OBSERVATIONS ON THE REALIZATION OF THE MORPHOLOGICAL OPPOSITION OF NUMBER IN NEUTER NOUNS WHOSE ROOT ENDS IN –*E*

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ABSTRACT. *Observations on the Realization of the Morphological Opposition of Number in Neuter Nouns Whose Root Ends in –e*. The study aims to identify the main rules governing the distribution of the etymological desinences for plural nouns (–*e* and –*uri*), in order to establish the principles that should be applied in the case of neuter nouns with the root ending in –*e*, a category of nouns that has been little studied in the literature. As neologisms are borrowed from other languages, this category is significantly enriched, becoming increasingly fluctuant and heterogeneous. Since the previously formulated rules do not apply consistently in the case of these nouns, the –*e* at the end of the root – which could be confused with the homonymous plural desinence – is the only element that imposes either the neutralisation of the number opposition (*nume* [name], *index* [index], *faringe* [pharynx], etc.), or its realisation exclusively by using the desinence –*uri* (*degradeuri* [colour gradients], *café-frappé-uri* [frappé coffees], *puzzle-uri* [puzzles], etc.).

Keywords: neuter gender, morphological opposition of number, etymological desinences –e/–uri, neuter nouns with the root ending in –e.

REZUMAT. *Observaţii referitoare la realizarea opoziţiei morfologice de număr a substantivelor neutre cu radicalul în –e*. Lucrarea de faţă îşi propune să identifice principalele reguli referitoare la distribuţia desinenţelor etimologice de plural (–*e* şi –*uri*) în vederea stabilirii principiilor care s-ar putea aplica în cazul neutrelor cu radicalul în –*e*, adică în cazul unei categorii de substantive puţin studiate în literatura de specialitate. Odată cu împrumuturile neologice, această categorie se îmbogăţeşte semnificativ, devenind tot mai eterogenă şi mai fluctuantă. Întrucât regulile formulate anterior nu se aplică în mod unitar în cazul acestor substantive, –*e*-ul din finalul radicalului, care s-ar putea confunda

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cu desinența omonimă de plural, reprezintă unica condiționare ce impune fie neutralizarea opoziției de număr (*nume, index, faringe, laringe, torace* etc.), fie realizarea acesteia exclusiv cu ajutorul desinenței *–uri* (*degradeuri, café-frappé-uri puzzle-uri* etc.).

Cuvinte-cheie*: genul neutru, opoziție morfologică de număr, desinențe etimologice –e/–uri, neutre cu radical în –e.*

The neuter gender is a grammatical category frequently studied in Romanian linguistics. Throughout the twentieth century, various hypotheses were advanced regarding the origin, the development, the designation, the peculiarities compared to the other Romance, Slavic and Germanic languages, the semantic content, the inflection, or the regional evolution of this class.[1] Numerous studies on the Romanian neuter gender refer to the evolution of the etymological type of plural desinences and their distribution in nouns. Based on empirical or statistical analysis, these studies are all set on finding a solution for one of the thorniest issues of Romanian grammar, namely the impossibility to establish a general rule regarding the use of *–e* and *–uri* in the plural of neuter nouns (Macrea, 1954: 135).

The expression of the number category by means of specific desinences was first studied by Iorgu Iordan, who, after analysing an extensive material excerpted from the literary texts of his time, stated that the original characteristic sign of the *ambigen* (ambigeneric, two-gender) plural, namely *–uri*, risked disappearing or, at least, diminishing because of the competing ending *–e*, which tended to spread ever more widely (Iordan, 1938: 18). The author studied the trends underlying the formation of the plural both in neuter nouns long entrenched in the word-stock and in neuter loan nouns.

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[1] The bibliography dedicated to the Romanian neuter gender includes reference studies, authored by some of the most prestigious Romanian linguists. From among these, we shall mention here only some of the best known and most valuable studies: Iorgu Iordan, *Pluralul substantivelor în limba română actuală*, in "Buletinul Institutului de Filologie Română 'Alexandru Phillipide'", Universitatea din Iași, no. V/1938, pp. 1-54, Alexandru Graur, *Les substantifs neutres en roumain*, in "Romania", no. 2/1928, pp. 249-260, idem, *Sur le genre neutre en roumain*, in "Bulletin linguistiqe", Paris, Copenhague, Bucarest, no. V/1937, pp. 5-11, idem, *Genul neutru în românește*, in LR, no.1/1954, pp. 30-44, idem, *Tendințele actuale ale limbii române*, Editura Științifică, București, 1968, 437 p., I. Coteanu, *Despre pluralul substantivelor neutre în românește*, in LL, no. 1/1955, pp. 103-117, Acad. Al. Rosetti, *Contribuții la studiul neutrului în limba română*, in SCL, no. 4/1963, pp. 433-438, Gr. Brâncuș, *Pluralul neutrelor în limba română actuală*, in SCL, no. 3/1978, pp. 153-262, I. Pătruț, *Despre genul neutru în limba română*, in CL, volume I, no. 1-4/1956, pp. 29-40, I.I. Bujor, *Genul substantivelor în limba română*, in LR, no. 6/1955, pp. 51-64, V. Arvinte, *Terminația de plural –auă a unor substantive neutre*, in SCL, no. 2/1959, pp. 213-239, Em. Vasiliu, *Observații asupra categoriei genului în limba română*, in SCL, no. 3/1960, pp. 769-770, Paula Diaconescu, *Numărul și genul substantivului românesc (analiză contextuală)*, in SCL, no. 3/1964, pp. 295-316 and the list could go on.

In the case of the former, he found that the plural forms ending in –*uri* were all the more numerous as the studied texts were older and that, in speech, they were better represented in the informal than in the formal register (Iordan, 1938: 40). In the case of ambigeneric nouns long extant in the language, the author noticed that "a battle is waged between the two most important (and traditional) desinences –*uri* and –*e*" (Iordan, 1938: 18), generating various double forms, the most widely used being the one ending in –*e* (Iordan, 1938: 18). The less and less frequent use of –*uri* was attributed to its expansion to feminine nouns, where it was used to mark plurals such as: *blănuri* (furs), *bunătăţuri* (goodies), *frumuseţuri* (beauties), *legumuri* (vegetables), *mâncăruri* (dishes), *mătăsuri* (silks), *ocăruri* (reproaches), *pânzeturi* (canvases), etc. (Iordan, 1938: 23), contributing to the formation of what Alexandru Graur calls an "over-plural", with a collective sense (Graur, 1954: 41).

As regards loanwords, which Iorgu Iordan described as belonging to the word-stock of educated people, the analysis of numerous examples taken from the literary texts of the time revealed that they exhibited a strong tendency to form their plural in –*e* (Iordan, 1938: 40). This led the linguist to state that "the more recent the loan, the great the appeal of this ending" (Iordan, 1938: 30). There was only one exception to the rule: the neuters ending in –*iu* in the singular tended to regularly receive the desinence –*ii* in the plural: e.g. *consorţii* (consortia) (Iordan, 1938: 30).

The increasingly rare use of the desinence –*uri* in ambigeneric nouns is, therefore, explained in terms of its archaic and popular nature, of the loss of its status as a specific marker of neuter nouns in the plural, caused by its extension to feminine nouns, and of the competition exerted by –*e*, which is gaining ground because of neologisms. The author's predictions, based on the observations referenced above, indicate that the ending –*uri* in neuter nouns will eventually be replaced with –*e*.

I. Coteanu approaches the distribution of the desinences –*e* and –*uri* in plural neuter nouns from a different perspective. The conclusion he reaches is that in Romanian the differences between the two are not stylistic; in other words, they are not used to express the opposition *educated/neological/written* vs. *archaic/popular/oral*, as previously argued by Iorgu Iordan. The distribution of the two desinences is done according to phonological and morphological criteria, more precisely, according to accent rules and to the syllabic structure of the root.

The author notes that the desinence –*uri* has certain use restrictions. It can be used to mark the plural of neuter nouns that are oxytone in the singular, but not that of neuters that are paroxytone or proparoxytone in the singular. By contrast, the use of –*e* as a marker of the plural is not conditioned by the accent. It can be attached to any of the nouns in the aforementioned categories. On the other hand, however, –*uri* has the advantage of leaving the root of the noun

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unchanged, as it does not generate phonological alternation (either in vowels or in consonants). For that reason, it is preferred especially in the neuter nouns that, for various reasons (phonetic structure, linguistic novelty, monosyllabic character), cannot or should not alter the sound sequence of the root. Things are different with –*e*, which activates a whole inventory of vowel and consonant alternations (Coteanu, 1955: 116-117). By and large, the tendency of the contemporary literary language is precisely to avoid these phonological alternations in the root (Brâncuş, 1978: 261).

The specific features of the desinence –*uri* "have been used to form one-syllable neuter nouns" (Coteanu, 1955: 110). This is a category of nouns consisting of "all kind of words, both from the basic word-stock and from the broader lexicon, some of them new or very new" (Coteanu, 1955: 115). Thus, an analysis carried out on a sample of over 455 one-syllable neuter nouns – whether of higher or lower frequency in the language, whether they entered common use long ago or recently – reveals that the plural of only 35 nouns is formed with –*e*, and that 10-15 have double forms, ending either in –*uri* or in –*e*. In addition, –*uri* appears to be preferred over –*e* in all of the new neuter nouns, whose phonetic structure is not yet perfectly adapted to the Romanian language, as in the following examples: *bibelouri* (china figurines), *cadouri* (gifts), *depouri* (storehouses), *maiouri* (tank tops), *platouri* (plateaus), *radiouri* (radios), *sacouri* (jackets), *stilouri* (pens), *tricouri* (t-shirts), etc. (Coteanu, 1955: 110).

The existence of a series of nouns which used to form their plural with –*e* but resort to –*uri* to form it in contemporary language (*discurse – discursuri* [discourses], *răspunse – răspunsuri* [answers], *înţelese – înţelesuri* [meanings], *începute – începuturi* [beginnings]), in conjunction with the high frequency with which it is used to form the plural of certain categories of neuter nouns, shows that –*uri* remains a very active ending for the plural of nouns in the Romanian contemporary language (Coteanu, 1955: 114).

Alexandru Graur discusses this topic in several studies. Reflecting on Iorgu Iordan's statement concerning the existence of a clear tendency to relinquish the desinence –*uri* in favour of the desinence –*e*, he claims that he is not "fully convinced this thesis is correct" (Graur, 1954: 40), because in order to see which of the endings is used with greater frequency, "the numerous recent neologisms, which form the plural with –*uri*, should also be taken into account: *colhoz* (collective farm), *pud* (pood), *sovrom* (communist economic enterprise), *tanc* (tank), etc." (Graur, 1954: 40). Then, in the light of studies relating to loanwords, he nuances his position, maintaining, in any case, a dose of scepticism.

The author's analysis of the neologisms that enter the basic word-stock highlights the fact that there are many more loan words that form their plural with –*e* than those that form their plural with –*uri*. Being aware that the basic word-stock is not a relevant source for drawing objective conclusions about the frequency of etymological desinences (since it includes mostly words that have

been in the language for a considerable amount of time), Graur also undertakes a statistical study on the neologisms in the DLRM. The terms excerpted from the dictionary show that 39 of the neuter nouns starting with the letter D form their plural with –*uri*, 93 with –*e*, and 5 with –*i* (that last one is considered to be "rare" and is found only in *decenii* [decades], *detalii* [details], *domenii* [domains], *domicilii* [domiciles], *diluvii* [deluges]). A similar distribution of the desinences is identified for the entries starting with E (24 with –*uri*, 88 with –*e*, 7 with –*i*) and F (30 with –*uri*, 72 with –*e*, 4 with –*i*). If the ratio between the plural forms ending in –*uri* and those ending in –*e* is calculated, an average of 2.5 to 1 will be found in favour of –*e*. In spite of the statistical data obtained by analysing the DLRM, Graur is, once again, somewhat reserved. He points out that the statistic has been compiled for only three of the alphabet letters, that the dictionary does not always indicate the plural forms, that sometimes it does not recommend the more commonly used form and that, "in a language, not all of the words are equally significant: some are rarely used and pertain to a literary register, while others are more colloquial" (Graur, 1968: 127-134).

The study of the DLRM also leads to a series of secondary conclusions that reinforce Ion Coteanu's older assertions that the desinence –*uri* is more common in short nouns. It also supports the idea that the desinence –*e* occurs more frequently in compound nouns with an instrumental suffix, such as –*t(or)* or –*s(or)*. This idea is developed later by Gr. Brâncuş.

A second statistical study of seminal importance for the topic of the distribution and frequency of etymological desinences for the plural of neuter loan nouns is based on *Dicționarul explicativ al limbii române* (The Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian Language, DEX), the 1975 edition. Its findings reveal that out of 4568 loan nouns, 3061 form their plural with the help of the desinence –*e*, 1307 with the help of the desinence –*uri*, 161 with the help of –*i* and 57 have double plural forms, ending both in –*e* and in –*uri*. This study also confirms the pre-eminence of –*e* over –*uri*. The ending –*e* is identified in 66.75% of the cases, while –*uri* occurs in only 28.68%. The desinence –*i* has an extremely low frequency, being found in only 3.52% of the analysed situations, while doubles appear only sporadically, totalling just over 1% (Brâncuş, 1978: 255).

Several conclusions are substantiated by these statistical data. The desinence –*uri* is frequently found in: neuter loan nouns with a one-syllable root (e.g. *bar* [bar], *bec* [electric bulb], *blanc* [tanned leather], *bon* [receipt], *bord* [board], *chec* [cake], *cod* [code], *cor* [choir], etc.); compound derivatives with prefixes or prefixoids that are based on a one-syllable root (e.g. *afront* [offence], *arhetip* [archetype], *demisol* [semi-basement], *consens* [consensus], *export* [export], *nonsens* [nonsense], *substrat* [substrate], etc.); loans whose root ends in a vowel (e.g. *decolteu* [cleavage], *eseu* [essay], *jeleu* [jelly], *bolero̱* [bolero], *studio̱* [studio], *lo̱to* [lottery], *ra̱dio* [radio], *ze̱ro* [zero], *piure̱* [purée], *taxi̱* [taxi], *cinema* [cinema], etc.); and unassimilated loan nouns, which are still perceived as foreign (e.g. *cortex*

[cortex]*, memorandum* [petition]*, epos* [epic]*, hematom* [haematoma]*, sarcom* [sarcoma]*, crichet* [cricket]*, fault* [foul play]*, grepfrut* [grapefruit]*, ofsaid* [offside]*, jeep* [jeep]*, seif* [safe]*, miting* [meeting] etc.). The desinence –*e* is more common in the case of multisyllabic neuter nouns, derivatives with suffixes and suffixoids such as –*or (–tor, –sor), –aj, –on (–fon, –con), –ar, –ment, –ism* etc., that is, with derivation elements specific to the scientific and technical-professional jargon: *accelerator* [accelerator], *capsator* [stapler], *compresor* [compressor], *afişaj* [display], *ambalaj* [packaging], *avion* [airplane], *balon* [balloon], *ciclon* [cyclone], *abecedar* [primer], *abonament* [subscription], *condiment* [spice], *comunism* [communism], etc.

The author concludes that the distribution of the two plural endings among the neuter loan nouns is determined by the general tendency of contemporary literary language to avoid phonetic alternations in the root. Thus, in the first phase of the adaptation period, neuter loan nouns with non-Romanian endings automatically belong to the –*uri* type of plural. On the other hand, the loan nouns derived with suffixes and suffixoids that end in a specific consonant of the Romanian language belong to the –*e* type of plural, which, with rare exceptions (e.g. *miriapod – miriapode* [centipede-centipedes]), determines phonological alternations, especially of a vowel nature: *microfon – microfoane* (microphone-microphones), *avion – avioane* (airplane-airplanes), *capsator – capsatoare* (stapler-staplers), *horoscop – horoscoape* (horoscopes-horoscopes), etc. (Brâncuş, 1978: 258-262).

More recent studies on the competition between the etymological desinences of plural nouns –*e/–uri* show that, with the entry into the language of many inanimate nouns of English origin, classified as neuter nouns, the desinence –*uri* is experiencing a spectacular revitalisation, being preferred over –*e* (Pitriciu, 2006, 345).

As regards Anglicisms, –*uri* is encountered in the case of short/one-syllable words: *bluff, boom, brand, creek, flash, rock, start*, etc., in the case of long/two-syllable or multisyllabic words: *banking, charleston, compound, modelling, shopping*, etc., of compound nouns: *coffee-break, exit-poll, hypermarket* [hypermarket], etc., of oxytones: *paraflow, one-man show*, etc., of paroxytones and proparoxytones: *overlock, western*, etc. This has led some experts to assert that the desinence is not conditional on the stylistic register or on the length/the syllabic structure of the root (Dragomirescu, 2005, 117-118). The only past hypotheses that are valid in this case are the following two: 1. very recent neologisms that do not belong to the specialised languages tend to select –*uri*, and 2. specialised scientific and technical terms prefer the desinence –*e* even in the early adaptation stages: *browser, controller, scanner, toner* (the field of computer science); *banner, poster, prompter, recorder* (the field of entertainment), etc. (Dragomirescu, 2005, 119).

This literature review has highlighted the Romanian linguists' concern for identifying the rules for the formation of the plural in neuter nouns, in general, and in neuter loan nouns, in particular. However, studies reveal a

tendency to focus extensively on identifying the combinatorial possibilities of the etymological desinences *–e* and *–uri*, to the detriment of other themes such as: the peculiarities of the subclass characterised by the neutralisation of the number opposition or the evolution tendencies of neuter nouns that end in–*iu/–eu* in the singular and in *–ii/–ee* in the plural. That is why, in what follows, we will examine a niche topic: neuter nouns with the root ending in *–e*. Our approach is aimed at identifying the particularities of this class and of its members, the influence that the singular form exerts on the plural form, the neutralisation of the number opposition vs. its realisation through specific desinences, and orthographic and orthoepic aspects of the plural forms.

With the exception of uncountable nouns, such as *spate* (back), *lapte* (milk), *sânge* (blood), *full-time, porridge, room-service, striptease, mascarpone, mate, panetone*, etc., which differ in terms of age and degree of adaptation to the Romanian inflectional system, neuter nouns ending in *–e* in the singular are subdivided into:

A. Nouns that do not realise the number opposition: *apendice* (appendixes), *cefalotorace* (cephalothoraxes), *codice* (codices), *faringe* (pharynges), *indice* (indexes), *laringe* (larynges), *meninge* (meninges), *metatorace* (metathoraxes), *microsporange* (microsori), *nume* (names), *pântece* (wombs), *portavoce* (megaphones), *prenume* (first names), *renume* (renown), *spadice* (spadices), *sporange* (sori), *supranume* (sobriquets), *torace* (thoraxes), etc.

The number of words included in this category seems to be oscillating. Under pressure to realise the number opposition with the help of specific desinences, some of them tend to change either their singular or their plural form.

For example, *pântece* (womb), inventoried as a neuter noun that does not realise the number opposition, according to the older dictionaries (Scriban, 1939; DLRLC), has created an alternative singular form: *pântec*, which currently doubles and competes with the variant of the singular *pântece* (DOOM2; DEX 2009; MDA2). If the latter prevails and becomes entrenched in usage, the noun will slide into the better represented and more stable category of the neuters of the following type: (consonant) *–Ø /–e*: *scaun – scaune* (chair – chairs), *sat – sate* (village – villages), *pântec – pântece* (womb – wombs).

Microsporange (microsorus) is inventoried as a neuter noun that does not realise the number opposition (DOOM2). However, in the case of the root *sporange* (sorus), older in the language, a gender mutation has already occurred. Older dictionaries identify it as a neuter noun, *sporange – sporange* (DLRLC; DMLR), while the current ones list it as a masculine noun: *sporange – sporangi* (DOOM2; DEX, 2009, etc.), which realises the number opposition through the specific desinences: *–e/–i,* in keeping with the model: *frate-fraţi* (brother-brothers), *munte-munţi* (mountain-mountains).

The gender mutation, brought about by the tendency to avoid the singular – plural homonymy, can be found in other cases as well. For example, *indice* (index-indexes) is considered to be an invariable neuter noun when used

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in the sense of bibliographical or citation listing, but a masculine noun that realises the number opposition: *indice – indici* (index-indices), when referring to all other meanings.

Also, *cleşte* (pliers) used to be considered as an invariable neuter noun (Scriban 39; DER). Subsequently, it was included among neuter nouns of the type *cleşte – cleşti* (pliers) (GA, 1963: 70), and then was characterised as a masculine noun, since, in this category, the combination of desinences is much more common (DLRLC; DEX, 1998; DEX, 2009; DOOM2).

A similar change may be expected in the case of the noun *portavoce* (megaphone), because *voce* (voice), the root of the word, is a noun that realises the number opposition through the same type of specific desinences *–e/–i*: *voce – voci* (voice – voices). Given the classification of the latter as a feminine noun, *portavoce* (megaphone) should slide into the category of feminine nouns with *–e* in the singular and *–i* in the plural: *o portavoce – două portavoci* (one megaphone – two megaphones), rather than into that of masculine nouns with identical desinences: *un portavoce – doi portavoci*.

As regards the neuter nouns that end in *–e* in the singular and that are invariable from the point of view of the category of number, they are generally limited to an old lexeme, included in the basic word-stock: *nume* (name – names), with its derivatives: *prenume* (first name – first names), *supranume* (sobriquet – sobriquets), *renume* (renown), and to a few Latin-Romance neologisms in the specialised fields, ending in a palatal consonant, more precisely, in the groups *–ce, –ge*, with their possible derivatives: *torace – cefalotorace* (thorax – cephalothorax), *metatorace* (metathorax), etc.

When the latter mark the number opposition through specific desinences: *sporange – sporangi* (sorus – sori), *indice – indici* (index – indices), the tendency is to select, without fail, the *–i* of plural masculine or feminine nouns at the expense of the other desinences, such as *–uri,* from the plural of neuter nouns. This conditioning might be determined by the ending of the root. Despite the fact that theorists claim that nouns ending in a palatal consonant can take, without restriction, both the desinence *–e* and the desinence *–uri*, all of the excerpted examples render the palatal graphically through the clusters *–ci/–gi*: *bici – bice* (whip – whips), *brici – brice* (razor – razors), *sforaci – sforace* (rope – ropes), *teglici – teglice* (last – lasts, tools used by cobblers), *trăgaci – trăgace* (trigger – triggers) or *bâlci – bâlciuri* (fair –fairs), *beci – beciuri* (cellar – cellars), *clenci – clenciuri* (hook – hooks), *clinci – clinciuri* (clinch – clinches), *ghiveci – ghiveciuri/ghivece* (one-pot dish – one-pot dishes/pot – pots), *lipici – lipiciuri* (glue – glues), *meci – meciuri* (match – matches), *plici – pliciuri* (click – clicks), *puci – puciuri* (coup d'état – coups d'état), etc. (Pitriciu, 2006: 348-349; GALR, 2005: 81). If we accept that *ce, ge* have a slightly different palatal timbre from *ci/gi*, then we can say that in end position, the palatal followed by *–e* imposes certain combinatorial restrictions. In other words, any noun that ends, in the singular, in *ce/ge*, which marks the number opposition through specific desinences, will select

solely the desinence *–i* to mark the plural, after the model of the masculine and feminine nouns with similar phonetics: *cange – căngi* (spear – spears), *cruce – cruci* (cross – crosses), *lance – lănci* (lance – lances), *lege – legi* (law – laws), *minge – mingi* (ball – balls), *pace – păci* (peace), *salce* (old form of *salcie*) *– sălci* (willow – willows), *voce – voci* (voice – voices), etc. (f.), *doge – dogi* (doge-doges), *rege – regi* (king-kings) (m.), etc.[2] The impossibility of these nouns to combine with another plural desinence can also be seen in an example such as *sânge – sângiuri* (blood) (plural form of the neuter not accepted by DOOM2, but inventoried by numerous other dictionaries: DLRLC, DEX 1998, DEX 2009 and others). It appears that a combination with *–uri* causes a slight alteration of the palatal, as *sângiuri* has a slightly different pronunciation from the unaltered variant *sângeuri (*sânge* + *uri*). The data on which this hypothesis is based are, however, insufficient to draw a clear conclusion in this regard. In order to do this, further, more detailed research is needed on other words as well. Experimental research is particularly necessary to either confirm or disprove the different phonetics of the *ce/ge* vs *ci/gi* groups and their combinatorial possibilities.

B. Nouns that achieve the number opposition exclusively with the help of the etymological desinence of the plural *–uri*. What they all have in common is that they have relatively recently entered the language and that they have the ability to receive, in addition to the plural desinence, all article types, including the enclitic definite article. This has led some researchers to consider that they are completely adapted to the Romanian inflectional system (Dragomirescu, 2005: 121). On the other hand, however, they are individualised in many other respects. They are nouns derived from different languages: French: *bie*, *bourrée, col-roulé*, English: *office, puzzle*, Spanish: *ole* (Andalusian dance). They can be both short/one-syllable words: *cafe, site, mouse*, and long/two- or multi-syllable words: *home-page, degrade* (colour gradient)*, walkie-talkie.* They can be oxytone: *cloisonné, portbebe*, or paroxytone: *aide-mémoire, autoservice* (car service)*.* They can belong to the field of science/technology: *autodafé, pipeline*, but they can also represent words in general use: *piure* (purée), *single*. They can be adapted from the point of view of the spelling: *degrade* (colour gradient), *file* (filet) or not: *boogie-woogie, cottage* etc.

As is clear from the examples above, in their case, none of the rules previously laid down can be relied upon to express an exclusive association with the plural desinence *–uri*. The only constant feature that could determine such a conditioning is the presence of *–e* at the end of the root, but even this *–e* is of several types:

a. final stressed *–e*, pronounced and written as in Romanian: *autodafe* (auto-da-fé), *bie* (biais, oblique), *bucle* (bouclé), *cafe* (café), *degrade* (dégradée,

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[2] The only exception to this rule seems to be *bridge* [pron. *briğ*] *– bridge-uri*. Listed by the older dictionaries as an uncountable noun (DLRLC, DLRM), *bridge* seems to have acquired a plural form over time: *bridge-uri* (DOOM2, DEX 2009). However, because it is a non-adapted neologism, its phonetics in the source language are slightly different from those of an adapted noun, ending in *–ge*, of the *laringe* [larynx] type.

gradient), *file* (filet), *hașe* (haché), *lame* (lamé), *nescafe* (instant coffee, Nescafé), *ole* (olé), *parfe* (parfait), *pate* (pâté), *piure* (purée), *portbebe* (porte-bébé, carrycot), *sote* (sauté), etc. Most of the nouns in this subcategory are neologisms of French origin, oxytones whose French pronunciation is faithfully rendered with the means provided by the alphabet of the Romanian language.

b. final stressed *–e,* pronounced, but graphically rendered by means of the letter "é" or by the groups of letters: "ai", "ay", "ez": *bourrée, café-frappé, chardonnay, cloisonné, col-roulé, consommé, crème brûlée, forfeit, pince-nez*, etc. (Pitriciu, 2006: 350). As a rule, French loanwords that retain their etymological spelling belong to this category.

c. final –e is unpronounced/mute*, but rendered graphically: aide-mémoire, quiche, aftershave, autoservice* (car service*), boogie, boogie-woogie, bridge, cottage, device, drugstore, drive, duty-free, exchange, mouse, pipeline, puzzle, ragtime, remake, sample, self-service, service, single, site, slide, skate, template, upgrade, update, walkie-talkie,* etc. Most of these nouns are Anglicisms that have recently entered the language and are not adapted to the Romanian spelling. Some of them are so new that they have not even been recorded by the dictionaries.

In all of the examples above, the presence of an *–e* that could be mistaken for the homonymous desinence (Dragomirescu, 2005: 118) at the end of the root of neuter loan nouns is an element of sound and spelling (sometimes only of spelling)[3] that demands the selection of *–uri* as the sole marker of the plural. In accordance with the current rules, this desinence should be attached without a hyphen if the nouns end in letters of the Romanian alphabet that are pronounced the same way as in Romanian: *cafeuri* (café), *degradeuri* (gradients), *portbebeuri* (porte-bébés), etc. but with a hyphen if the final letter is written and pronounced differently: *chardonnay-uri* (chardonnays), *col-roulé-uri* (col roulés, polo necks), *quiche-uri* (quiches), *service-uri* (services), etc. (DOOM2, 2005: LXII).

The above-mentioned rules, governed by the tendency to preserve the etymological spelling "especially in the case of loanwords deemed to be international words" (Athu, 2006: 45) generate spelling difficulties, especially in situations such as: *cafe – cafeuri* (café – cafés), *nescafe – nescafeuri* (instant coffee) vs *café-frappé – café-frappé-uri* (café-frappé – café-frappés). Ordinary speakers have no way of knowing, for each individual case, whether or not the spelling of the stressed *–e* at the end, which they do pronounce, has been adapted or not. Some inconsistencies in the normative dictionary, such as *cafe – cafeuri* (café – cafés) vs *ole – ole-uri* (olé – olés) (DOOM2) can be invoked to show the difficulty of this problem.

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[3] In the context of a more complex discussion on the preference of recent loanwords for one of the etymological desinences of plural nouns, Adina Dragomirescu shows that the selection of the desinence *–uri* is conditioned by the final *–e* in the spelling of the root of Anglicisms such as *cottage, device*, etc. (Dragomirescu, 2005, 117-118), but does not go into details, nor does she focus on this aspect in other types of loanwords.

Not only does the maintenance of the etymological spelling make it difficult to write down neologisms, but it also causes an excessive and unnecessary complication of the Romanian inflectional system. This has been seen in other cases as well: loanwords ending in consonants that are not specific to the Romanian language (Bocoş, Cuibus, 2016: 70-77) or compounds with *–man/–men* (Bocoş, 2018: 32-34). Thus, no less than three different patterns can be identified in the following category alone: neuter nouns with the root ending in *–e* which realise the number opposition with the help of the desinence *–uri*.

    a. *–e/–uri*: *degrade/degradeuri* (gradient/gradients), not recorded in GA (1963: 69-71), but inventoried in GALR (2005: 81) – is the result of the spelling adaptation of some French neologisms;

    b. the end-stressed [é] pronounced like in Romanian, but spelled as follows: (1) "é", (2) "ée" (3) "ai", (4) "ay", (5) "ez", or any other possible combinations of letters that are pronounced [é]/*–uri* in the source language: *café-frappé/café-frappé-uri* (café-frappé/ café-frappés), *bourrée/bourrée-uri* (bourrée/bourrées) is the result of the fact that certain French loan nouns have not adapted their spelling to Romanian. These loan nouns could be very easily assimilated to the variant above;

    c. silent final *–e/–uri* (in writing) vs (consonant) *–Ø/–uri* (in pronunciation): *puzzle/puzzle-uri* (puzzle/puzzles), *site/site-uri* (site/sites). This is an uncertain pattern, unnatural for the Romanian language, the result of the general tendency not to adapt Anglicisms and also some Frenchisms.

Given these possibilities, however difficult it would be to find acceptable solutions for adapting neologisms in the spirit of the phonetic principle, which is fundamental for Romanian spelling, and however many controversies this might generate, this remains the preferable option. Otherwise, the Romanian inflection would become excessively and unnecessarily complicated.

In conclusion, it can be said that neuter nouns ending in *–e*, almost all of which are loanwords that entered the language a long time ago or more recently, realise the number opposition exclusively with the help of the etymological desinence *–uri*, attached with or without the hyphen. This is due to sound and spelling conditionings (sometimes only spelling ones) related to the presence, at the end of the root, of an *–e* that might be confused with the homonymous desinence of the plural. The exceptions to this rule include a noun inherited from Latin, *nume* (name), with all its derivatives: *prenume* (first name), *renume* (renown), *supranume* (sobriquet), and a series of neologisms *–ce/–ge*: *laringe* (larynx), *faringe* (pharynx), etc., whose phonetics appear to impose restrictions in the selection of desinences. Apparently incompatible with the desinence *–uri*, they select solely the desinence *–i* to mark the plural. This desinence is often found in masculine and feminine nouns with identical roots. If they do not modify their gender (see, for example, the masculine *sporange – sporangi* [sorus – sori]), neuter nouns ending in *–ce/–ge* remain unchanged from the point of view of the category of number.

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