

## **The Classical Languages and Their Actual Contribution - The Case of German and Greek**

Elvis Bramo<sup>1\*</sup>, Salian Cullhaj<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Greek Department, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Tirana, Albania; <sup>2</sup>Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Tirana, Albania

\*elvisbramo@yahoo.com

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### **Abstract**

In research on lexical and linguistic interference from one language to another, the case of Greek language contact with German has drawn attention. Greek, as one of the most widespread classic languages in the world, came through the Latin channel to convey its words, mostly science (e.g., mechanics) and the arts (e.g., aesthetics), in German-speaking countries. This paper investigates how two languages that share no common borders acquired numerous common words with matching semantic meanings. Tracing linguistic contact from the Greco-Roman period and the Migration Period (Völkerwanderung) through Martin Luther's translations of the Holy Scriptures, gymnasium schooling, and lexicons like the Duden dictionary, the study analyzes historical borrowing across multiple domains. The findings reveal that German absorbed extensive Greek vocabulary, technical prefixes, and expressions spanning medicine, pharmaceuticals, space science, religion, sports, arts, linguistics, personal names, toponyms, and contemporary culinary interactions. Despite continuous purification efforts by German linguists starting in the eighteenth century, these loanwords persisted and adjusted their pronunciation or structure. The article concludes that classical languages served as an inexhaustible treasure for German terminology, leaving Greek elements so thoroughly assimilated that modern native speakers naturally perceive them as native vocabulary rather than foreign linguistic additions.

**Keywords:** Greek, German, word, term, field, linguistics, period, contact, interference

## Introduction

Our initial interest focused on how the two languages that share no common borders have many words in common, often with the same semantic meaning. The answer is to be found in the Greco-Roman period, led by Julius Caesar<sup>1</sup>, who constituted the main foundation of this cultural dominance over other nations (around 58 BC) that enabled linguistic contact between the two languages in this study<sup>2</sup>.

As a result of economic, social, and cultural imposition, the linguistic impact of Greco-Roman culture on the peoples of other tribes that they conquered was formed. Many inscriptions in Greek throughout the region of Galatia prove how widespread the recognition of Greek in these areas was, either as an indicator of its presence or as an indicator of the fact that Greek was once considered a "lingua franca" that should definitely be spoken by the upper classes<sup>3</sup>, with Greek certainly conveyed to the conquered territories through a third language, namely Emperor Caesar's Latin. This effect explains how words like Apotheke (pharmacy) from gr. φαρμακείο, chirurg (surgeon) from gr. χειρουργός, catharsis (catharsis) - from gr. κάθαρση, and kathode (discount) from gr. κάθοδος are found in its dictionary.

Another period of contact between the barbarian tribes of central Europe and North and South (call barbarian tribes, because at that time the people that were not Roman were considered Barbarian) was The Migration Period (Völkerwanderung) circa 450 A.D. who managed to reach as far as the North Africa and reformatted the boundaries of the peoples of the time affecting even their former invaders, still deeply in administrative shape, but however gradually moving over to the administrative and terminology terms that they found in their passage through the Roman civilization which prevailed for centuries in these areas. As a result, numerous prisoners and Roman monks that were assimilated into new society forms continued to convey automatically cultural elements of the Greco-Roman civilization also affecting Christianity of the barbarian tribes, but also by transmitting to them words, as they possessed the power of knowledge in multiple areas and they were maritime traders, slaves, poets, scholars, philosophers, etc. where for the words and the terms used by them there were not equates to the German language and naturally the consequence was that these words would simply adjust their pronunciation. Horace (65-8 BC) said: *Graecia capta ferum victorem cepit et artis intulit agresti Latio*.

The Gothic language, initially part of the wider family of the German language from which it then diverged, reflects in its dimension, although written in the IV century AD, a number of Greek vocabulary words transmitted into the German language. It involves a more or less restricted lexicon, because it is mainly church vocabulary, but it contains many paradigms worth mentioning, such as: (Old German) Pfarre – (ahd) Pfarre, paroecia -paroikia –παροικία<sup>4</sup>, etc.

The Renaissance of the 15th and 16th centuries led the German-speaking countries to educate their children in gymnasiums in Ancient Greek because the translation of the Holy Scriptures by Martin Luther (Martin Luther) brought about the need to understand the meaning of these texts in their original language. Through their translation into German, the Holy Scriptures introduced a variety of concepts, names, and phrases that gradually became part of the German language and were now mastered even by ordinary people who had had no previous contact with classical education or, even more so, with Hellenic civilization. Thus, under the influence of the operation of high schools and the courses that took place in them, the classical Greek language was introduced into the German dictionary up to the 19th century.

This allows us to find words such as: *akropolis, agora, ethos, amfibrachus, autochtoon, autochthonous, palindrome, diaspora, hybris, kosmos, pathos, schisma, cosmos, heureka, epos, delta, pi grek (in geometry), alfa en omega* (used metaphorically as an expression), etc. In the field of medicine, German borrowed more words from Greek. Some of them are: *diafragma, epidermis, epilepsie, herpes, astma, lepra, dosis, bronchiën, hymen, acne, aorta, clitoris, larynx, meniscus, eczeem, dermatitis, cirrose, oedeem, trauma, colostomy, therapeut, angiogram, leukocyt*, and many names of specializations, such as *pediatre, chirurg, psychiatrist, gynecolog, oncolog*, etc. Pharmaceuticals also contributed paradigms such as glucose, glycerine, kerosine, pepsine etc.

In the sports field, Greek led to the promotion of various sports words established in ancient Greece<sup>5</sup>. These include words such as *marathon, pentathlon, triathlon, decathlon* etc.

From the field of the arts we have words such as *estetic, fotograaf, amfitheatre, bibliotheek, drama, komedie, museum, mysterie, myth, proza, retorica, diploma*, etc.

In the field of religion we have words such as *clerus, kyrie-eleison, apocalyps, apostel, engel, evangelie, orthodox, patriarch, priester, synagoge* etc.

In the field of space science, ancient Greek scholars established this sector's terminology with words that dominate to this day, such as: *astrolog, astronomie, ellips, horizon, komeet, planet* etc.

The same happened with the German Martin Kraus (1607) and his works in German, Turcograecia and Germanograecia, where one can find numerous Greek words.

The development of science and its branches created the need for terminological vocabulary with neologistic lexemes from Greek; as is well known, medicine, philosophy, theology, pharmaceuticals, biology, flora and fauna, linguistics, the arts, and many other fields retained their terms from Greco-Roman civilization for their naming needs<sup>6</sup>.

These were the main motives for the entry of Greek words into German, where, despite the continuous efforts of German linguists to purify their language from the 18th century onward, they continued to be present, as seen in classical expressions in texts translated into German and in the personal names with which even today many Germans are baptized, e.g., Angela, Dionysius, Agatha, Stephan, Dorothea, Sophia, Andreas, Lydia, Melanie, Peter, Theodor, Helena, Sebastian, Nikolaos, Irene<sup>7</sup>, Hektor, etc. Toponyms such as Kristianopel, Palaiocome, and Neanderthal began appearing in German cities because of the admiration that the German King Ludwig I had for Greece and Greek civilization; beyond the fact that some buildings in Bavaria were built in the style of ancient Greece, in 1825 his son, Prince Otto, was sent as the first king of free Greece.

Browsing the German dictionary: "Duden, Deutsches Universal Wörterbuch." we note that technical<sup>8</sup> terms are commonly found either adapted to the rules of German or completely left just as in borrowing language:: *topos* - from gr. τόπος, the word *idiot* gr. Old ιδιώτης del *idiot*, in German the word *Krise* comes from the Greek κρίση, the word *organ* emerges as *orgel* from Greek ὄργανο, *der Dialekt* from gr. διάλεκτος. Today in the German language, we face many of the Greek prefixes used in the technique words in German. Prefixes as *aero*, *neo*, *hyper*, *pneuma*, *tele*, *syn*, *kosmo*, *bio*, *astro*, *auto*, *anti*, *agro*, *elektro*, *homo*, *demo* etc., which have found their way into German through her contact with Latin as we explained above.

Not a few are compounds with suffixes from Greek, such as:

- gram at the word *hologram* from gr. ολόγραμμα<sup>9</sup>
- *logie* from gr. λογία.
- *skop* from gr. σκόπιον
- *thik* from gr.θήκη
- *pathie* from gr. πάθεια.
- *id* from gr. είδης.

Leaving aside borrowings from the 15th and 16th centuries, we see that even today German tourists' contacts with Greeks have enabled the entry of certain words in the modern period, mainly culinary terms such as *ouzo*, *souvlaki*, *retsina*, *tzatziki*, *moussaka*, *gyros*, etc.

From the Linguistics and rhetoric we come across words as:

*Epithet*, *idiotic*, *litotes*, *prolegomena*, *lexicon*, but we also have words such as: *etymologicon*, *hexameter*, *zeugma*, *oxymoron*, *polysyndeton*.

Also interesting are some of the expressions found in the linguistic studies of Emmanouil Geogudakis that he mentions in one of his articles: *Das A und O*, *Unter der Ägide*, *Trojanisches Pferd*, *Danaidenfass*, *Gelegenheit beim Schopf packen*,

*Kassandrarufen, Pyrrhussieg, Sisyphusarbeit, Zankapfel*. All these expressions exist today and will remain in use in the German language in the future, as all these centuries have failed to change anything about them.

## Conclusions

The classical languages served as an inexhaustible treasure for today's terminology of many Western languages; in this setting, they made an indisputable contribution to the German language. Numerous examples from different fields of life, more than knowledge, openly testify to this phenomenon.

The contribution of classical languages in the field of lexicology does not, even today, represent a linguistic problem of clearing the language of terms from classical sources, because these words have been completely assimilated, so that users of Western languages, where classical languages mainly find their place, do not feel them to be foreign. This distinction can be made only by someone who is fluent in Ancient and Modern Greek, and also in Latin. Most users perceive these words in the context of a functional individual and collective bilingualism, and they cannot distinguish them from the vocabulary of their native language.

## References

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## Notes

1. See Caesar, G. Jul, "De bello gallico", Athens: Grigoris, 2007, Edition:I, paragr. 29.

2. See Georgidakis, E. "Barbarian raids and the decline of the West" A2, Papazisi, Athens 2014, pg. 209.
3. Wierschowski, L., "Fremde in Gallien- Gallier in der Fremde: Die Epigraphisch bezeugte Mobilität", Stuttgart, Steiner 2001, pg. 448.
4. Wierschowski, L., "Fremde in Gallien- Gallier in der Fremde: Die Epigraphisch bezeugte Mobilität", Stuttgart, Steiner 2001, pg. 448.
5. Here we can see how even centuries after the Olympic Games of ancient Greece, the same terms and designations continue to be used so far in different languages of the world.
6. For more read the Swedish author Carolus Linnaeus, "Psittacula alexandri", Linnaeus 1758
7. For more refer to, Günther Steffen Henrich, "Von Kristianopel bis Kiritimati. Heutige Ortsnamen griechischer Etymologie außerhalb des griechischen Kernraumes", Ekkehard Stärk, Philologus nr. 141.
8. The word technique itself has its origin from the Greek, see, Babinioti J., "Ετυμολογικό Λεξικό της Νέας Ελληνικής Γλώσσας", Κεντρο Λεξικολογίας, Athens 2010, pg. 1420.
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