

Linguistics

LANGUAGE PURISM IN THE MIRROR. WILLIAM BARNES AND AUGUST TREBONIU LAURIAN

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Abstract

The article sets out to draw a very brief comparison of the common features shared by the purist attitudes displayed by two 19th-century English and Romanian scholars, William Barnes and August Treboniu Laurian and classifies them according to the set of criteria devised by Thomas (1991). The paper also goes over several concepts regarding purism. The author of the paper analyses the concept of purism in both countries within the intellectual and temporal dimensions of purism.

William Barnes was a Victorian reformer, a polymath, a priest, a poet in his Dorset dialect and a utopian prescriptivist linguist capitalizing on the Germanic word stock of English and suggesting the removal of excessive Latin & Greek vocabulary. He wrote several linguistic books and poetry. August Treboniu Laurian was an outstanding Romanian reformer and polymath. He penned a theoretical book heralding his reformist belief: "Tentamen Criticum", in 1840 and a huge Dictionary of the Romanian language in 1876 (after a seven year work) capitalising on the Latin word stock of Romanian and suggesting the removal of non-Latin lexemes.

Keywords: purism types; William Barnes; August Treboniu Laurian; Saxon/Germanic; Latin.

1. The outline of the paper

The flicker of Saxonising purism was rekindled in the 19th century by scholars like William Barnes (1801-1886), who eulogized "the speech of landfolk", wrote theoretical works and carried out purist experiments in his poetry.

In 19th Romania stands the corresponding major figure of August Treboniu Laurian (1810-1881), who experiments with a new method for reshaping a new language, levels criticism at the impurity of Romanian by writing a theoretical book on his method and compiles an impressive

dictionary of Romanian which winnows out the Latin elements from the non-Latin elements.

We have chosen William Barnes and August Treboniu Laurian as the two foremost polymaths and representatives of the purist currents in language policy in both England and Romania. They both lived in the 19th century and stand out as staunch and well-grounded reformers, thinkers and practitioners of their creed. They both wrote works in which they spelt out their linguistic thinking and illustrated it in important lexicographic endeavours.

We draw a very brief parallel of the common features shared by the intellectual and critical attitudes evinced by these two 19th century English and Romanian scholars and slot them according to the set of criteria propounded by Thomas (1991) as follows: archaising, ethnographic, elitist, reformist, playful and xenophobic. We discuss several concepts regarding purism. We also embed the whole current of purism in both countries within the intellectual and temporal framework of purism.

We agree with Roper (2012) that the means and origins of PS (purist substitutions) creation in different periods of linguistic purism contributed to a more or less successful purism campaign. The most productive means and origins of PS creation for English purists turned out to be affixation, mostly by means of autochthonous affixes, compounding, calquing, archaic and obsolete vocabulary from English dialects.

In the case of Romanian purists, the most productive means and origins of PS creation were borrowings from Latin, archaic or obsolete vocabulary, but also word formation by means of Latin origin affixes.

2. Waves of purism in the mirror. England and Romania

Judging from the chronological principle, one may identify four stages of purist activity in England (see also Roper, 2012):

1) 16th & 17th centuries evince a reformist activity setting out to right the linguistic wrongs and revive the English language

2) 18th century saw an elitist kind of purism as English scholars tried to produce a reasonable English language by ridding it of barbarisms.

3) 19th century witnessed both xenophobic purism and elitist purism.

4) 20th century and 21st century teem with literary experiments, most of them being playful, counterfactual or tongue-in-cheek.

William Barnes belongs to the third stage. Purism was directed at the abundant foreign element, which is represented by Latin and/or French words. Barnes wanted more Germanic words, PS's (purist substitutions), which are true to the making of English.

In the Romanian cultural area, the literary form of Romanian was the result of a tug-of-war between two opposite trends: the traditionalist supporters and the purist supporters who stood up for a Latinised aspect of

Romanian. The purist trend emerged in Transylvania in the 18th century, but it reached across the Carpathians in the 19th century, where the newly founded Romanian Academy took over the task of printing the all-encompassing *Dictionary of the Romanian Language* called *Dicționariulu limbei române*.

The stand-off in language matters reflected in the etymological spelling and the phonetic spelling and the clash between the Latin and Cyrillic alphabet supporters were finally solved by the decision of the Romanian Academy to adopt the Latin alphabet in its entirety. Later on, as the political unity of a Romanian state had taken shape under the spell of Titu Maiorescu's charisma, the phonetic spelling got the upper hand of the etymological spelling and has been pursued like this ever since. (see also Laurian 2010)

Therefore, in Romanian culture, we find the first wave of purist endeavour in the 18 century, in Transylvania. This was the fruit of Romanian historians and philologists known as belonging to the Transylvanian School (*Școala Ardeleană*). It was reformist and somewhat xenophobic, but it displayed nationalist goals.

The second wave of purism occurred in the 19th century, and to this period, we ascribe the activity of August Treboniu Laurian, both in Transylvania and in Bucharest. The purist activity had a bearing on the foreign elements in Romanian: the Slavic, Turkish, Neogreek and Hungarian words, which Laurian wanted to be banished. Laurian wanted more Latin words, PS's which are true to the nature of Romanian. His purism was somewhat xenophobic and elitist as Laurian evinced nationalist and reformist goals. Laurian practised mostly lexical purism.

We may even discern a further third wave of unplanned, but a de facto RE-LATINISATION of Romanian in the 20th century and 21st century through the process of the modernisation of Romanian that becomes synchronised from the terminological point of view, making up for the terminological lag and acquiring an important amount of Latin words via French, Italian and even English (paradoxically enough, these English neologisms are mostly of Romance origin). This wave strives for modernising and updating Romanian towards globalist goals.

3. Types of purism in England and Romania

Certain language backgrounds called for the appearance of linguistic purism in England and Romania. Thus, purist activities first came into being at the time of language standardisation if we look at this process taking in the 3 phases the pre-standardisation, standardisation and post-standardisation phases in the evolution of a language.

We again agree with Roper that: “linguistic purism was obviously of different kinds, and had different aims in various periods of the development of English. So, the first stage of purist activity in England was of the reformist type with the aim to reform and resuscitate the language in the 16th and 17th century”.

In the 18th century, i.e. in the situation of language standardisation, linguistic purism in England was of elitist type when English scholars tried to mend the English language standards and hinder them from 'unnecessary' internal pollution (all sorts of barbarisms). Elitist purism claims that “the language should be spoken and (especially) written following the usage of a social elite, represented historically by the court” (Roper 2012)

The 19th century saw two types of linguistic purism in England: xenophobic (i.e. directed against loanwords), represented by William Barnes and the poets G.M. Hopkins and W. Morris, etc. and elitist purism, represented by G. Graham, A. Bain and other language critics. The xenophobic purism did not reap any career success in England. (see also Roper 2012)

In the 20th century and after, English purism becomes a matter of playful, counterfactual or parodic experiments, sometimes in a tongue-in-cheek manner or a work written in jest.

4. Purism as Language Planning Ideology

As we have said, choosing procedures and resources for PS creation at different stages of linguistic purism was decisive for the fate of purism activities. Language planners go for borrowings and affixation by means of autochthonous affixes, compounding, calquing, and archaic resources of language dialects.

We agree with Brunstad that in standard definitions, linguistic purism is considered a language planning ideology implying opposition to foreign elements. “Purism is the opening of the native sources and closure of the non-native sources for the enrichment of language. Though the native sources are open in general, the dialectal and literary sources are often treated differently.” (Brunstad 2003).

5. Purism as an Ideology of Substitution

Purist substitutions (PS) are the solutions, the lexical items put forward by the purists instead of some 'unwanted' words existing in a language (mainly loanwords). The formation of Purist Substitutions makes up the staple trade of purist activity in general.

It is now obvious that purism has functioned as an ideology for removing unwanted elements from the language and breathing life into autochthonous elements. Automatically, purism has also laid the foundations

for imposing language borders and language norms, particularly for standard languages.

Therefore purism represents a speech community designed to shield a language from, or to rid a language of, putative foreign items or other items deemed to be unsuitable for usage (including those coming from dialects, sociolects and styles of the same language).

Purism may have a bearing on all linguistic levels, but primarily on the lexicon. Above all, purism is an aspect of the codification, cultivation and planning of standard languages. (Thomas 1991)

Thus purism is a global phenomenon, and based thereupon, Thomas formulates a more comprehensive definition of purism, including opposition to dialectisms and other non-standard elements. As we can see, purists distinguish between the status of dialectisms and the status of foreign elements.

6. Purism as a mental construct

From a linguistic point of view, there is no such thing as a 'pure' language. All languages evince the presence of sundry kinds of loanwords. Furthermore, many languages are created on the basis of language contact and language mixing. (Brunstad 2003)

The notion of *pure* versus *impure* language, as we find it in linguistic purism, therefore refers to a mental construct. Yet, by achieving a special status in society this mental construct may be operative as a norm phenomenon or at least play a role in the process of norm formation. (Brunstad 2003)

We find these criteria of classification very helpful and euristic (Thomas 1991):

Directions: internal or external/ xenophobic

Goals: reformist, protecting, traditional, nationalist etc...

Types of purist substitutions (PSs): archaising, ethnographic or elitist

Substance: lexical, orthographic, morphological, syntactic, and phonetic

Another important remark was brought up by Brunstad, with whom we agree. According to him, foreignness & impurity are conceptual constructions. These constructs are not completely arbitrary, but may very well be based on folk linguistic attitudes which are untrue from an etymological point of view. As a mental concept, linguistic purism borders a lot on conceptualisation and subjective categorisation. Human conceptualisations such as *language* and *purity* are very often uttered as metaphors. Obviously, he is right to point out that by way of metaphors, people capitalise on their experience from a source domain (what is known)

in order to comprehend the more abstract content of a target domain. (Brunstad 2003)

Let us come back to the categories of purism put forward by George Thomas (1991):

- “1. Archaising purism: The language of the golden past ought to be kept pure. Literary tradition is important and innovations banned. (Examples: Latin, Chinese and Arabic.)
2. Ethnographic purism: This is a nationalist oriented purism where rural dialects are regarded as purer than urban speech and the standard. (Example: Icelandic.)
3. Elitist purism: The language of the educated elite in the city is regarded as the best. Substandards and regional varieties are banned. (Example: French.)
4. Reformist purism: A new society ought to be built, and new words and phrases ought to be supported. Purism is directed at old forms which are regarded as backward, often because they are associated with a colonial past. (Example: Swahili.)
5. Playful purism: Linguistic purism as an aesthetic game.
6. Xenophobic purism: The archetypal purist orientation with avoidance of foreign elements and use of native elements. (Purism in general.)”

Yet we must express a caveat about alleged xenophobia. Thomas (1991:80) calls any rejection of foreign elements “xenophobic”, but purism may indeed point at a construed outward threat without being xenophobic in the chauvinistic petty-minded way. Therefore we agree with McLelland, who claims that even if the bone of contention is foreign lexemes, the motivation may be non-chauvinist nationalist rather than chauvinist. (McLelland 2012)

It befalls to us to tell the xenophobia of chauvinist nationalism from a modern kind of nationalism which stresses the essential bond between nation and identity, while it more or less explicitly throws out chauvinism. We believe that this is the case for both William Barnes and August Treboniu Laurian.

7. William Barnes’ creed

Barnes’ plea and creed are expounded first in *Se Gefylsta, (the Helper)* (Barnes 1849), where he spells out his budding beliefs. The book pleads for a purist doctrine and claims that Anglo-Saxon English is purer than modern English. Barnes justifies this by adducing the arguments that Modern English has undergone the loss of important inflections and that it has forfeited useful words to less intelligible items of import.

Barnes trusts that Anglo-Saxon has the ability to thrive spontaneously from within itself and discusses two phenomena: the lexemes of the Anglo-Saxon word-choard and their potential. He also remarks on the loss of such words since Old English times. The book foreshadows the idea of basic word stems, a topic later discussed in *Tiw*. (Barnes 1862)

With *A Philological Grammar*, which appeared in 1854, Barnes thought he had managed to hit upon the essentials of grammar of any language, revealing thus their universal features by way of comparison.

Here Barnes re-expresses his belief in purism as he further clarifies its meaning. “A language is called purer” (Barnes 1869), he defined it now and henceforth, “inasmuch as more of its words are formed from its own roots.” (Barnes, 1869)

Although a classical philologist, Barnes levies criticism at the influence of Latin and Greek upon the English language. “A blind slavery to the Greek and Latin languages, and a readiness to believe that everything which imitates their idiom must be so far regular, has misdirected or fettered our whole literature.” (Barnes 1854)

In *A Philological Grammar* Barnes repeats that he once launched an appeal for the inversion of the historical tendency in the English language. Not only did he call for a come-back to autochthonous roots, but he also spelt out specific ways of achieving an authentic and autochthonous way of speaking. One should start turning out new Saxon verbs, nouns, and adjectives through cognates. It is interesting how for the first time Barnes sets about replacing entire groups of Latin English terms with Germanic counterparts.

At the core of Barnes’ activity lay the hope that a ‘pure English’, free from Greek, Latin, and other foreign influences, might be found (or, re-created). As he claimed in 1869 in his treatise *Early England and the Saxon-English*:

“English has become a more mongrel speech by the needless inbringing of words from Latin, Greek and French, instead of words which might have been found in its older form, or in the speech of landfolk over all England, or might have been formed from its own roots and stems, as (...) words have been formed in German and other purer tongues.”

A staunch defender of Saxonisms, Barnes had recourse to an array of arguments for Saxonising English. He claims that hybrid English makes for a more difficult learning experience:

“Thence English has become so much harder to learn, that, in its foreign-worded fullness, it is a speech only for the more learned, and foreign

to unschooled men, so that the sermon and book are half-lost to their minds.” (Barnes 1869)

The causes of this unbidden hybridization lie with “the slighting of Saxon English”, claims Barnes:

“Some of the mongrel form of our English has arisen from the slighting of Saxon-English, and other Teutonic tongues at our universities and in our schools.” (Barnes 1969)

Barnes argues for learnability and intelligibility as he claims that the purer a language is, the easier it is learnt and understood:

“Purity is deemed a good quality of languages, inasmuch the purer a language is, the more regular it is in clippings and breath-sounds and in the forms of its words and sentences; and the more readily it is learnt and understood.” (Barnes 1869)

Barnes thought that purist substitutions were the best solutions he fell back on in order to restore the lost Germanic glamour of English. As he was fluent in classical languages, called for the purging of English regarding French, Latin, Greek and other unwanted foreign influences so that it might be better comprehended by those without a classical background. For example, the word *photograph* (from Greek *light+writing*) would become *sun-print* (from Saxon). He came up with suggestions like: *wortlore* (*botany*), *welkinfire* (*meteor*) and *nipperlings* (*forceps*). Barnes went on to suggest *wheelsaddle* as an alternative to *bicycle* and *painlore* and *folkwain* instead of *pathology* and *omnibus*. Here we have to accept that such arguments about language turn out to be always political, and purism carries along an ideological load, however well-stowed away this may be.

It is well known that Willian Barnes bemoaned the loss of Saxon words. As a practitioner of his creed, he penned poems also in his Dorset dialect and thought the English showed no self-respect when they resorted to classical languages to make learned words. He bewailed the loss of old Anglo-Saxon words like *inwit*, *earthtillage* and *bodeword*, replaced by *conscience*, *agriculture* and *commandment*.

Barnes suggested that English should not only swap Latin words for Saxon ones (undersea instead of submarine or freedom instead of liberty); but that English should sometimes make new words to replace the Latin-derived ones. The word *bendsome* should replace *flexible* as a case in point.

Modern English has words like *solstice*, *equinox*, *disc* (as of the sun), and Sagittarius; but English has not become richer with these, since English has thrown away good Anglo-Saxon words like: *sun-stede*, *eaniht*, *trendel*, and *scytta*, to make room for these Latin origin lexemes, Barnes brings up the issues of this loss in his *Se Gefylsta* ‘The Helper’ work.

8. August Treboniu Laurian's creed

The counterpart of William Barnes from Romania, as keen, learned, passionate and staunch as Barnes, was August Treboniu Laurian (1810-1881). As a polymath like Barnes, he read several subjects: he read Philosophy in Cluj, and afterwards, he went on to study Physics, Mathematics and Astronomy at the Polytechnic in Vienna and Göttingen.

He was a philologist, historian, journalist and political leader of the 1848 Transylvanian revolution. As a founding member of the Romanian Academy he was chairman of the Literary Section of the Romanian Academic Society (1867-1876).

Laurian was raised in the spirit of high-flown intellectual Romantic ideals and believed that as a scholar he should pay his homage to his homeland by his contributions to the betterment of his mother tongue. Picking up the intellectual thread of the Transylvanian School from the previous century, he endeavoured to bring to light the Romanian word-hoard harking back to the period before the 13th century in Transylvania, and that is from the period before the coming of the Hungarians to Transylvania. (see also Roșu 2008)

He also sets out to bring to light documents and historical sources regarding Romanian history as he spells out his goal in his *Tentamen criticum in originem, derivationem et formam linguae Romanae in utraque Dacia vigentis vulgo Valachicae*:

“«Nonnullas harum curiosarum epistolarum hic attingendi haud inopportuno fore judicavimus locum, quum praeterea paucis admodum notae sint, et magnum historiae propagent lumen» ‘We deemed that it would not be an inappropriate place to touch upon some of these curious letters here, since, moreover, they are known to very few people, and throw a great light on history’.” (Laurian 1840)

Laurian speaks out against barbarisms and wobbly plebeisms. Laurian's spelling is meant to retrieve the archaic phase of Romanian hailing from before the splitting of the dialects from the north and south of the Danube. The first condition was the purity of language. “That is why we have looked for the original forms everywhere, we have preferred the older ones to the more recent, corrupt ones (...). We have stuck to etymology as to Ariadna's thread.”, the author confesses. (Laurian 1840) Laurian stuck to his principle throughout in his works. Laurian's mainstream work is his *Dictionary*.

The monumental *Dictionary of the Romanian Language* came into being in 1876 as the fruit of a longstanding co-operation with Ion Massim. But the creed evinced by Laurian's outstanding dictionary was foreshadowed in a theoretical book *Tentamen Criticum* from 1840.

9. Tentamen Criticum

Tentamen Criticum, appeared in Viena and it counts as a foundational scholarly work penned by August Treboniu Laurian, which the author himself looked upon as his „carte de visite”, being aware of the radical nature of his purism expressed therein. (see also Dumitraşcu 2006)

Tentamen Criticum takes in the author’s wholesale views on the history, origin, etymology, spelling, phonetics, and grammar of the Romanian language compared to Latin and other Romance languages. Here Laurian shows how Romance languages have sprung from sundry dialects of Latin, and according to the author’s belief, Romanian has sprung from the Sicilian dialect as the similarities between them stand out in the text of the prayer “Our Father”. Laurian claims that the Romans settling in Dacia came from the south of Italy, from Campania and Sicily.

Being under the spell of a Romantic outlook, Laurian describes Romanian as being „serious, righteous and imposing”, claiming to boot that the influences have not altered it since its grammar has stayed the same. Laurian dreams of reconstructing common Romanian before it split into northern and southern dialects, of showing dialectal continuity and sets out to reveal the role of the substratum in the language history.

Laurian claims that he tries a new method and attempts to apply a rigorous kind of criticism meant to reveal the language form in all its aspects and tracing back its history always accompanied by analogy regarding Latin and its Romance descendants: Italian, French and Spanish.

The logic behind the enormous design was that Romanian was deemed by purists like Laurian to be the corrupted outcome of classical Latin as it had been uninterruptedly spoken in the eastern part of the Roman Empire and therefore its improvement would be possible if the foreign words in common parlance were replaced by Latin words. This would be tantamount to retrieving a lost Paradise of pure Latin.

The plan was to remove all the foreign origin words and to have them replaced by Latin stock words without forcing them upon the potential users. Laurian also staunchly believed in the necessity of a literary language that could breed prestigious national literature.

10. The Description of Laurian’s Dictionary

Between 1871 and 1876, at the behest of the Romanian Academic Society August Treboniu Laurian, working with the linguist Ion C. Massim published the outstanding and unique *Dicţionarul limbii române*, the Dictionary of the Romanian Language, a real language monument in two volumes (1871-1875), in which he turned his principles into practice

compiling a giant amount of words in a Romanian free from non-Latin influences.

Part ONE in two volumes exclusively features the Latin stock words used in common parlance, or those not having gained currency yet or those already ousted. Part ONE includes two bulky volumes of 1864 pages taking in only Latin origin words, as we said.

Part TWO gathers doubtful origin words, alien words which, having only a synonymic currency, are “earmarked” as expendable, lending themselves to being ousted bit by bit. Part TWO is represented by a glossary running to 584 pages, playing host to these black-listed words, despite their usefulness in everyday communication.

As we have said, the tug-of-war in the linguistic field was a fact and Laurian’s *Dictionary* came under severe criticism from the supporters on the anti-Latin side as these grounded their criticism in that they claimed that the so-called righted wrongs would result in a simplified, poorer Romanian language, sometimes changed beyond recognition and difficult to understand by less educated people.

Laurian’s opponents claimed that Laurian wanted to give rise to an artificial language by ousting the non-Latin words and accused him of ignoring the fact that any literary language should to be underpinned by the language of the folk.

The number of entries is impressive: 50,000. The spelling principle is etymological. What also strikes us is the richness of regional, local or dialectal words, which betokens the authors’ commitment to dialectal survey and field research buttressing their theoretical stances.

This dictionary remained the main normative instrument of the Romanian Academy for a century and has underpinned the later editions of Romanian language dictionaries produced by the Romanian Academy, laying the foundations for a thorough, consistent study of Romanian. August Treboniu Laurian’s scholarly endeavour awaits and deserves novel evaluations and interpretations. (see also Macrea 1967)

11. Conclusions in the mirror: William Barnes and August Treboniu Laurian

William Barnes was a Victorian reformer, a polymath, a priest, a poet in his Dorset dialect and a utopian prescriptivist linguist favouring the Saxon/Germanic element and pleading for the removal of excessive Latin & Greek vocabulary for the love of English. He authored theoretical books like *An Outline of English Speech-Craft* (1854/1878), where he aired his xenophobic purist views (classification according to Thomas, 1991). His substitution type of purism was also archaising & ethnographic and his goal was reformist. He practiced lexical & morphological purism.

August Treboniu Laurian was an outstanding Romanian reformer and polymath. He wrote a theoretical book foreshadowing his reformist creed: *Tentamen Criticum* in 1840 and compiled a huge Dictionary of the Romanian language in 1876 (after a seven year work) favouring the Latin element and pleading for the removal of non-Latin lexemes deemed by him alien to the spirit of Romanian and collected in a separate lexicon. His did it for the love of Romanian. His direction of purism was xenophobic, his substitution type was also elitist and his goals were nationalist and reformist. He practised lexical purism for which he was criticised by his peers. Beyond any doubt August Treboniu Laurian remains an outstanding personality with extraordinary achievement in Romanian culture.

In this paper two exceptional scholars, two thoroughbred polymaths stand in the mirror as they both tried to reform their languages. William Barnes wanted to promote the Germanic element in The English language at the expense of the excessive Latin and Greek elements and August Treboniu Laurian wanted to promote the Latin element in the Romanian language by ousting the non-Latin elements. They both wrote theoretical books substantiating their claims and produced purist substitutions in their scholarly works. Although their approach bordered on utopian designs, they have left essential contributions for their English and Romanian culture, respectively.

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