

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International License

## **From a Woolen Curl to an Emotional Wave**

**Nicolae STANCIU**

Center of Theory and Practice of Discourse, University, Dunărea de Jos', Galați,  
Romania

Institute of Romanian Language, Bucharest, Romania  
University, Ss Cyril and Methodius', Skopje, North Macedonia

### **ABSTRACT**

A lexical item found in some languages like Bulgarian, Macedonian, Romanian or Russian basically denominating a woolen ball or curl made me think of how superficially and unilaterally some words are traced to their language of origins. Confusingly mixed up with Germanic, Romanian and Slavic roots the term *volna* has generated a multitude of discussions among researchers of different backgrounds (anthropologists, ethnologists, historians, linguists). Having been found in numerous groups of Indo-European languages, the root displaying a trichotomic meaning was constantly labelled as Slavic in Romanian without any etymological incursion into the origins and the historical evolution of the word. In fact, being one of those lexical units found at the confluence of some language families the concept-word *волна* 'wool' resulted from a long historical process of assimilation and evolution while traveling through ancient and modern languages and tell us about its symbolical meaning conventionally represented as a round wave graphically resembling the shape of letter W. In Romanian it generated an adjective, a noun and even a toponym whose symbolism is connected to a noun and a verb signifying freedom and setting somebody or something free. Tracing back the term to the hypothetical languages of origins has become a fruitful possibility to reveal its symbolism based on the evolution from a concrete woolen curl to an abstract spiral going up to a peak and returning down through a circular motion symbolically marked by the lower half of the round shaped wave. Further on, the folk representation of demons and fairies who attract inattentive man or women who lose their way in the forest or die in the curved waves after becoming victims of their own illusions allowed us a cultural and discursive approach to etymology.

### **Introduction: A cultural and discursive approach to etymology**

Tracing back the origins and the history of the words and phrases might bring us some insights about cultures and language spoken by the people of different ethnicities. Instead of using the traditional matrix of formulating and interpreting etymologies that has been found in the current dictionaries by linking a lexical item to a congener from a neighboring dialect or language, I would rather prefer following the words from the possible language of origins to their historical linguistic development while keeping the connections of a phonetical body (sometimes changeable according to phonetical laws) and similarities in meaning. Thinking of languages as an activity and a form of life, namely a modality to recall, imagine and represent through lexemes a set of events and human dispositions, mostly in functional-cognitive and philosophical-discursive perspective (Gelner 1960:21-22, Crapanzano 1981, 2006; Haliday 2014: 53) I defined

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0. International License

a broader paradigm of interpreting etymologies considering the roots and derivatives as modalities to mirror the world. First, I have considered some possibilities of contextualization for etyma beginning with the first ancient language the word might have been used, following it across the languages it exists today and establishing the style in which it occurs, making cultural connections with ethnicities, folklore, history of empires and traditions and underlining their belongingness to a stratum that can cover different languages. Accepting the circulation of numerous words in ancient languages that have spread due to the empire domination and language imposition implies acknowledging etymological confluences and an evolutive approach of meaning, namely deviation and metaphorization. Reaching a second dimension of discursive etymology, we can consider analyzing at least three categories of meaning that not always overlap in the semantic matrix of a word: basic meaning, which is usually concrete; secondary one, resulting from a minimal deviation found sometimes in collocations and literary phrasal verbs. At this level, other categories of meaning might enhance the interpretation of etyma such as pragmatic (locutionary, illocutionary and performative) or metaphorical-symbolic, which ancient words are always potentially capable to develop. Finally, I bet on words relevance in building modern ethnicity just by following a simple ratio: languages encode cultures, and the last ones include folklore, linguistics, anthropological mentalities and traditions, slang.

### **Blurring meaning in the languages of origins**

Recorded in the etymological dictionaries of numerous languages either as a minimal root *wo(l)* or a derivative with a particle/suffix *-na*, the headword *volna* has developed a variety of meanings still closely or metaphorically related to the tridimensional semantics of the basis, which retains some main basic significations gradually stratified: *hair, wool, wave, will*. Possibly to be retraced to ancient languages, the root(s) might be discovered and followed in language families/groups chronologically disposed and reconstructed like the Proto Indo-European root *\*wlh<sub>2</sub>neh<sub>a</sub>* (Mallory & Adams 1996: 70, 178) and Indo-European one *\*uolk'-o* (Pokrony 2007: 1139, Derksen 2008: 527) with alike meanings spanning from concrete Hitt. *hulana* 'wool' (Kloekhorst 2008: 416), Skt. *woon* Av. *varanā* 'wool' (Monier-Williams 1976: Got. *wulan* (Lehman 1986: 411), Germ. *wollen* 'sort of wool' (Isbășescu 2007: 989), English *wool* (AHDEL 8150-8151), Lit. *vilna* 'hair', Mac + Russ. *волна* 'sheep wool' (Tomici 1986: 782, Vasmer 1986-1: 339) probably preserving the double divergent meaning from Old Church Slavonic *волна<sub>1</sub>* and *вал* 'wave' and *волна<sub>2</sub>* 'wool' (DOCS 1847-1: 154) to metonymic ones in Romanian and Russian *val* 'wave, shaft for felt' (Dal' 1998: 353-354, DEX 2016: 1301) or even Russ. *валенки* 'felt boots', Mac. *вала* (Tomici 1986: 75), Russ. *валить* 'to turn, to move around, to shape by rolling, to roll' or even Mac. and Old Russian *довольно* 'enough, with enough will, wish' and Rom. *a voi* 'to will' < Lat. *volo* or Rom. *voie* < Slav. *volja* 'permission, wish' (Vinereanu 2009: 901) which found cognates in Sks: *valati/velati* 'to roll', Engl. 'felting wool'. The trichotomic character of the root was basically noticed in the etymological charts bringing together *wel<sub>1</sub>*, *wel<sub>2</sub>* and *wel<sub>3</sub>* (Nourai 2014: 519-511) and became the main source of my interpretations. In fact, instead of linking words to a Slavic root as it has always happened in Romanian etymological dictionaries published in the last century (Scriban 1939: 1435, DEX 2016: 1301, 1328), it will be more interesting to dive into the origins of the cognates

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International License

and to make connections while keeping the tridimensional schemata of interpretation consisting of similarities in phonetical body and meaning, conceptual representation of a notion and the possibility of metaphorical deviation. However, less attention was paid to the cultural dimensions of etymology, namely to the signification the roots have acquired while traveling through languages and traditions and to the mechanisms of recovering words significations into the sets of national ethnicities.

### **Ancient semantical divergences and reverberations in the modern languages**

Preserving a double basic meaning either related to hair, to wave or to sheep wool the same root which survive in numerous Indo-European languages Av. *varesa* ‘hair’, Pahv. *vars*, curly hair’, Pers. *vares* ‘a string used in Zoroastrian ceremony resembling a curly hair’, Old Germ. *wula* ‘hair’, Lat. *villus* ‘shaggy hair’ (Nourai 2014: 509-511) has evolved into metaphorical nominal: Germ. *volk* ‘wolf’ or Rom. *vârcolac*, Srb. *vukolak* ‘werewolf’ and verbal meanings such as *varemi* ‘to wave’, Lat. *volvere* ‘to roll, to make a cavity’ and all other derivatives in English *evolve*, *evolution*, *revolve* or Romance languages Fr. *vol* It. *volo* ‘flight’, *volare* ‘to fly’, French and Rom. *volanta* ‘, Rom. *val* ‘fabric felt, wave’ < Slav. *valŭ* (DEX 2016: 1301) and Rom. *vălătuc* ‘wave, wool felt’ (DLR 2010-18: 1997).

This basic etymological matrix of the root with a trichotomic character has generated across different languages various meanings still quite related to the primordial significations. At the first level of basic meaning two words from Macedonian and Russian *волна<sub>1</sub>* ‘wool’ and *волна<sub>2</sub>* (Poposki & Atanasov 2007: 71, Tomici 1986: 96, Vasmer 1988-1:339-340) display a widely spread meaning across Lit. *vilna* ‘small hair’ or *wilna* ‘woolen boyar or ruler’s gown, mantle, kaftan’ and all other Slavic languages: Bg. *война*, Cz. *vlna*, Pol. *welna*, Slo. *volna*, Ukr. *вовна* and Latin *vellus* ‘wave, precinct’ oscillating among three main primordial significations: ‘hair, wool, wave, will’. Russian *валенки* ‘woolen boots’ denote the first movement to meaning deviation because the wool threads used for manufacturing them are curly. Apparently, the term *volos* ‘hair’ describes a special form of hair which curls like the sheep wool as the waves of the sea that resemble a spiral crest similar to a lamb. Going further on to mythological meaning the Slavic god *Veles/Volos* whose main characteristic was to wear a wand with a top in the shape of a curl. On the one hand, the noun and verb derived from *wol* ‘wave, to roll up’ have found an interesting expression in Mac. *вала* ‘to roll up, to give a circular shape by rolling, Russian where *вали отсюда!* ‘get away from here in a wavy way! lit. roll up from me/here!’ constituted the first step in the process of semantical divergence. In addition, the derivation of the root *vol+na* resulted in denominating a circular movement of the water wave: first half goes up as a crescendo and the second one represents a decrease suggesting the opposite value of dissipation and maybe failure of an imperfect and incomplete twist. This rolling up and down also denotes disorientation, incompleteness and loss of vigor and the name of the god *Volos* might have passed through a tridimensional meaning derivation and metaphorization, comprising the following steps: 1. *vo/wo* ‘hair, wool’ followed by 2. *vol/wol* ‘flight, going up’ and completed by *-los* ‘decrease, loss of intensity, disappearance, a falling wave’. Even in Persian the word concept *Vulidan* denominates the same circular movement like to move around person own axis or place in a spiral going up and down. As for Vedic linguistic and imagistic representations of *wol-na* the same derivative particle *-an/na* indicate the

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International License

reversal nature of the motion including action, emotion, movement, and symmetry. The same Indo-European root *wo* ‘wave, to take a circular shape’ and the derivate *wol* ‘will’ convey the idea of a reality transmitted by a person to the world. On the other hand, the Slavic god *Veles* [Weles] significantly preserved as a toponym in North Macedonia which has been associated with other Old Slavonic relics like *велик* ‘big’ (Meillet 1905: 394-395, Stanovska 1995: 44) reminiscent in a Romanian rank *vel-logofăt, pitar* ‘high-class boyar, noble’ (DEX 2016: 1312). Properly, within Indian tradition the thief of Indra’s sheep and his name could be understood as *volis depriving* ‘the reducer of desire, the distorter of eagerness’. An associated meaning to this Sanskrit conception of movement have generated in Romanian and Slavic an abstract metaphorical signification Rom. *voie-* Russ. *volja* ‘choice, desire, election, permission, will, wish’ (Dal’ 1998: 360, DEX 2016: 1327). The basic value of this item is reconstructive within the system of As-Veda starting with the shape of microcornea which has the shape of a letter W, a symbol of both knowledge and wave represented by the synesthetic sound of light and wave movement in technical term *volonka* ‘to wave, to convey information by radio station’ or even the Romanian phrase *a face valuri* ‘to generate wave, to boast oneself’ retains the both basic and metaphorical meaning of deadly illusions (*fata morgana*) or self-overpraising. In the same mythological track, the mythological name Lavinia apparently Latin has a cognate in Slavic *loviti* ‘to fish, to hunt, to catch the light of knowledge, to bring together perception and initiate a process of action as decision making and overpassing quests, steps which set free the hero and permit the advancement to a higher condition. A significant verb in Romanian *a (se) volnici* ‘to set free, to liberate, to allow’ (DLR 2010-19:1037) with regional circulation, which still keeps the initial signification of a quest followed by a liberation of something, somebody or even the self. Relicts of this sort can be found in Bulgarian, Hungarian, Macedonian, Polish, Romanian, Russian and Ukrainian or in the extended frame of the Balkans as possible multiple derivates from Proto-Slavic *volja* ‘(to) want, (to) will, (to) wish, preference’ (Georgiev et alii 1971: 179, Dal’ 1998: 154, Vinereanu 2009: 901) either adjectives or nouns such as Bg. *воля* ‘choice, habit, love, possibility to impose somebody’s wish to others’ Bg. *волник* (Georgiev et alii 1971: 175), Rom. *volnaș* (Samaritan 1934:184) or *volnic* ‘free peasant’ (DLR 2010-19:1037), Mac. *волно* ‘freely, independently’ (Tomici 1986: 57) and Rom. *volnicie* ‘freedom, independence’ (Samaritan 1932: 32, Scriban 1939: 1416), Rom. *năvalnic* ‘impetuous, stormy’, Rom. *nevolnic* ‘ailing, delicate, frail, impotent, incapable, pitiable, poor, powerless, sickly, weak, woeful’ as well as Rom. *nevoie*, Hung. *nevolja* ‘lacking the freedom, living in slavery’, Srb. *nevolja* ‘misery, need, necessity, poverty, trouble’ (Skok 1972: 657, Benkö 1976: 1112, Dal’ 1998: DEX 2016: 789,) and Russ. *наволно* ‘in a totally free manner, shameless’, Rom. *samavolnic* and Russian *самаволник* ‘acting at one’s own authority, autocratic, authoritative, despotic, high-handed, taken without having an official authority’ (Dal’ 1998: 3217, DEX 2016:1073) or verbs like Rom. *a năvăli* ‘to pounce’ and Russ. *навалить* ‘to overthrow something’ (Dal’ 1998: 2025) Rom. *a (se) volnici* ‘to liberate, to set oneself free’ (DLR 2010-19: 1039), Srb. *voliti*, Ukr. *вoлyмy* ‘to choose, to desire, to love, to prefer, to will, to want’ (Rudnickyj 1972: 465) belong to the same etymological and tridimensional root and found other cognates which have evolved at etymological confluence. The primordial ancient roots have developed through resemantization and derivation a multitude of synonyms and preserved both Latin meaning of *volutis*< *volvere* ‘to fly in spiral, to evolve, to involve, to revolve’

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International License

(Niermeyer 1976: 1117) and Slavic significations related to . Significantly a toponym like *Volna* suggest the same intermingling signification as staying for a migration in waves and settling down and functioning as an expression of inhabiting a place with free people brought into region (Samaritan 1931: 184). In the same track a later evolution might be noticed by a regional adverbial locution *de-a volna* ‘abundance, plenty, rich store’ (DLR2010-19:1029) having cognates in Mk. *доволно* ‘enough’ (Poposki & Atanasov 2007: 129, Tomici 1996: 126) and Russ. *довольный* ‘contented with, please with, satisfied with’ (Dal’ 1998: 132). Moreover, Slavic beliefs call him the spirit of the forest who acts at the cross-paths in a place in which a person loses his orientation and get easily lost. Other universal traditions referring to Fairies and Fates cause the same deviation: a person thinking that is walking straight on the right path experiences the greatest danger at the crossroad or in the forest and usually an inattentive young man is taken away and moves in the circle like a wave. Close to the Germanic *wol* and *wul* stays Romanian and Slavic *val* ‘wave’ (Dal’ 1998: 354, DEX 2016: 1301) which was supposed to be derived from the Baltic *volē* ‘wooden beater or roller for butter’ and all go back to the same Proto-Indo-European root *\*wlh<sub>2</sub> neh<sub>a</sub>* ‘wool, wave’ (Mallory & Adams 1996: 70, 178) though the meaning of wave might be a later loan in Germanic, Slavic and Romanian. As for the first meaning of wool found in Germanic and English, two Romanian nouns *vălătuc/vălătan* ‘cotton, fabric or wool cylinder, roller, thread, wattle’ (DLR 2010-18: 1059) and their correspondent verb *a vălătuci* ‘to roll out, to flatten out with a roller’. The root of the word I assume to be *val*, while *-(ă)tuc* is just a diminutive suffix. Belonging to the same root numerous other words either nouns or verbs survived as relics in Alb. *volbūr* (Orel 1998: 572) and Romanian such as *volbură* ‘a plant with the trunk in the shape of a spiral, a vortex, whirlwind’ (Meyer-Lübke 1911: 719), *vâltoare* ‘eddy, whirl, whirlpool, vortex’ and the correspondent processive verbs *a (se) învolbura*, *a (se) învâltori* ‘to whirl, to grow up into a spiral shape’ < Lat. *\*volvula*, *volvare* (DEX 2016: 1328). Other related cognates found especially in Western Romance languages have developed the signification of flying like It. *vola* and Fr. *voler*, Sp. *vuela* ‘to fly’ (Littré 1874: 1520, Alkire & Rosen 2010: 182, 289). A secondary metaphorical meaning surprisingly preserved in Gothic, Albanian and Russian was built on a semantic deviation of an ancient root: Got. *wulan* ‘to seethe’ (Lehman 1986: 411) Alb. *valē* ‘wave’, *valet* ‘to boil hot, to seethe’ (Orel 1998: 493-494) sprang into Russian verb *волновать (ся)* ‘to bestir, to fret, to fuss, to reckon, to torture oneself, to worry’ (Dal’ 1998: 354). All these words have evolved at etymological confluences and preserved inferential meanings either connected with the primordial roots like Skr. *varah* ‘choice’ (Monier-Williams 1976: 1279) or with the abstract metaphorical varieties found between Latin *uale* ‘domination, freedom, heritage’ or even *ualer* ‘eagle, vulture’ having an obscure Indo-European etymology *\*w<sub>1</sub>lē* ‘sovereignty’ that might rest in numerous ancient language including Gothic *waldan* and Slavic *vladet* ‘to command, to control, to dominate, to master’ (Ernout & Meillet 1951: 1258-1259) and *volutilis* < *\*volvare* ‘to fly up in spiral, to whirl up’ (Niermeyer 1976: 1112, Glare 1968: 1354) and Romanian-Slavic items related to *vol(ovi)* ‘waves’ and *voljan, volnic, wola* ‘free’ (Brückner 1985: 617).

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0 International License

## Conclusions

All languages have evolved in a long process of historical and social interaction and assimilation, and they do not experience a unidirectional influence, which might function as a limitation of the interpretative context for etymologies.

Extending the frame of interpretation by considering the evolution of the roots in their phonetical body, derivational means and semantical changes may become a fruitful method of cultural interpretation of confluent developed and structured etymology. Working with discursive dimensions of the lexical units to explain semantic deviations suffered by the words within their evolution from abstract roots to concretization and a later re-symbolization in different families of languages belonging to Indo-European tree.

A lexical item like the one analyzed in this article might have added numerous semantic dimensions to its metaphorical meaning though it remains wooly. Analyzing the words with an obscure etymology by tracing them to the languages of origins might open new possibilities in following their history in a comparative-evolutive perspective and create the opportunity to deepening the interpretation and inserting this field of philology in the sets of cultural identity.

## References

- AHDEL: *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, Third Edition, Ed. by Anne H. Soukhanov, 2010, New York: American Heritage Publishing Co.
- Alexe, D. 2015. *Dacopatia și alte rădăcini românești*, București: Humanitas.
- Alkire, T. & Rosen, C. 2010. *Romance Languages. A Historical Introduction*, Cambridge, New York, Dubai, Tokyo: Cambridge University Press.
- Benkő, L. 1967–1976. *A magyar nyelv történeti-etimológiai szótára* [Historical etymological dictionary of Hungarian]. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.
- Brückner, Al. 1985. *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego*, Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.
- Crapanzano, V. 1981. 'Text, Transference and Indexicality' in *Ethos*, 9(2), pp. 122-148.
- Crapanzano, V. 2006. 'The Scene: Shadowing the Real' in *Anthropological Theory*, 6(4), pp. 378-405.
- Dal' V. 1998: *Tolkovy slovar' zhivogo velikoruskogo jazyka*, Moskva: Tsitadel'
- Derksen, R. 2008: *Etymological Dictionary of the Slavic Inherited Lexicon*, Boston and Leiden: Brill.
- Dictionarul explicativ al limbii române* (DEX 2016), București: Univers Enciclopedic.
- DLR 2010: *Dicționarul limbii române*, vol XVIII-XIX, București: Editura Academiei Române
- Ernout, A. & Meillet, A. 1951. *Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue latine. Histoire des mots*, troisième édition, Paris: Klincksieck.
- Gellner, E. 1960. *Words and Things. A Critical Account of Linguistic Philosophy and a Study in Ideology*, with a preface by Bertrand Russell, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Georgiev et alii. 1971. *Bългарски etimologičeski rečnik*, Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Bългарската Akademije na Naukite.
- Glare, P. G. 1968. *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Halliday, M. A. K. 2014. *Introduction to Functional Grammar*, Fourth Edition, Revised by Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen, London & New York: Routledge: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Isbășescu, M. 2007. *Dicționar german-român*, București: Teora
- Kloekhorst, A. 2008. *Etymological dictionary of the Hittite inherited lexicon*, Leiden: Brill.
- Lehman, W.P. 1986. *A Gothic Etymological Dictionary*, Leiden: Brill

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0. International License

- Littré, É 1874. *Dictionnaire de la langue française*, Paris : Hachette
- Mallory, J. P. & Adams, D. Q. 1996. *The Introduction to Proto-Indo-European and the Proto-Indo-European World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Meillet, A. 1905. *L'etymologie et le vocabulaire de vieux slave*, Paris : Émile Bouillon.
- Meyer-Lübke, W. 1911. *Romanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Heidelberg: Carl Winter's
- Monier-Williams, M. et alii. 1976. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, London: Clarendon Press
- Niermeyer, J. F. 1976. *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus*, Leiden: Brill
- Nourai, A. 2014. *Etymological Dictionary of Persian, English and Other Indo-European Languages*, Boston: Books on Demand.
- OCSO 1847. *The Dictionary of Old Church Slavonic*, Sankt Petersburg: Imperial Academy Printing House.
- Orel, V. 1998. *Albanian Etymological Dictionary*, Leiden, Boston, Koln: Brill.
- Pokorny, J. 2007. *Proto-Indo-European Etymological Dictionary*. A Revised Edition of Julius Pokorny's *Indogermanisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Indo-European Language Association available online at <http://www.dnghu.org>.
- Poposki, A. & Atanasov, P. 2007. *Dictionnaire macédonien-français*, Skopje: Jugoreklam.
- Poruciuc, A. 1998. *Confluente și etimologii*, Iași: Polirom.
- Rudnickij, Y. 1972. *An Etymological Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language*, Winnipeg: Ukrainian Free Academy of Science.
- Samarian, P. 1931. *Istoria orașului Călărași (Ialomița) de la origine până la anul 1852*, București: Institutul de Arte Grafice E. Marvan.
- Scriban, A. 1934. *Dicționarul limbii românești*, Iași: Institutul de Arte Grafice „Presa Bună”.
- Skok, P. 1971. *Etimologijski rječnik hrvatskoga ili srpskoga jezika*, Zagreb : Jugoslavesnka Akademija Znanosti i Umjetnosti.
- Stankovska, L. 1995. *Makedonska ojkonomija*. Kniga prva, Skopje: Metamorfoza
- Tomici, M. 1986. *Dicționar român-macedonean*, București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică.
- Vasmer, M. 1988. *Etimologičeski slovslovar' russkogo jazyka*. Edited by O. N. Trubačev, Moskva: Progress.
- Vinereanu, M. 2009. *Dicționarul etimologic al limbii române. Pe baza cercetărilor de indo-europenistică*, București: Alcor Edimpex