernization of institutions and society. French expressions were calqued extensively, especially in literature, law, and administration.

3.4. Russian and Soviet Influence (20th Century)

Under Soviet influence, Romanian absorbed many ideological, bureaucratic, and political calques from Russian, shaping official discourse.

3.5. English Influence (Late 20th – 21st Century)

In the digital and global era, English has become the dominant source of calques, especially in business, science, and technology.

4. Alphabetical Glossary of Romanian Calques

A – A da greș (lit. to give mistake) – from German 'Fehler machen' – 'to make a mistake'

A avea grijă (lit. to have care) – modeled on Latin 'habere curam' – 'to take care'

B – Bună ziua (lit. good day) – modeled after French 'bonjour' – common greeting

C – Casă de cultură (lit. house of culture) – from Russian 'дом культуры' – cultural center

Câmp de luptă (lit. field of fight) – from French 'champ de bataille' – battlefield

D – Drum de fier (lit. road of iron) – from German 'Eisenbahn' – railway

Drepturile omului (lit. rights of the man) – modeled on French 'droits de l'homme' – human rights

E – Economie de piață (lit. economy of market) – from English 'market economy'

Efecte secundare (lit. secondary effects) – from French 'effets secondaires' – side effects

F – Fără precedent (lit. without precedent) – modeled on French 'sans précédent' – unprecedented

G – Grup de lucru (lit. work group) – from English 'working group'

I – Imagine de ansamblu (lit. image of ensemble) – from French 'image d'ensemble' – overview
 L – Luptă de clasă (lit. fight of class) – from Russian 'классовая борьба' – class struggle
 M – Minorități etnice (lit. ethnic minorities) – modeled on French 'minorités ethniques'
 N – Nivel de trai (lit. level of living) – modeled on French 'niveau de vie' – standard of living
 O – Ordine publică (lit. public order) – from French 'ordre public'
 P – Putere executivă (lit. executive power) – from French 'pouvoir exécutif'
 R – Război rece (lit. cold war) – from English 'Cold War'
 Reformă agrară (lit. agrarian reform) – from French 'réforme agraire'
 S – Societate de consum (lit. society of consumption) – from French 'société de consommation'
 Stat de drept (lit. state of law) – from French 'État de droit'
 T – Tehnologie avansată (lit. advanced technology) – from English 'advanced technology'

5. Impact on the Romanian Language

Calques have helped Romanian maintain a Romance identity while assimilating modern concepts from dominant cultures. They enabled linguistic adaptation to technological, political, and social changes without excessively relying on phonetic borrowings. For example, calques like 'drepturile omului' and 'stat de drept' allowed Romanian to align with European political discourse in its own linguistic framework.

6. Controversies and Purism

Romanian linguistic purists sometimes criticize calques, especially modern ones from English, for potentially corrupting the structure or spirit of the language. Phrases like 'a face sens' (calqued from English 'make sense') or 'a aplica pentru un job' (from 'to apply for a job') are increasingly used in informal speech but are considered incorrect by traditional standards. Linguists continue to debate the line between natural language evolution and linguistic degradation.

7. Conclusion

The richness of the Romanian language lies in its capacity to adapt, evolve, and integrate influences from a wide range of cultures. Calques, as literal translations of foreign concepts, offer insight into Romania's cultural and political ties throughout history. Whether influenced by French elegance, Slavic pragmatism, Soviet bureaucracy, or Anglo-American innovation, each calque embodies a piece of linguistic and historical exchange.

Calques represent a fascinating window into Romanian's interactions with the world. They preserve the lexical and syntactic integrity of the language while allowing it to grow and adapt. As Romania continues to engage with global culture, the process of calquing will undoubtedly persist—bridging local linguistic tradition with global communication.

The study of calques reveals not just linguistic evolution but also the cultural pathways that have shaped modern Romania.

Whether welcomed or resisted, calques are a natural consequence of cultural contact and linguistic creativity. As this glossary illustrates, they offer insight not only into Romanian vocabulary but also into Romania's historical and political journey through the centuries.

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