

# A Short Description of the Romanian Language as a Romance Language with Latin, Dacian and other Characteristics

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## **Abstract**

*Languages connect people with their roots, providing the opportunity to learn and teach, to express feelings and hopes. When learning one’s native language, people are imprinted with a permanent identity connected not only to history but also to the future development of society.*

*The Romanian language was born in a Dacian space, with a Latin influence, and Slavic, Greek, and other particularities, especially concerning words that came from different domains. The Romanian language is very rich in old expressions that cannot be translated into other languages and has its own associated letters like ș, î, ț, ă, â. For example, in Romanian, “Romania” is called România and it includes the Romanian letter â. Although other languages, like English or German have “sh” written in English or “sch” written in German and pronounced as Romanian letter “ș”, the letter “ș” is present just in Romanian alphabet and comes from the Latin letter “s” with a comma below.*

*This paper includes a general description of the evolution of the Romanian language as a Romance language, and analyzes its Dacian influences and its development. This work also describes the oldest traditions concerning the Dacian people and their spiritual symbol, Zalmoxis.*

*Traditionally, the Romanian language has been used by people to share stories or fairy tales. The Latin and Dacian languages have played an important role in the formation of Romanian. Therefore, when analyzing Romanian, a description of the Dacian and Latin influences on the formation of this language, that have provided a rich cultural influence, is necessary.*

*The last part of this paper includes a short overview concerning Greek and French cultural influences on the modern development of Romanian language.*

**Keywords:** *Romance languages, Romanian language, Latin, Thracian-Dacian language, traditions, Zalmoxis.*

*Introduction*

Language represents one's connection with a culture, or a set of values in the historical context. A native language connects people with the past, with ancestors and provides an opportunity to receive and transfer information, having the chance to learn from others and teach them to express feelings and hopes. At the same time, when learning a native language, people learn how to interact in a specific context and how to express themselves. Additionally, people receive a permanent identity connected to the history of their culture and to the future development of their society. People also learn how to express an individual point of view and a collective perspective on different subjects.

An important function of one's native language is its ability to forge an individual or collective identity related to religion, culture, gender, and values that people consider fundamental in the context of their society.

Considered a Latin language, Romanian emerged from a Dacian speaking space. However, this language also contains Slavic, Greek, and Turkish influences. Trying to explore how the language was formed and what impacted different characteristics of Romanian, is important to analyze its particularities.

Traditionally, Romanian is connected to stories that were used by people to share their values from one generation to another, through the oral aspects of Dacian language, but also to Latin influences, especially as the language started to be written using Latin, after the use of Cyrillic alphabet. People used the language to share stories and tales, being influenced by old texts that inspired oral stories.

Culturally impacted by Greek and French, the Romanian language expanded, enriching its vocabulary in different domains.

Starting from a general description of Romanian, as a Romance language, this paper includes an analysis of the evolution of the Romanian language, its Latin and Dacian aspects, and presents how Romanian was shaped from its beginning to modern times.

*Latin, Thracian-Dacian influences, and other aspects concerning the evolution of Romanian*

Romanian was shaped by Latin and the Thracian-Dacian language in the context of its development, receiving as well other influences.

Romanian is a Romance language, a language with Latin influences, from the same family as French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. When many foreigners discover Romanian, they are surprised to find that the Romanian

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language has a strong Latin influence. Slavic and Greek influences can also be observed on Romanian.

The Romanian language is presented by Alexandru Rosetti as representing the continuing spoken Latin language on the oriental side of the Roman Empire. This gives Romanian a Latin background, as well as being influenced by the Dacian language of the locals or by the languages of other people that came to live in this area.

Romanian is part of Appennino–Balcanic linguistic group which includes Dalmatian, Albanese, and Central and Southern Italian dialects. Rosseti (1986) identified several common characteristics of these languages: keeping the Latin *u* in Romanian and Italian dialects, as in the Romanian word *furca* (pitchfork) and the Sardinian word *furca*. Different words that include in the pronunciation of *p*, *t*, *k*, and *s* can be found in Romanian, Spanish and Italian:

- in Romanian the words *căpăstru* (halter, bridle), *roată* (wheel), *păcurar* (shepherd; also refers to a worker that extracts oil), are similar with the same words in Spanish: *cabestro*, *rueda*, *pegureiro*, and in Italian *capestro*, *rota*, *pecoraio*. (p.13).

The Romanian literary lexis indicated the following composition in the middle of 20th century:

- 20 per cent inherited Latin words;
- 11.5 per cent Slavic words;
- 3.6 per cent Turkish words;
- 2.4 per cent Modern Greek words;
- 2.17 per cent Hungarian words;
- 43 per cent Romance words, with a majority of 38.40 per cent from French.

(Dindelegan, 2013, p. 3)

Genealogically, Romanian has characteristics from Latin (Neolatin) and from the lexical point of view, Romanian is Thracian-Dacian, including over 150 words from the Thracian and Dacian substrate, used gradually in the Danubian Latin (Căprioară, 2020, p. 432).

Grumeza (2009) observed several conjectures about the Dacian language, stating that “Dacians did not have a written language” and “were not a migratory population”, having “settlements today in and around modern Romania”. The group of words in Romanian that are supposed to come from the Dacian language include: *abur* (steam), *amurg* (down), *balaur* (serpent), *baiat* (boy) (p. 86).

When learning Romanian, learners pay attention the words that come from Dacian words, like *brânză* for *cheese* or *copac* for *tree*. The presence of a consonance gives these words a specific particularity.

Thraco-Dacian, a “satem type Indo European”, forms the substratum of the Romanian language, concerning mostly “anthroponyms, toponyms, hydronyms, or names of mountains”. In Greek and Latin treatises of botany and medicine there were found Dacian medicinal plant names (Dindelegan, p. 2).

In the 11th century, there were published the first documents that confirmed the existence of a group of people called Romanians (ăz Rum), presented in the Arab-Persian world, in a treatise called *The Ornament of Histories* by the historian and geographer Gardizi. Romanians (ăz Rum) are described as a group of people from the Roman Empire located between the Danube and a large group of mountains (Decei, 1936, p. 19).

Friedrich Christian Diez (1833), an important German linguist, made the first significant analysis of Romance languages and stated that Romanian was a Romance language. Diez called the language Valachian as the language of Valachia, Țara Românească, and placed it together with other Latin languages, showing that the Romanian language is a similar language with Italian, Spanish and Portuguese, and French. In his research that started in 1836, Friedrich Diez analyzed in several sections, the declination, conjugation, nouns, and verbs of the Romanian language (p. 3). Diez showed that all the mentioned languages have the same influence concerning writing and speaking, keeping also a strong cultural influence from the Latin culture.

Diez also emphasized how different old Dacian ballads with Thracian influence helped develop the language by preserving the Dacian influence on the formation of the Romanian language. From this source came the particularities of the Romanian language that included its roots that shaped the language as the society changed.

Further, Diez explained how Daco-Romanian literature started in 1580, demonstrating its importance that at that time was not yet discovered and promoted (p. 67). His reference to the beginning of Daco-Romanian literature was published in his first work edition.

A literature with Dacian roots and Latin influences started slowly to develop and to be shared among people.

The oldest period of the Romanian language, called “Common Romanian, Proto-Romanian, Primitive Romanian” is the period between the 10th and 12th centuries that was before the separation of the four Romanian dialects.

The four Romanian dialects were: “a north Danubian dialect (Daco-Romanian) and three south Danubian dialects (Aromanian-Macedo Romanian, Megleno-Romanian and Istro-Romanian)” (Dindelegan, p. 4).

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In 1780 the first book of the Romanian grammar was printed in Vienna by Samuil Micu and Gheorghe Șincai.

Based on the evolution of different alphabets throughout the world, it can be observed that the Cyrillic alphabet represents one of the oldest to reflect the evolution of languages and of humanity. The Cyrillic alphabet is one of the oldest and most widespread alphabets in the world nowadays, alongside the Latin (or Roman) alphabet, Chinese characters, the Arabic script, and the Devanagari script. Concerning its evolution, the Cyrillic alphabet is considered to originate in the 10th century from areas around Bulgaria, where before were used other alphabets, like Gothic alphabet, invented in the 4th century and Slavic Glagolitic alphabet, invented in the 9th century by St. Cyril (Iliev, 2013, p. 221).

Invented in the year 893, the Cyrillic alphabet is considered to be an expanded form of the Greek uncial writing system, and therefore, it is not treated as a totally unique alphabet like the old Glagolitic alphabet (Iliev, p. 225).

After the formation of the Romanian principalities Moldova and Wallachia, for around five centuries the Cyrillic script was used for religious rituals and as the liturgical and administrative script, first used in Slavic and later also in the Romanian language.

Concerning the official beginning of the Romanian language, the earliest known text in Romanian is from 1521, representing a Letter from Neacșu of Câmpulung to the Mayor of Brașov. The letter was written using the old Cyrillic alphabet that was used until 1859 in both Moldova and Walachia.

In the middle of the 16th century, Deacon Coresi went to Brașov to provide Romanian churches with religious services in Romanian. In 1559-1560, Coresi started to publish *The Christian Inquiry*, printing 35 different religious books from Church Slavonic to Romanian. Other translations of religious texts took place in Transylvania in 1570, and in 1648 the whole of the New Testament was translated into Romanian in Alba Iulia under the coordination of Metropolitan Simion Ștefan. The printing press was introduced in Iasi in 1640 and some of the religious texts were written directly in Romanian. In 1673 Dosoftei, Metropolitan of Moldova, published the Romanian verse version of the Book of Psalms (Baker, 1998, p. 534).

The first literary texts written in Romanian were *The Chronicles*, by Grigore Ureche (1642-1647), Miron Costin (1675), and Ion Neculce (1732). The *Chronicles* also include short stories, biographies, and historical aspects of political events concerning the Romanian Principalities (Hill, Alboiu, 2016, p. xvii).

From the end of the 17th century, the Latin alphabet was starting to be largely used for more texts, and in the middle of the 19th century, from 1860 to 1862, Cyrillic was replaced by a Romanian alphabet that was based on the Latin alphabet.

*Traditions associated with stories that influenced the Romanian language*

Traditionally, the Romanian language is connected to stories that were used by people to share their values from one generation to another through old Thraco-Dacian ballads and Latin stories that influenced the development of the Romanian language.

In Romanian, Romania is written as România and is a reflection of the people's identity. The structure of the name of the country, Romania, is very complex and is assumed to come from the toponym "Romanus+ia". Romanus as the Oriental Roman Empire or the Byzantine Empire, that represented Oriental Christianity (Metzeltin, 2006, p. 221). Symbolically, when analyzing the suffix ia, it also is a separate word that refers to the Romanian word ia. The word ia refers to a handmade Romanian shirt of white fabric decorated with embroidery and beads. This handmade Romanian blouse, ia, is a part of traditional clothing, connecting Romanians to their traditions and ancestors. Ia, as a component of the country's name, connects Romanian people to their identity, their cultural and historical heritage that shaped their historical evolution, reflecting the distinctive continuity of Romanians, connecting them with the old values of the past, and the perpetuity of the traditional heritage.

The official use of the name Romania for the country was started in 1862 by Alexandru Ioan Cuza who was named the first head of state of the Romanian Principalities in 1859. After his abdication, in 1866, the name Romania was included in Article 1 of the Constitution of 1866: "The United-Romanian Principalities constitute a single indivisible State, under the name of Romania" (Constitutiune. Titlul 1, 2010).

Different stories that traditionally influenced the development of the Romanian language and identity are found in old documents. Book IV of Herodotus' Histories mentions the oldest treaty concerning the history of Getae, and was written to describe the expedition lead by King Darius I against the north-pontic Scythians (Florea, 2019, p. 14). The Persian army met the Getae army which was considered to represent bravery and justice among all the Thracians tribes. This document remains of a considerable importance for the description of those times, and for the presentation of the traditions associated with the bravery

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of those tribes that inspired many generations to follow and to include it in short-stories, songs, and ballads.

This short description of the history of the Geto-Dacian people influenced not just the formation of a future group, shaped by an ideology of bravery and strength in the light of history, but also created a mixture between historical events and the imagination of the old communities that was later transferred to future generations. Zalmoxis was also mentioned as a central figure that dominated the Geto-Dacian people's social and religious life.

Eliade (1972) describes Herodotus' presentation of Zalmoxis (p. 257). He was seen as the central deity of the Getae who were considered to represent the bravest of all Thracians. Zalmoxis influenced the social and religious lifestyle of the Getae. Herodotus mentioned two important rituals that were dedicated to Zalmoxis. The first one happened every five years and it was represented by the sacrifice of a messenger. The second ritual was practiced during thunderstorms and included the shooting of an arrow. Both of these rituals had a strong significance for the community's lifestyle and then for the development of its collective identity based on bravery and its connection with the forces of the nature.

From Herodotus description of the Greeks, readers can find another symbolic influence on both science and tradition. It is stated that Zalmoxis (Salmixis) "was a man who once was a slave in Samos, his master being Pythagoras, son of Mnesarchus; presently, after being freed and gaining great wealth, he returned to his own country" (Eliade, 1972, p. 257) This story inspired the transfer, through language, of different beliefs associated with the collective wisdom of Zalmoxis as a hero that came from the past to the present.

The story of Zalmoxis shows on the historical side, a significant Dacian influence on the development of Romanian identity, and on the scientific side, it reflects the Greek influence in the Black Sea region that impacted the Romanian language, science, and culture.

*Greek and French cultural influences on the Romanian language*

A complex concept present and functional in different societies is the concept of culture. It is described by Hou (2013) as representing "a set of fundamental ideas, practices, and experiences of a group of people that are symbolically transmitted generation to generation through a learning process" (p. 31). Culture includes different aspects of a people's identity, their values, and

attitudes concerning diverse challenges and their capacity to express themselves in distinctive ways.

Constantin Erbiceanu (1888) was the founder of Modern Greek studies in Romania and described the cultural Greek influence on Romanian economic and religious activities, historic texts, and architectural designs. In 1888, Erbiceanu was the editor of a volume that included a group of Greek chronicles which made reference to different aspects of Wallachia and Moldavia during the Phanariot time. In the introduction it is argued that the influence of the Greeks in Dacia was known before, during, and after the Roman conquest (pp. ix-xiii.).

Erbiceanu stated that in the context of learning about Romanian history, it is very important to elaborately research old Greek texts that reflect Romanian history and that can offer data and historical facts that can open more perspectives when interpreting Romanian religious traditions and philosophy (p. VIII).

Additionally, a strong cultural influence on Romanian culture, history, and language came from the French. At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, France was seen as a model for many countries in Europe, being the first republic of Europe that led to the development of modern Europe. This made Romania follow the example of the French state, society, and culture and seek French support in promoting and realizing its political and cultural goals. Therefore, a large number of Romanian writers, historians, philosophers, and painters studied in France. Xenopol and Iorga had some of their texts first published in French, and from 1869 to 1914 Pompiliu Eliade created the “national consciousness of Romanians” with his French texts (Kellog, 1990, p. 89).

### *Conclusions*

In summary, the Romanian language as a Romance language has its particularities due to the location of its development. Romanian is a language formed under Dacian influence, representing the Latin language that spread on the oriental side of the Roman Empire. The language was influenced by old Thracio-Dacian ballads, and, according to the German linguist Diez, Daco-Romanian literature started in 1580, which was not widely known at that time.

The oldest period of the Romanian language was the period when the language was known as Common Romanian and it existed from the 10th to the 12th century before the separation of the four Romanian dialects. The first book of Romanian grammar was printed in Vienna in 1780.

The official beginning of the Romanian language includes the earliest known text in Romanian that was written in 1521, representing a Letter from Neacșu of

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Câmpulung to the Mayor of Braşov city. The letter was written in the old Cyrillic alphabet that was used in both, Moldova and Walachia, until 1859.

After the formation of the Romanian principalities, Moldova and Wallachia, for around five centuries the Cyrillic script was used for religious rituals and for writing official documents in Romanian. Starting from the end of the 17th century, the Latin alphabet was used for more texts and in the middle of the 19th century Cyrillic was totally replaced by a Romanian alphabet based on the Latin alphabet.

The name of the country Romania, in Romanian România, was officially used for the first time during Alexandru Ioan Cuza's leadership and was included in Article One of the Constitution of 1866. Symbolically, the name of the country connects Romanians with nature and ancestral times.

Based on different traditions that shaped the Romanian language and Romanians identity, it can be concluded from Herodotus' Histories that the history of Geto-Dacian is perceived as presenting those people that were shaped by an ideology of courage and strengths, living somewhere between reality and an imagination of old ancestral communities. They had Zalmoxis (Salmixis) as a model which was a central figure that dominated their social and religious lives. This model of life was then transferred to future generations through stories associated with this period.

Herodotus wrote what he learned from Greeks, and Greek culture and language also influenced the Romanian language, its history, science and philosophy, and it contributed to the development of Romanian culture.

Culturally, the modern Romanian language was influenced by French. In the 19th and 20th centuries, numerous Romanian writers, historians, painters, philosophers, sculptures, and architects studied in France, having a strong impact on the modern development of the Romanian language and culture.

The Romanian language is a Romance language, similar to French, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese. Romanian is considered to be the persisting spoken Latin language of the oriental side of the Roman Empire, part of the Appennino-Balcanic linguistic group. The evolution of this language showed, in the middle of the 20th century, a strong presence of Latin and words from the group of Romance languages, with a strong influence from French words. Several words from the Dacian language are still present in it, representing the Thraco-Dacian substratum of Romanian.

Geographically isolated from the other Romance languages, Romanian nonetheless has remained a Romance language and it has kept, to this day, its Dacian roots.

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