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NAMES OF BULGARIAN AND ROMANIAN HEAVY METAL BANDS

NUMELE DE TRUPE *HEAVY METAL* DIN BULGARIA ȘI ROMÂNIA

Rezumat: Lucrarea de față propune o analiză sociolingvistică a numelor de grupuri din muzica heavy metal din perimetrul bulgar și român, pornind de la stabilirea coordonatelor cadrului în care numele în cauză sunt investigate, spațiul public, din perspectiva raporturilor socioculturale care se petrec la nivelul lui. Astfel, spațiul public se conturează ca o negociere continuă între cultura de tip mainstream și cea de tip underground, confluență unde se poate regăsi și muzica heavy metal, supusă major efectelor globalizării la nivel lingvistic și sociocultural (reacționând fie în concordanță, fie în discordanță cu acestea).

Din punct de vedere onomastic, studiul de față tratează numele de trupe *heavy metal* ca forme denominative aflate la granița dintre antroponimele de grup și numele comerciale (numele de branduri). Prin urmare, denumirile de trupe *heavy metal* sunt nume neconvenționale, care îndeplinesc o funcție triplă: identificatoare, individualizatoare și descriptivă.

Studiul are în vedere atât particularitățile lexicale și morfologice, cât și aspectele semantice ale elementelor din aceasta categorie onomastică, referindu-ne la sensurile asociative cuprinse formal sau virtual în numele investigate de către agenții-purtători, sau declanșate în contextul receptării, în legătură cu genul muzical reprezentat. Sunt discutate și influențele lingvistice și socioculturale care stau la baza numelor de trupe *heavy metal*, care alături de alți factori (cei politici și economici, de pildă) reflectă evoluția spațiului public și a limbii în special în ceea ce privește domeniul muzical cercetat.

Cuvinte-cheie: sociolingvistică, spațiu public, globalizare, nume de grup, nume neconvenționale, muzica *heavy metal*

1. Introduction

In all its possible fields: language, society, culture, religion, economy, politics, technology, sports, and the arts, the dynamic of contemporary public space is the result of a historical accumulation of effects (diachronically) and of globalisation factors (synchronically). Perceived as a constant negotiation between mainstream and marginal (subcultural/ countercultural) orientations, each of the aforementioned subspaces contributes to and mirrors the evolution of public space as a whole. To illustrate these aspects, this paper deals with names of heavy metal bands from Bulgaria and Romania for at least two reasons. On the one hand, the onomastic stock is one of the first dimensions of a given sociolinguistically defined space that records matters of fashion, customs, or preferences, all of which leave their mark on the development of public space. On the other hand, heavy metal, as a music genre, through its numerous subgenres, refers to certain sociocultural groups that define their position against mainstream principles, but who have captured the attention of music lovers in general precisely through their desire to swim against the current. By looking at the names of such bands, we can begin to fathom the values held dear by the sociocultural group they pertain to (as these names are not only used to identify but also to advertise, to describe their bearers). On this account, we can learn about the contemporary configuration of public space on a social and cultural level, by understanding the creed underlying heavy metal aesthetics, and on a linguistic level, by considering the semantic and etymological structure of the designating items gathered from the two countries (Bulgaria and Romania), keeping in mind their former political framework and the salient effects of globalisation in present-day societies.

2. Public space: mainstream vs. marginal

Public space appears as an "entity whose identity is at the same time concrete, flexible, vacillating, imaginary and subjective", "[...] a multitude of micro-spaces that are always in motion and that have specific

objectives and goals" (Stănescu 2012: 41; 42, orig. Romanian, my translation). As it is the place where human beings develop their social selves, public space has as a core law the principle and praxis of communication. In the context of a democratic state, people are encouraged to take an active part in building society (at all levels) and to interact with each other in this respect. Bearing in mind every person's individual contribution to public space, we can assert, in agreement with Stănescu (2012: 37), that one's private space determines to some extent the construction and evolution of public space, a material and spiritual complex of components that result from the intersection of numerous and varied private spaces. It is a matter of language and culture contact, against the background of which "Variation is acceptable and identities are multidimensional" (Coulmas 2010: 31).

The orientation of communication in public space is supported by common interests, as it follows the fulfilment of common objectives. To this end, besides the observation of official laws, one can also note the contextual establishment of precepts that are "validated" informally, by mass consensus. Together, these two directions form mainstream culture, which in the current context of globalisation favours elements that pertain to popular culture (in several fields: language, the arts, media, fashion etc.), namely to "the vernacular or people's culture that predominates in a society at a point in time" (Delaney 2007: online). Within the framework of popular culture and as a (usually counter) reaction to mainstream values (which are seen as superficial, inauthentic, regressive etc.), diverse subcultural and countercultural groups emerge, each with a particular linguistic and social behaviour. Some of these groups (as it was also the case of heavy metal when it was consolidated as a movement) may become mainstream, depending on circumstantial factors, thereby influencing the development of public space in general. Therefore, the study of such groups reveals potential sources of sociolinguistic development of public space in various spatial and temporal situations.

3. Heavy metal as a sociolinguistic phenomenon

According to Kurtagic (2010: online), "Heavy Metal emerged at a time when its original core demographic – white working-class males –

were experiencing a growing social, cultural, economic, political, and demographic displacement, thanks to the rising tide of radical feminism; belligerent black activism; discriminatory legislation in housing, education, and employment favoring minorities; non-white immigration from the Third World; and a serious economic downturn that drove the most marginalized whites to the wall". Although during the 60s and 70s (the period when heavy metal appeared) bands playing this kind of music were initially criticised harshly (their music was ranked as anarchistic and diabolical, because of the thematic peculiarities of their discourse and of sound-related aspects), *Led Zeppelin, Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, Judas Priest, Motörhead,* and *Iron Maiden* managed to establish their art as a key part of society in general, and they are known not just as icons of heavy metal, but as icons of the period when they were most successful in general.

Aesthetically, heavy metal defined its creed by rejecting the positive outlook promoted by the hippie movement: "The master word of the 1960s, LOVE, was negated by its binary opposite, EVIL. Colors shifted from earth tones and rainbow hues to black. Fabrics went from soft-woven natural fibers to leather. Heterosexual groupings became male-only clubs" (Weinstein 2001: 18). Soft, melodious tones were replaced by loud ones, with emphatic rhythms and long guitar solos, along with numerous other subgenre characteristics (*e.g.*, black metal often has highpitched, almost unintelligible vocals, which sound like inhuman voices, whereas folk metal uses traditional musical instruments).

Metal language is usually marked by certain aggressiveness, salient in the numerous curse words and vulgar physical references that can be found not just in the lyrics sung but also in conversations between band/lead singer and audience during concerts. There is also what one could call *metal terminology*, which comprises lexical items (some in common with rock slang) that refer to metal practices and, by extension, to people taking part in these practices (*e.g.*, *headbanging* "a type of dance typical of rock and metal music, which involves violently shaking one's head in time with music", *headbanger* "a person dancing in this manner (headbanging); generic term to refer to metal music lover (same as *metalhead*)", *bangover* "the headache one gets after headbanging; from *hangover*",

death growl "death metal vocals", moshing/slamming "an activity occurring on the occasion of rock and metal concerts, in which members of the audience aggressively push and slam into each other", mosh pit "an area in front of the stage at rock and metal concerts where people mosh" etc.) (Pearl Drummers Forum 2008: online). Moreover, there are terms that designate genres and subgenres within this musical field. Encyclopaedia Metallum (online) records the following major subgenres of metal music: Metal/Traditional, Black, Death, Doom, Thrash, Speed, Folk/Viking, Power, Progressive, Electronic, Gothic, Orchestral/Symphonic, Avantgarde, each of which allows for further subdivisions and crossover variants. These categorical terms (cf. Van Langendonck 2007: 79) are indicative of bands' musical peculiarities, image attributes and lyrical themes. In Bulgaria and Romania, variants of black and death metal groups are predominant.

Thematically, lyrics sung by heavy metal bands tally with the visual and melodic symbolic representations they cultivate. Thus, heavy metal texts develop aspects that are very often dealt with philosophically and that fall within the scope of topics like

- celebration of masculinity (folk/Viking and gothic metal celebrate femininity as well, through their portrayal of nature and female mythological characters);
- death (from perspectives ranging from aggressiveness to melancholy);
- love (mostly its tragic facets), but also lust or sex (especially in traditional heavy metal, referring to the genre's origins, *i.e.* blues music);
 - angst, rebellion, and escapism in relation to commercial mainstream;
- occultism, folklore, and mythology (usually pre-Christian or fantasy-inspired, e.g., via J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*);
- nature and landscape (dark in black/death metal, idyllic in folk metal);
 - war and discrimination (speaking in favour of them);
 - politics (anti-capitalism).

Mainstream reacted to the solemn tone adopted by most heavy metal bands in the textual (but also musical and visual) rendition of elements pertaining to the aforementioned subjects by singling out certain stereotypes and poking fun at them. One of these stereotypes regards the uncanny names that metal bands pick for themselves, which are in agreement with the thematic preferences and actually reflect them. Onomastic items from this music genre moreover mirror the subcultural group's attempt to eschew changes brought about by globalisation (and the intercultural contacts it favours), except for (paradoxically) those regarding language, since to a significant extent names of Bulgarian and Romanian heavy metal bands are in English, the *lingua franca* of globalisation (see below numerous examples in this respect).

4. Lexical, morphological, and semantic aspects of heavy metal band names from Romania and Bulgaria

From the perspective of onomastic theory, names of bands are unconventional designation formulas, similar to collective bynames. According to Felecan O. (2012: 219–220), bynames chosen to designate a microcollectivity refer to various behaviours that a group displays, whose individualisation thereby proves that the group of people identified has gained social recognition. Similarly, band names convey associations that relate to their referent's peculiarities, such as the music style adopted, thematic field of interest, shared beliefs or attitudes, either directly (the associations underlying the naming process are conspicuous, hence the name is *semantically transparent: Cadaverine, Gothic, Necrotic, Protest*), or indirectly (the link between lexical elements contained in the name and referent cannot be accessed simply by considering the genre of music it pertains to, and/or the characteristics of this genre: *Bucovina, Cyborg, Star Queen, Web*) (cf. Van Langendonck 2007: 49).

At the same time, the onomastic formulas dealt with on this occasion designate cultural entities and therefore have to observe intellectual property laws. They also have a descriptive and advertising function, and, from this viewpoint, they tend to behave as trade names: "Band names are functionally related to brand and company names, in that they are carefully planned and adjusted to the band's target group. However, they are not part of a complex management plan, but are initially chosen by a band that is still unknown and without a record contract. Choosing a band name seems to involve two main motivations, *i.e.* an identifying

and an associative one. On the one hand, the name is an individual band's 'face', it reflects its originality and uniqueness. On the other hand, it can indicate the band's affiliation to a particular music style and cultural tradition" (Androutsopoulos 2001: online), as is the case of most metal band names as well, which mirror this affiliation through their semantic constituents.

At a lexical and morphological level, heavy metal band names from Romania and Bulgaria consist of

- (1) simple constructions, based on
- (a) proper names:
- personal names (first names, hypocoristic forms, surnames): *Nesh* (< Vasil Neshev, the group's founder), *Pandrea* (< Leo Pandrea), *Schtephan* (< *Ştefan*, Romanian first name; the form contains two grapheme substitutions: *Sch* for Rom. S to render the consonant sound S and S to render another fricative consonant, S
 - cultural names related to
 - folklore: Samhain (Gaelic festival of harvest);
- fantasy worlds (in books or games) and mythologies: Ackeron (river of pain in the underworld in Greek mythology), Agartha (the name of a legendary city in the earth's core), Calth (a realm in the computer game Warhammer), Elivagor (in Norse mythology, collective name of rivers that existed at the beginning of the world), Irkalla (the underworld in Babylonian mythology), Kortirion (the main city in an island inhabited by Elves in Tolkien's fantasy universe), Mopdop (Mordor, the dwelling place of Sauron in Middle-earth, a fictional universe in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings), Moria (in J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings, a complex of mines in Middle-earth), Solaris (a planet in Stanisław Lem's 1961 homonymous novel, Solaris);
- divine or fantastic entities from various mythologies and religions: Greek (*Argus, Attis/Atys, Cronos, Deimos, Hades, Haron, Marsyas*), Egyptian (*Hathor, RA*), Norse (*Njordhr*), Roman (*Nox*), Romanian (*Marţolea*), Slavic (*Svarrogh* < *Sváróg*), Thracian/Dacian/ Gaetic (*Bendida, Kandaon, Uniilă* the master of wizards in *Getica*, an RPG, *Valefar*), Zoroastrian (*Angra Mainyu*), Tolkien's fantasy world (**Smeagal*

- < Sméagol, the form found in the band name is an approximate phonetic spelling of the original name);
- geographical names: *Ashaena* (Dacian name of the Black Sea, meaning 'dark blue; mysterious, deep'), *Bucovina, Пирин* (*Pirin*, a mountain range in southwestern Bulgaria);
- names in music: *Abigail* (the homonymous 1987 album by King Diamond), *Trooper* (< *The Trooper*, a song by Iron Maiden);
 - names of drugs: Analgin (analgesic), Neurobex (vitamins).
 - (b) common nouns:
- medical terms (names of physical or mental disorders, diseases, and conditions; names of anatomical parts): *Ablepsia*, *Amuzia* (Bg., Latin alphabet, 'amusia'), *Aphasia*, *Biophobia (< pseudoprefix bio- < Gr. β io ς 'life' + pseudosuffix –phobia < Gr. φ ó β o ς 'fear'), *Cadavrul* (Rom., 'corpse'), *Catalepsia* (< Bg. κ amaлепсия 'catalepsy'), *Ciroza* (Bg., Latin alphabet, 'cirrhosis'), *Coma* (Rom. coma 'coma'), *Coprostasis*, *Corpse*, *Demenzia* (< Bg. δ emenum 'dementia', with a grapheme substitution ψ → z), *Dysthymya (< Eng. dysthymia), Epilepsy, Eufobia (< Gr. prefix eu- 'well' + phobia), Foeticide, Malformation, Necrophile, *Paralisy (a false English variant of Rom. paralizie 'paralysis'), Гранулом (Bg., 'granuloma'), Проказа (Bg., 'leprosy'), Putrefaction;
- honorific titles and historical events: *Bagatur* (from Mongolian, 'hero, valiant warrior'), *Haganat* (from Mongolian, 'khan of khans'), *Holocaust, Ювиги* (Bg., 'great khan');
 - nouns related to several semantic fields:
- feelings, qualities, sins, flaws: Adultery, Агония (Bg., 'agony'), Anguish, Envy, Hate, Nihilist, Odium (Lat. odium, -i 'hatred'), Torment, Verecundia (Lat. verecundia, -ae 'modesty, diffidence');
- dreams; religious, esoteric and occult practices/ entities/ attributes of entities/ objects: *Altar, Anastasis* (< Gr. ανάστασις 'resurrection'), *Demon, Demonism, Destroyer, Diablerie, Diabolism, Enthrallment, God, Horns, Incarnation, Legion, Necromancer, Nightmare, Rug* (Rom., 'pyre'), *Sanctuar* (Rom., 'sanctuary'), *Shadows, Taine* (pl. form of Rom. *taină* 'secret, mystery'), *Tenebre* (Rom., 'darkness');

- death and burial: *Concrete, Cromleh* (Rom. *cromleh* 'cromlech'), *Exhumation, Exhumator* (< vb. *exhume* + English agent suffix -or), *Kistvaen*;
- individuals' status/attitude in relation to society: Avatar, Cyborg, Defender, Exile, Kaskadiori (< Bg. каскадьор 'stunt man'), Legacy, Outsider, Protest, Ренегат (Bg., 'renegade'), Scapegoat, Serenity;
- state of society: *Anarhia* (Rom., 'anarchy'), *Cacealma* (Rom., 'bluff'), *Emptiness*, *Korozy (< Bg. κοροзия 'corrosion', Anglicised), *Unhumanity (< Eng. prefix un- + humanity), Vortex, Zaplaxa (< Bg. заплаха 'threat');
- war/destruction and justice: *Chains, Iudicium* (Lat. iudicium, -i 'trial'), *Morion, Rampart, Trotyl;*
- nature and the universe: Айсберг (Bg., 'iceberg'), Bruma (Rom., 'hoarfrost'), Лавина (Bg., 'avalanche'), *Galaxis (< Eng. galaxy, false Latin suffix), Kartzer (< Bg. карцер 'black hole') Ork, Thunderstorm, Tornado, Vepres (Lat. vepres, -is 'thorn-bush'), Vespera (Lat. vespera, -ae 'evening').
- (c) adjectives (pertaining to the aforementioned fields): Absolute, Adânc (Rom., 'deep'), Aghast, Celest (Rom., 'celestial'), Cronic (Rom., 'chronic'), Desolate, Eerie, Frozen, Gothic, Grim, Necrotic, Mirthless, Symbolic.
- (d) verbs (infinitives, or past participles functioning as adjectives): *Armed, Disintegrated, Disinter, Embalmed, Graven, Stink, Redound.*
- (e) adverbs: *Athron* ('further, beyond', in the fictional language invented by J.R.R. Tolkien), *Staccato*.
 - (2) complex structures
- (a) spelled in the manner of solid constructions. Most onomastic formulas of this kind have strong connotations of masculinity (by referring to typically masculine activities or by being expressions of strong feelings): Angercure (anger + cure), Angerpoint (anger + point), Bolthard (bolt + hard), Loudrage (loud + rage), Wolfdance (wolf + dance). Others have a connection with mystery and the occult: Darkflight (dark + flight), DinUmbră (Rom. din umbră 'from the shadow'), eyeSEEred ('I see red'), Inspell (in + spell). Some show where the individual stands in his/her relationship with divinity or the world: Innerhell (inner + hell),

Insepultus (Lat. in sepultus 'in the grave'), Pillfed (pill fed), Rotrave (rot + rave), Smallman (small + man). There is a construction referring to divinity's status in the context of an almost post-apocalyptic world: Wormgod (worm + god). Words like anger, hell, rot are very common in names of metal bands, because their relation to the aesthetic values promoted by this music genre is widely acknowledged. Therefore, name givers are keen to employ all sorts of word building mechanisms that would guarantee an original and legal yet semantically significant name.

(b) phrases containing

- determiners (definite article, possessive determiners), which intensify identification: *My Shadow, The Faded Moon, The Grand Phoenix, The Order, The Season, Thy Shadows.* There are two constructions which also include prepositions: *At My Funeral, In My Own Blood;*
- adjective (proper or present/past participle functioning as adjective) + noun, used for their explicitly descriptive content, which can easily trigger associations regarding the musical genre that a band pertains to or to its creed and aesthetics: Anal Dissected Angel, Apollinic Rites, Aryan Art, Black Diamond, Bleeding Thorn, Blind Spirits, Burning Necks, Celelalte Cuvinte (Rom., 'the other words'), Constant Motion, Cursed Cemetery, Dark Aevum (Lat. aevum, -i 'eternity'), Dark North, Dark Spirit, Dead Future, Distorted Reality, Empty Dreams, Eternal Darkness, Езическо Обсебване (Bg., 'pagan obsession'), Fading Circles, Forgotten Forests, Frozen Dusk, Frozen Tears, Gruesome Fate, Haunted Wood, Illegal Operation, Indian Fall, Infinite Dawn, Malformed Nature, Mortal Remains, Odd Crew, Ordinul Negru (Rom. 'the black order'), Perverse Monastyr, Protest Urban (Rom. 'urban protest'), Rising Shadow, Serpentine Creation, Whispering Woods;
- noun + noun (most of which have salient negative connotations related to death, destruction, disease): Disaster Area, Ghost Warfare, Goat Perversion, Grohot Exitus (Rom. grohot 'grunt' + Lat. exitus, -us 'exit, end, finish'), Human Trophies, Leprosy Abscess, Obsidian Sea, Project Arcadia, Star Queen, Void Forger. Some nominal constructions also contain coordinating conjunctions: *Amor e Morte (It. amore 'love' + e 'and' + morte 'death'), Sheky & the Bloody Boys) or the synthetic genitive (Mercy's Dirge).

- prepositions: among (Man Among Stars), by (*Embrace by Dark < embraced by the dark/darkness), of (showing composition, relation, origin, aim + de, its Romanian counterpart: Act of Grotesque, Cap de Craniu (Rom., 'head of skull'), Crown of Sins, Day of Execution, Dimension of Harm, Domain of Dreams, Dream of December, Fortress of Faith, Glades of Gloom, Icon of Sin, Knights of Fire, Nice Side of Pathology, Order of Splendour, Season of Tears, Tomb of Time, Voice of Hell), on (On Wings);
- numerals, used for being concise forms of expression, but highly connotative: 9.7 *Richter* (the magnitude of the greatest earthquake ever recorded Chile, 1960), *13 Rituals* (the number of Satanic rituals), *17.XII* (the beginning of the Saturnalias, an ancient Roman holiday), 88 (the eighth letter of the alphabet is "h", therefore $88 \rightarrow HH$ 'Heil Hitler!');
- acronyms, which, unless explained, hinder the proper decoding of a band's message (this is meant to indicate that the group thus named and their fans refuse to be perceived as part of the majority): *B.T.R.* < *Bending the Rules, E.D.O.M.* < *Eternal Darkness of Moldavia, M.S.* < Rom. *monstru sexual* "sexual monster", *F.D.B.* < *Fight Dem Back* (*dem < them), *R.U.S.T.* < *Rock Under the Sign of Thunder, SJK* < *Smoke Jack Kill*;
- c. sentences: Darken My Grief, Descend into Despair, Destroy Analogy, Highlight Kenosis, Open Fire, Thou Who Fights for Glory. Unlike acronyms, sentences are used for their explicit descriptive content, clearly suggesting the named entities' beliefs and values.

5. Concluding remarks

Names of Bulgarian and Romanian metal bands are diagnostic markers of heavy metal communities of practice, in particular, and of contemporary public space, in general. At a sociocultural level, when it emerged, heavy metal community was defined as "decidedly out of step with modern mainstream liberalism", since it "tended to resist radical changes in its form, celebrated heroic masculinity, and was predicated on an ethos of integrity and authenticity that deplored its own commercialization" (Kurtagic 2010: online). While there were bands that over time developed a commercial dimension, most metal branches still cultivate the aforementioned values (or variations/adaptations of them). These are even

more accounted for in Bulgarian and Romanian contemporary public spaces, whose passage from oppressiveness to democracy was impulsive and uncontrolled.

In the context of globalisation (both geopolitical and geocultural), names of metal bands highlight "the mobility of signs across time and space, combined with a strong sense of the local" (Blommaert 2011: 22). They are "strong indicators of identity" (cf. Neethling 2012: 148), an identity that results from intercultural communication and language contact, as can be seen in the numerous cultural aspects underlined through the lexical, morphological, and semantic structures that the names consist of, as well as in the linguistic codes that are chosen to constitute a basis for naming, among which the English influence is salient. This descriptive, advertising function of band names – that hence prove to be unconventional anthroponymic formulas (Felecan D. 2012: 189) – does not obstruct identification, but develops a secondary facet of it, as it facilitates the distinction of heavy metal as a sociolinguistic and cultural community.

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