

**„Babeş-Bolyai” University  
Faculty of Letters**

***IMAGINING THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE IN MODERN  
LITERARY ROMANIAN IDEOLOGY***

**- summary -**

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**ABSTRACT:** The present paper has as its aim an analysis of the evolution of Romanian language in the modern age, through the perspective of a cultural history of language, completed with the methodological acquisitions of sociolinguistics, in an attempt to summarize not the linguistic change per se, but rather the role of the standardizing processes, of the linguistic politics dominant at a certain historic point, of the literary and cultural personalities. In other words, we have attempted in the following pages a short history of Romanian linguistic imaginary, but also of the processes which contributed to its shaping, while permanently considering the way in which the social, historic and political context influenced it.

**KEYWORDS:** national language, language ideology, linguistic imagery, modernity, Transylvanian School, 1848 revolution, national state, interwar period.

**SUMMARY:** Although sociolinguistics and then historical sociolinguistics are research fields already consecrated in the west-European and American academia, we considered that applying these to the Romanian context might lead to a new approach of Romanian language history, studied so far especially through the viewpoint of formal modifications which happened along the way.

The premise of the present paper is that the attitudes and evaluations which lead to the formation of linguistic imaginary influence the evolution of the language through their prescriptive nature, so that studying the dominant discourses about the language of a certain time frame has effects in its ulterior development (such examples are, in the case of Romanian language) the Latinist discourse and its effects on the alphabet reform, the reduction of dialectal diversity supported by the dominant unionist ideology etc.). Thus, the fundamental distinction we have operated is between language seen as an ensemble of varieties and language seen as a cultural construct, permeable from an ideological point of view.

In this respect, we have tried to describe the evolution of linguistic ideology which influenced language standardization in its tight relation with nationalist ideology, dominant during Romanian modernity. Seen from this viewpoint, the matter at hand is even more interesting in respect to the Romanian case, given the multiple incongruences at the level of consecrated cultural ages, the permanent attempt made by Romanian elites to recuperate its delay

from the Western world, the inevitable “complexes” which arise from it, and, most importantly, the importation of the dominant ideologies in a certain historic moment. The fundamental “unsettlement” of the Romanian culture offers in this respect a fascinating case study, in which the historical, social and political conditions make the debate on the national language a passionate subject.

Circumscribing the place which the national language holds in the Romanian cultural discourse and meta-discourse is in a tight, if not infrangible connection with the idea of *national specificity*. This concept, the central theme of interwar polemics, is also present along Romanian pre-modernity and modernity in all the ideas debates. The national specificity is a main concern in the aesthetic debates, as well as sociological or political, whilst being indispensable in explaining dichotomies relying on the ratio between the aesthetic and ethic factor, as well as cultural, socio-political etc.

In this context, the argument of language in defining national specificity becomes one of major importance. Just like in the case of Germany or Italy, the politic and territorial division of the Romanian space has a decisive input in shaping the national ideological discourse and especially its argumentative sphere. If in the case of France, England or Spain the discourse on the national language is made from the perspective of a unitary state, to which common language only gave administrative and educational cohesion, for the Romanian intellectuals at the dawn of modernity the language was the soul of the nation itself, the irreducible essence of being Romanian.

We have used the word *imagining* in the title of this paper since we aim to examine this subject from a viewpoint which follows its *dynamic* and examines the way in which the reflection on language is populated by elements of nationalist ideology. Applied to the cultural climate of modern Romania, such an approach offers the possibility to determine the successive historical stages in which this contamination happens – which we intend to follow diachronically – as well as the relation these modifications have with the dominant paradigm of Romanian modernity.

Given the elements of this corpus the need arose for a very precise thematic cut, which we operated from the viewpoint of the perception of Romanian language in each historical step

of modern Romanian cultural history. If in the discourse of the Transylvanian School, for example, language is seen as a first ranking expression of nationality and prestige, through its Latin origin, in the period surrounding the 1848 revolution the discourse changes. Though language remains an inevitable political argument in the fight for national liberation, the intellectuals of this period bring forth in the discourse on language the cultural component as well. Language must evolve in order to become a language of culture, to allow writers to create works which can put Romanian culture in its rightful place in Europe.

In the period after 1859 and the unification of the Romanian principalities, the dominant ideology becomes that of standardizing. The birth certificate of the Romanian state has as correspondent many attempts to give Romanian language an official birth certificate as well. The main question becomes „*how* should the Romanian language be?”, and the philology of that time sets out to answer this question by dictionary projects, grammars and language histories, trying to offer the linguistic equivalent of state unification. It is a time when the science of language begins to develop, not without failures and resounding press scandals – we refer of course to the *Academic Dictionary* conceived by Massim and Laurian. However, this is the starting point for a synchronisation with the European ideas in the field. The interwar period represents the moment when the discourse on language becomes explicitly a discourse on the literary language, and the preponderant attempt is *synthesis*, expressing a unity and uniqueness guaranteed precisely by the diversity of language.

Of course, the ethnic factor is present in each of these stages, more or less explicitly, but what is truly interesting are the variables in which this insinuates in the discourse, according to the historical or social conditions of one period or another.

On a general level, the first two chapters of our paper are meant as a theoretical basis which will serve the analysis of the following chapters, applied on texts from Romanian modernity. Thus, the first chapter tries to set the main coordinates of the “national language” as a concept, seen as consubstantial to the European modernity. After the Middle Ages, the European society and culture enter the long stage of modernity, which determines a series of cultural and political changes which will influence decisively the way in which we perceive the national language today. The main factor in this process was the idea of nation, and in the first part of the introductory chapter we have tried to summarise the main directions in the analysis of this

concept. The first one, the modernist approach, considers the nation consubstantial to modernity, while the ethno-symbolist one sees in the modern concept of nation a recrystallization of the older one, namely the ethnic. Once we have established the coordinates of the emergence of the idea of nation in European culture, our research goes towards the language, seen as a main instrument for the imposition of this nationality. Originated in the writings of German romantics, the language-nation equivalent will become more and more instrumental to the formation of modern European states. In the last part of the first chapter we have presented two extreme cases of this equivalence, namely the process of linguistic unification of French after 1789 through the intentional eradication of the dialects and the apparition, at the half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, of a variant of Norwegian which was artificially created and meant to support the claims of the Norwegians in their fight for national autonomy.

The second chapter of our paper continues the theoretical introduction by detailing some key concepts in the analysis of ideologising mechanisms for language and linguistic imaginary. Set on some extremely recent researches, from the last three or four decades, this chapter displays the conceptual findings in the analysis of the social dimension of language (a phenomenon investigated for the first time by the Russian formalists and rediscovered in the 60s, with the spring of sociolinguistics as an academic discipline). The sociolinguistic approach generated a series of sub-fields of study. like those referring to language standardisation and the ideology involved in this process, historical sociolinguistics (which privileges a diachronic approach in the attempt to rebuild, based on historical documents the social factors which have influenced the development of the language), as well as the study of linguistic purism, a phenomenon specific to linguistic ideology, be it nationalist, geographic, related to social classes etc. A final aspect described here is the linguistic imaginary, as a depository of the “subjective norms”, assailable to the judgements which speakers make on a certain language, especially in comparison with other languages.

With the third chapter of our paper begins the analysis per se of the evolution of imagining Romanian as a national language. Given the temporal coordinates which we have set beforehand, we began this journey with the writings of the representatives of the Transylvanian School, considering that only from this moment we can speak of an articulated discourse which appeals to representations of the nationalist imaginary applied on language. From the multitude

of writings of the representatives of the Transylvanian School we have chosen as representative the opinions of Ion Budai Deleanu and Petru Maior, some of the first Romanian writers which bring into discussion the language as an identity factor and also the ones who set the basis of the discourse on the Latinity of Romanian.

The following chapter is concerned with the period surrounding the 1848 revolution, a moment in which the discourse on the national language becomes central to the national freedom movement. M. Kogălniceanu, Heliade Rădulescu or Alecu Russo write passionately about the need for a national language and literature, about the standardising efforts which have to be made and about the coordinates which this linguistic and literary evolution must follow. At the level of linguistic imaginary there is to be remarked the influence of the romantic paradigm, dominant at that time in respect to the rhetoric as well as content.

After the moment of Romantic effusion of 1848, with the formation of the national Romanian state the discourse on the language modifies as well, reaching a period of consolidation. From mere wish, language becomes reality, and this presupposes the need of organising and standardising, felt even more acutely than before and reflected by the huge scandal started by the dictionary of Massim and Laurian. The vehement opposition of some very important names from the Romanian cultural scene spring a polemic which has as result the fact that the double discordancy, Latin and Slavic, of the Romanian language is fully accepted.

The period before the First World War and during the interwar period is the last stop in our diachronic investigation. The already known polemics of this period, Europeanism versus traditionalism is to be found at the level of the discourse on the national language. The traditionalists make the apology of the rural language, seen as an absolute depository of the national soul, whereas the modernists consider that denying the value of the imports from other languages can only impoverish the language and lead it to stagnation. With these polemics in the background, the beginning of the second world war and then the communist regime abruptly end the free ideas debate, with the instauration of censorship and the party's unique voice.

Following the *imagining* of the Romanian language in the modernist discourse, we have tried to combine a diachronic approach, which follows the main moments of this discourse in relation to the consecrated periodization by the histories of language and literature, completed with a stylistic and rhetorical analysis of the linguistic imaginary specific to every period of

development of Romanian culture, considering that only thus can we reveal the way in which the dominant figures of every historical moment have influenced the conception on language and its development.

In a time when alternative histories, narrated from diverse and surprising viewpoints are the norm, we think that the evolution of the meditation on Romanian as a national language can be such a history, all the more interesting and provocative as it doesn't offer answers, but merely indicates another level on which the obsessive Romanian identity debate can be carried.

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