

# On History of Certain Indeclinable Nouns of Foreign Origin

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**Abstract.** It is well known that borrowing is one of the most important universal sources of vocabulary replenishment of any language. The present work is a study of the indeclinable nouns, a special group of borrowings that to some extent contribute to the change of the grammatical structure of the Russian language in general, and the declension system in particular. The article describes the history of the emergence and reception in the system of the Russian language of certain indeclinable nouns of foreign origin. We studied the ways of the language units recorded in the lexicographic sources of the XVIII century. The reception of the prototypes of the studied units is reviewed in terms of the phonetic and graphic formalization of the word, the acquisition of its morphological characteristics, and the formation of its semantic structure. Due to the strong foreign language influence and multiple language contacts, the Russian language of the XVIII century is characterized by a high variability of the foreign language nouns, including the indeclinable nouns, often with the declinable doublets. The language can fix a declinable, as well as an indeclinable form.

## 1 Introduction

According to the Russian grammar, the indeclinable nouns are divided into nine groups according to the lexical and grammatical features, but the way of linguistic borrowing remains one of the reasons for the high increase in the number of the indeclinable words in the Russian language. Muchnik I. P. wrote, "Being less synthetic and therefore more analytical, the nouns with the same morphological structure are like an open flank of the Russian declension system for ingress of a variety analytical elements" [1].

The researchers note that "the uninflected nouns in the system of Russian morphological types are the innovation of the XVIII century" [2]. According to our data, the main source of replenishment of this group of words in the Russian language in the XVIII century was the borrowings from the French language. Let us consider the development of some of them in the Russian language.

In the history of the Russian linguistics, there are a lot of research in the field of the indeclinable nouns (A.M. Peshkovsky, F.I. Buslaev, L.V. Shcherba, A.A. Shakhmatov, V.V. Vinogradov, I.I. Sreznevsky, L.V. Knorina, A.A. Zaliznyak, G.A. Smirnova, M.V. Panov, I.G. Miloslavsky, I.P. Muchnik, etc.). However, we can say that in the varied and comprehensive scientific works on the functioning of the inorganic indeclinable nouns, in our opinion, not insufficient attention is paid to the adaptation of their prototypes in the host system.

We studied the ways of the language units recorded in the lexicographic sources of the XVIII century. The reception of the prototypes of the studied units is

reviewed in terms of the phonetic and graphic formalization of the word, the acquisition of its morphological characteristics, and the formation of its semantic structure.

## 2 Results and discussion

The word 'jalousie' was borrowed by the Russian language more than two hundred years ago. Compared to the dictionary data, Gabrdeeva V.N. notes the earlier fixing of the word in 1789. In the translation of Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*, "The women here enjoy great liberty: they are allowed to look at men through a species of a window called jalousie" [3]. At the same time, there is no such gallicism in the dictionaries of the XVIII century. According to the "Essays," the enter date of the word is 1793 [4], the Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century states 1790.

In the XVIII century at the initial stage of the reception, the indeclinable borrowing 'жалузи' (jalousie) had a morphologically adapted version 'жалузия' which was not fixed in the language. The initial version 'жалузи' reflected the influence of the French pronunciation, which in turn caused some grammatical fluctuations of the word in the process of its development in the language. D.N. Ushakov's Dictionary states the word as indeclinable neuter noun. S. Ozhegov's Explanatory Dictionary also indicates a variant that has the form of plural only, even though the French prototype has a different form of plural – 'jalousies.' This fact also indicates that the means of expressing the number in the source language have no effect on the

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morphological adaptation of the prototype in the host language. The indeclinable nouns of non-Russian nature express the numerical relationships only analytically, so the means of expression of the number category in the source languages do not appear to be significant in the grammatical adaptation of such nouns. Moreover, they differ significantly from the means of expression of this category in the Russian language.

We believe that this variation is a consequence of the phonetic and semantic formalization of the lexeme in the Russian language: common for the native plural nouns final *-и*, as well as the presence of plural number in the lexical meaning of the denotation "blinds, shutters." In this case, there is the process of restructuring or shifting of the boundaries between the word morphemes.

We are interested in the semantics development of this word. The prototype 'jalousie' in French Cellarius of 1769 has the following meaning: 'jealousy, jealousy of a wife or a husband'. In the Full French and Russian lexicon of 1786, the dictionary article contains several meanings of the word: "1) jealousy 2) envy 3) anxiety, embarrassment, fear, danger 4) bars near the window" [5]. After borrowing, the lexeme keeps only one meaning. The Dahl's Dictionary gives the following interpretation: "the window bars that sometimes have the transverse plates placed arbitrarily, flatwise and on edge, for light and shadow" [6]. In the Dictionary of Foreign Words of 1979, we find a more extended meaning: "the multi-flaps shutters and blinds (of fixed or rotating plates) installed on windows, spotlights fenders, etc. to change the luminous flux; shutters in the ventilation grilles are also used for control the air flow" [7]. So, we see a qualitative change and reduction in the semantic volume of the prototype 'jalousie.'

A French prototype 'marabout' had a dual phonetic and graphic formalization: a transliterated version 'марабу́т' (-а, м), and a transcription-based 'марабу́' (indeclinable, м.) [8]. Various formal characteristics led to morphological variation: the final hard consonant of the stem refers a foreign word to the second declension, while the alien to the Russian morphological system final *-y* refers a word to the zero declension. The borrowing was used in the meaning of "a North African, a member of the African Muslim sect." In the Dahl's Dictionary, the meaning of the doublets 'марабу́/марабу́т' is "a senegalese bird of the stork-family with fluffy curly feathers, which in the female outfits have the same name" [6]. Daf states only one meaning: "marabout. F. M. deffert Prétte mahoméтан qui une mofqute" [9] – 'Mohammedan priest'. However, in the Modern French Definition Dictionary, the lexemes 'marabout' has an expanded structure of meanings, including the meaning of 'a bird of Africa and India with a strong and thick beak, bare neck, and a pink bag at her warping' [2], which suggests a secondary borrowing of the word in the Russian language. In the modern Russian language, both correlates have been preserved, but they have different meanings. The 'марабу́' lexeme retains the meanings obtained as a result of a secondary borrowing: "a bird of the storks-family" and "the feathers of this bird" [10]. The 'марабу́т' borrowing is used in two meanings: in the countries of North Africa 1) a Muslim

saint, as well as a leader or a founder of a religious brotherhood, a dervish order; 2) in a broader sense — a Muslim monk, a member of a religious brotherhood, the same as dervish [10]. However, along with the change in the structure of lexical meaning, the grammatical characteristics of the correlates remained.

In the host language, the French prototype 'métamorphose' gets three morphological variants: метаморфозис//метаморфосис, метаморфозия, and метаморфозь (indeclinable) in inclined and indeclinable forms, as well as the fluctuations in gender (masculine and feminine). According to the Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century, since 1709, the variants replace each other throughout the century. In modern Russian language there is a single changeable form, according to the formal indicators, relating the word to the masculine gender. It is 'метаморфоз' as a biological term denoting modification, as well as the noun of the feminine gender 'метаморфоза' associated with any transformation or change. The acquisition of the final *-и* is due to the influence of the morphological characteristics of the prototype, which in the source language is of the feminine gender; therefore, the correlate later acquires the formal indicators of the feminine gender, which incorporates it into the paradigm of the Russian declension.

According to the Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century, 'кризис – криза' variant pair in the Russian language of the XVIII century was generated by the contacts of the Russian language with the Latin and French languages. At the initial stage of the morphological reception, the French prototype 'crise' with a mute *-e* attaches to the stem (formalized according to the pronunciation) the final *-а*, which is an indicator of the feminine gender in the native Russian words. This is due to the tendency of the source language to preserve the grammatical characteristics of the word, because according to the Russian grammar, a hard consonant of the transcribed stem would refer the word to the masculine gender. Having a productive final, the word is not yet included in the case system of the host language in XVIII century. At a later reception stage, the word reverts to a phonetic writing of a stem with a hard consonant 'криз', and is included in the group of nouns of the second declension. At the same time, the first version of the former doublet pairs 'кризис' was also used. In the modern language its semantic structure differs from a gallicism 'криз'. The described phenomenon reflects the mutual influence of morphological and semantic reception of a foreign word.

The French prototype 'mangue', f in the Russian language of the XVIII century reflexes in three phonetic-morphological variants: 1) close to the French pronunciation 'манго', indeclinable; 2) the form with the formal indicators of masculine gender due to the influence of a specific presentive meaning 'манг', -а, м; 3) 'манга', -и, f, the result of the influence of the prototype gender. Perhaps, the latter form arose under the influence of the Portuguese 'manga' which is considered the prototype of the French 'mangue.' Only one form 'манго' becomes stable the language, preserving the pronunciation of the source language, and

therefore, not included in the productive declension system.

The multiple variants 'менуэт', 'меновет', 'менуэ', 'менавет', indeclinable, m. were formed in the process of borrowing directly from the French language, or through the Polish language. The form 'менуэ' is a sound complex of the French word 'muenet', but this variant is lost, because the nature of the stem, the final -e, does not contribute to the productive declension of the lexeme. Polish 'menwet' gets a reflex in the Russian language in the form of phonetic writing 'меновет', ending in a hard consonant. This correlate could naturally be included in the group of masculine nouns of second declension, but the form is lost, probably because in the source-language a 'menwet' prototype has a variant form 'muenet' of the French origin. All three forms belong to the masculine noun group. In this case, there must be two factors determining the gender: in French, the prototype belongs to the masculine gender; in addition, phonetic formalization of the first two units could also find the expression of lexemes in the form of masculine gender in the Russian language. The language merely sets forth the transliterated form 'менуэт', which at the initial stage of use in the language is indeclinable, but then due to the formal indicators is included in the productive declension.

In the Russian language of the XVIII century the gallicism 'manteau' had one correlate, 'матон', which was formed under the assimilating influence of the Russian grammatical system, and acquired the stem with a hard consonant -н. According to the Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century, the word was changing in the first declension, and was in the masculine nouns group. However, according to the materials of the national corpus of the Russian language, in the modern Russian language we observe the functioning of the only invariant of the noun 'манто':

'A man in a black manteau and a small cylinder strode by melancholically, next to him a boy dressed out in a dark brown jacket, round panties and stockings jumped on one leg — a barin's son walked with his tutor' (Maya Kucherskaya. Aunt Motya // "Znamya", 2012).

According to The Dictionnaire de L'académie Française 1777, the prototype 'genie' had the following meaning structure: "1) spirit, demon, or evil, which was believed by the ancients to guided and shielded a man from birth to death; 2) angel; 3) natural ability, gift, inclination, aptitude to smth, talent; 4) engineering, science of towns and places fortify, attack, defend and siege" (dfr. Part I, p. 555). Despite the fact that during the reception there were phonetic and morphological variants conditioned by the presence of several prototypes, the correlative noun 'гений' fully preserves the semantic volume in the modern Russian language, except for the last meaning, which is not represented in the modern French language. According to the modern Russian language of the XVIII century, at the beginning of the reception, the lexeme functions in the following variants: 'гений' – 'гениус' – 'гении' – 'жени' with the following values: 1) according to the religious beliefs of the ancient Romans, the patron God of a person, city,

country; the spirit of good and evil; 2) the spirit of creativity, inspiration, imagination / creative talent, the highest creative ability; 3) a brilliant man (the Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century). In the process of reception, another meaning is borrowed: D. N. Ushakov's Dictionary states the meaning "embodiment, the highest manifestation of something" (Ushakov). The use of the word in a figurative sense, "a man very full of himself, a smarty pants" in a conversation (Ushakov) shows the full assimilation of the host language lexical system.

The noun 'минор' has appellatives in the Italian and French languages: 'minore' and 'mineur' respectively. Italian 'minore' has the following meanings structure: "comparative di piccolo, on the other hand, a maggiore. Presso dei legisti dicesi colui che non è ancora giunto all'eta determine dale leggi, onde poter essere padrone di see della roba. Termine usato da negli argomenti logici e vale la seconda proposizione del sillogismo" [dli. Ii, p. 6. 26], i.e. the comparison with small, insignificant, the antonym of big, as well as the legal term "minor", and the term of logic. The French prototype 'mineur' is defined in the Dictionnaire de L'académie Française as a noun "celui qui la mine pour en tirer la matière mineralé", i.e. a miner, as well as an adjective "celui, celle qui n a point atteint l'âge preferit par les lois pour difpofer de fa perfonne ou fone de bien", which means 'minors' [9]. The Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century records the only meaning of the correlative borrowing of 'минор/миноре' as "a musical scale the sounds of which form a chord on a small third" (The Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century). Today, the word is also used in the figurative meaning of "sad, melancholic mood" (Ushakov).

Often, a transcribed writing of the prototypes produces the homonymous pairs in the receiving language. This is the way the lexeme 'леве' functions in the XVIII century, being the result of the adaptation of the French prototypes 'lever' and 'levée.' The French Explanatory Dictionaries record the use of the word 'lever' since the XI century, and state up to thirty meanings related by the semes 'raise, sunrise, rising (rise)'. For example, Dictionnaire de L'académie Française 1777 fixes such meanings of the word 'lever' as 'raise' (in all meanings, including raise troops, raise the case); 'se lever' - to get up; to remove (the mask, the siege); to remove (cloth, anchor); to separate a part from the whole; to gather (berries, taxes)' [9]. In the Russian language, the correlation borrowing of 'леве' was used in the diplomatic speech only in one meaning absent in the French dictionaries but retaining the seme 'rising (rise)': "reception during the rise of the king or his morning walk-out" (The Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century). Thus, in the Russian language, the borrowing loses its polysemy as a result of semantic assimilation, and its lexical meaning is concretized. Today, the word is in the language passive vocabulary. In V.I. Dal's Dictionary there is only the homonym of this lexeme: "leve, neuter, indeclinable, French. In card games, a bribe, a bat" [6]. In Dictionnaire de L'académie Française 1777 it is 'a card term: a raised hand': "levée –

terme dont on fe fert au jeu des cartes, pour fignifier. Une main qu'on a levee" [9].

According to The Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century, the indeclinable borrowing 'бреве' ('брев' – XVIII) enters the Russian language with the meaning "the Pontifical letter, Pontifical decree" (The Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century). In the full French and Russian Lexicon of 1786 there is an extended semantic structure of the 'brev' prototype: "adj. Short; adv. In short; n. Letter of Pope; a book that specifies the priest's service" (dfr. Part 1. p. 135). In the modern Russian language there is a detailed meaning borrowed in the XVIII century: 'an order or an announcement of popes on less important issues of the Church governance, sometimes just the popes' personal letters.'

The Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century records the variant 'вермичелли' (1755)/ 'вермишели' (1785) / 'вермишель' (1775) in the meaning of "fine cut Italian pancakes to make noodles of" [7]. Borrowed from the Italian language perhaps through the French intermediary. First noted in the form of 'вермичелли' in the Cook Dictionary of 1795. Consider the semantic structure of the French prototype 'vermicelli'. Dictionnaire de l'Académie française of 1777 indicates: "Vermicelle. f. m. Mot emprunté de l'italien. Efpèse de pâte dont on fait des potages. On prononce Vermichelle" [9], that is, the word was used in the meaning of 'dough products, noodles'. In Italian, the 'vermicello/vermicelli' prototype, according to Dizzionario della Lingua Italiana, 1852, is a diminutive of 'worm, worm' meaning 'paste filaments that can be used to cook lasagna': 'Vermicello. Dim. di verme. Vermicelli, si dicono certe fila di pasta, fatte quella a somiglianza, e come le mangiansi cotti lasagna" (DLI. II, p. 6. 265). Thus, at the initial stage of reception, the semantic structure of the prototype remains unchanged, but in the modern Russian language there is an expansion of the semantic volume due to the acquisition of a figurative meaning "a tangled mass of some trifles (colloq.)" (Ushakov, p. 143).

The French word 'marli' in the Russian language loses the final -i of the stem, which is replaced by the final -я. Regardless of the formal characteristics acquired, at the initial stage of development in the XVIII century the lexeme is still indeclinable, and is used in the masculine gender, keeping the language norm of the source language. Today, we see its absolute involvement in the morphological system of the Russian language: the inflection -я refers a noun to the second declension. We can also trace the influence of a semantic feature in the morphological reception of this prototype: the denotation "ткань" (fabric) is a noun of the feminine gender (The Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century).

The predecessors of the modern lexeme 'макака' were the two phonetic-morphological variants 'макак' and 'макако', declinable and indeclinable respectively. Both variants were related to the masculine gender due to the gender of the prototype in the source language. Settling in the morphological system of the Russian language, the word changes its formalization, gets the inflexion -а, and becomes a declinable. Such a

transformation may be caused by the fact that the Russian generic concept 'обезьяна' (monkey) belongs to the feminine gender (the Dictionary of Foreign Words of the XVIII century).

The lexeme 'сальто' was recorded in the lexicographic sources of the late XIX – XX centuries. The Dictionary of Foreign Words of 1979 notes the meaning "in acrobatics, gymnastics – a full twist in the air without support, through the head (forward or backward) by jumping (double-rotation – double S., triple – triple S.)" [7]. In Italian, the word 'salto' has several meanings with the seme "leap, jump", but it does not mean a complete turn in the air. At the same time in the Russian language there is a foreign-language composite 'сальто-мортале' (somersault) which is recorded in the The Dictionary of Foreign Words with the same meaning as the 'сальто' (flip). Literally, the Italian 'salto mortale' is translated as 'a deadly jump'. Perhaps, this is why the meaning of 'a complete flip without support', which undoubtedly implies a dangerous trick, a jump bearing a potential threat to life, appeared in the Russian language.

### 3 Conclusion

Thus, due to the strong foreign language influence and multiple language contacts, the Russian language of the XVIII century is characterized by a high variability of the foreign language nouns, including the indeclinable nouns, often with the declinable doublets

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