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Sources of Information and Documentation

Sources of Information and Documentation and Working Tools in Foreign Language Teaching in Romania, 1960-1980 (II)

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Abstract

This article, the second part of a broader research project, attempts to analyze the evolution of the methodology of teaching the French language and literature in Romania under the communist regime, especially under the totalitarian rule of Ceaușescu. The documents used in this research are official pedagogical materials of teaching French as a second language (for primary and secondary education).

Keywords: *sources of information, documentation, didactic materials, methodology of teaching the French language, communist ideology, nationalist propaganda*

This study continues our analysis on the status of foreign language teaching in Romania after the 1960s, focusing on the way the French language had to be taught at the time, according to the instructions given by various methodological guides. If we take into consideration the considerable number of Romanian didactic materials published during the 1970s and the 1980s, the conclusion is would be that the French language was the most promoted and widely spread in comparison to the other foreign language. The introductory part of the previous article demonstrated the politicization of the educational

system that applied also to foreign language teaching. This paper attempts to point out the increase in political intrusions, nationalist socialist propaganda in the scientific and pedagogical research and activities in the case of French language teaching.

In 1965, when the Stalinist education law of 1948 was still valid, a methodological guide for the elementary school stated very clearly that teachers were to follow the soviet example for their classes as to make French language teaching subservient to the communist ideology. The bibliography starts with titles of articles from the Romanian-Soviet Annals, the pedagogy-psychology series. In addition to the integration of grammar, lexis and pronunciation knowledge into the communication exercises, “the *practical* purpose of French language teaching accompanies harmoniously the *educational* purpose. As in the case of the other school subjects, the study of the French language has to contribute to the communist education of the students. [...] The teachers’ purpose during the lessons will be double folded: it will be *instructive*, focusing on the language acquisition and *educational*, ie meant to form the students’ moral communist features, so appropriate in the case of our youth, who are expected to accomplish the construction of socialism, to participate actively in the construction of communism in our country. It is necessary that the study of the French language on the other hand implies general knowledge of the French country and people.” (2) So the lessons of French become mainly lessons of Romanian political education, the connection with the respective French culture and civilization being subsidiary. The *cultural* purpose is recognised as integrated into the educational purpose of teaching, but it is also mentioned that “the aspects of French civilization ... cannot have an encyclopedic character. This knowledge must be considered from our socialist perspective. In this way, it helps broaden the cultural knowledge of pupils.” (3) The authors of the guide present a short history of the French language teaching in Romania, showing that the beginnings can be traced in the second half of the 19th century. (4) The rich tradition of the Romanian Francophonie relies on solid documentary evidence, for example the last methodological guide mentioned by the authors is from 1938. Surprisingly, they omit the series of “unique textbooks” from 1950: those were mere transpositions of soviet textbooks, the only indication they were for the Romanian students was the coat of arms of the Romanian Republic, the place and the name of the publisher, no author being mentioned. (5) The final chapter of this guide from 1965 focuses on the organisation of extra-curricular activities, “outside the classroom”, which have to “represent an important means of communist education”, too.” (6) Other didactic sources were two series published in the 1970s, among which many consist of completely apolitical studies, scientific articles reflecting the so-called “cultural thaw” (unfortunately few numbers are be found today even in the specialized libraries). (7)

The year 1975 is very important from the methodological perspective of foreign language teaching in Romania: a series of methodological guides for all above-mentioned five foreign languages taught are published then. The French teaching guide for the elementary school lists the following points of interest: the study of the spoken language, the “living” language, speaking skills, writing skills, items of culture and civilization; the language is seen as a means of communication and information, with a practical goal; the last objective, emphasized as the most important, is the *multilateral development of pupils*, with a “formative and educational character ... for consolidating positive traits”,

the “insertion of Romanian realities into the content of texts and exercises assure also an educational character”. (8) Moreover, a subchapter is entitled explicitly “The contribution of the lessons of French to the communist education of pupils”. Strikingly enough, although the content of the subchapter briefly but pertinently analyses the importance of attention and the necessity to cautiously make use of memorizing, the introduction and the conclusion deal with the importance of the political engagement. The thematic hiatus within this argumentation indicates the way the cohesion is not a priority, the causal relation is taken for granted since the communist education represents the premise of any working hypothesis: “the communist education has become the goal of all the activities carried out in our educational system, at all levels. In order to achieve this, the teacher of French must assume a determined engagement.” (9) The conclusion focuses on the importance of thematic selection: the topics to be dealt with must reflect common points in the history of the two peoples, which are meant to develop patriotic feelings and “the spirit of internationalist solidarity”, for example the episodes that reflect the fight of workers for social justice and peace”; on the other hand, the French language becomes a blatant instrument of nationalist propaganda: “The information in French refer to the achievements of our country, to the activity of our representatives in various international organizations, to the role of Romania in the world and is meant to develop the love for the present and the future of the country, the admiration for the wise politics of the Romanian Communist Party, the belief in the justice of socialism, the educational purpose to use all mass-media so as to open the mind to the whole world.” (10) While the use of “the instruments of information” with a political purpose is clearly stipulated, the idea of “opening the minds” of the students is more than ambiguous, a typical *non sequitur* conclusion. “The political activation” of the students in the middle and late 1970s, especially within the social sciences, is already a point of interest for the authors of didactic materials, as a consistent application of the Theses of July 1971. (11)

The didactic materials published after the Law in 1978 (12) cite extensively from the works of Nicolae Ceaușescu, the general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party, which consist not only of speeches, oratorical texts, reports or dispositions, but also of scientific writings. For instance, *Dezvoltarea învățământului, științei și culturii în România [The Development of Education, Science and Culture in Romania]* is a guiding source of information and documentation for the specialists in the years 1980s. (13) For example Mariana Negulescu, an author of instructive materials for teaching of French, quotes from the above-mentioned work and shows how, within the teaching of the French language at the night secondary schools, “the ideal of the communist education means the *creation of the multilaterally developed citizens*, who are supposed to be able to participate creatively in the construction of the socialist and communist society”, all the more so as the students at such schools are already members of the Romanian Communist Party and “take part actively in the political-ideological educational system”. (14) The indoctrination of pupils has to be one of the the teachers’ duties, Mariana Negulescu contends. Along with the teaching of the French language, the teachers have the ethical and political mission to “instill surreptitiously into the consciousness of the students, on every occasion during the lessons, [as] at every school subject, at each class, *the characteristic values of the new Man, creator of the future communist society.*” (15) The author also cites an important ideological statute of the Communist Romanian Party, a

well-known “ethical code” that had become a guiding document in all the domains in the 1980s: in the case of the French language teaching therefore, an emphasis is put on the revolutionary socialist patriotism, on the communist attitude towards education, on the revolutionary humanism, and especially on the “respect and care for the people, since people are the main interest of our social activities” – one of the most used clichés of the Ceaușescu’s regime. (16)

Mariana Negulescu also recommends that the cabinet of foreign modern languages should include an inventory of didactic materials, and most of all, in the first place, before the dictionaries, textbooks, it should contain “Nicolae Ceaușescu’s socio-political works, translated into the main modern foreign languages and published by the Political Publishing House”. (17) The cult of personality, a pivotal element to the dictatorship, justifies the propensity for making his personality known abroad as well, as it is shown in the reports about the activity of the section of “agitation and propaganda” of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, in which there can be seen a special interest in translations, interviews given by the dictator to the foreign journalists, and biographies in various foreign languages. (18)

A re-evaluation of the importance of foreign languages can be explained by Ceaușescu’s keen intention to promote his image, to get a greater visibility, in order to legitimize and promote his position internationally. The law of education of 1978 – which was supervised by Ceaușescu himself, according to the informative notes of the propaganda section – stipulate two foreign languages were mandatory for elementary and secondary education and they were supposed to be pursued and studied thoroughly during the higher education programmes. (19)

Notes and references

- (1) We quote some objectives/legal provisions from the Decree no. 175/1948 for the Reform of Education, text published in M.Of. of Romania. art 2: c) The education of the youth in the spirit of popular democracy and the elevation of people’s knowledge; d) Recommendations how to use the free time of students, organizing extra-curricular activities that connect school, family and social life; e) The scientific training of the teaching staff and specialists that will meet the needs of the consolidation of popular democracy and the construction of socialist society. Law 11/1968, title I, art 1 stipulates the basic principles among which “the development of the socialist nation”, “the formation of the materialist-dialectic conception”, “encouraging the love for the country and the people”. Art. 12 mentions the centralized means of “guidance and control” (resumed and detailed at title IX): “Education in the Republic of Socialist Romania is carried out uniformly. The Ministry of Education is in charge of ruling, guiding and controlling the whole educational system, which is to apply the policies of the party and the state in this domain.”
- (2) DUMITRESCU, Viorica; POPESCU, Constantin; SARAȘ, Marcel; VICOL, Ion. *Metodica predării limbii franceze în școala generală de 8 ani*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1965, p. 8.
- (3) *Idem*.
- (4) *Ibidem*, pp. 12-16
- (5) *Ibidem*, p. 257.

- (6) *Limba franceză. Manual unic pentru clasa a IX-a/a X-a/ XI-a medie*, București: Editura de Stat, 1950.
- (7) A biannual series, *Limbile moderne în școală*, 1972-1991, was edited by the Society of Philological Studies and there was also a series “Modernization of Education”, *Predarea limbilor străine*. București: Biblioteca Centrală Pedagogică, 1975-1978.
- (8) SARAȘ, Marcel; SFICHI, Elena. *Îndrumător metodic pentru predarea limbii franceze în școala generală*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1975, pp. 5-6.
- (9) *Ibidem*, pp. 96-97.
- (10) *Ibidem*, p. 99.
- (11) DRĂGULEȚ, Marin. *Procedee de activizare a elevilor (discipline umaniste)*. București: Editura didactică și pedagogică, 1974. The common element of all scientific studies that were published since 1970 was to include in the bibliography, before the sources in the alphabetic order, at least one or two studies/papers signed by Nicolae Ceaușescu. Thus, Marin Drăguleț mentions the theses from July 1971 and also the speech and the resolution of the Romanian Communist Party of 1973, Nicolae Ceaușescu being the author, placed before all the other authors of specialized works ordered alphabetically (p. 183).
- (12) The Law of Education no. 28/1978 consolidates the role of the Romanian Communist Party “to establish the socialist society multilaterally developed and the Romanian pursuit of communism”. The fundamental objectives were: “the multilateral training of the specialists in all fields of (...), the training and education of the new Man, the continuous improvement of the professional, scientific and technical training of the working people, (...) the elevation of the general knowledge of the people”. The new law adds to the materialist-dialectical training the “socialist humanism, the ideology and policies of the Romanian Communist Party, the principles of socialist ethics and equity, cultivation of the love for the country, the party and the people, the ideals of peace and social progress”.
- (13) CEAUȘESCU, Nicolae. *Dezvoltarea învățământului, științei și culturii în România*. București: Editura Politică, 1979.
- (14) NEGULESCU, Mariana. *Metodica predării limbii franceze în învățământul liceal seral*. București: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1982, p. 15.
- (15) *Ibidem*, pp. 15-16.
- (16) *Ibidem*, p. 16. The guide consists in a “social behaviour code” of 32 pages, a “notebook” in the format A6, *Codul principiilor și normelor muncii și vieții comuniștilor, ale eticii și echității socialiste*. București: Editura Politică, 1981. The author also states that among the teaching objectives “the mainly educational objective we have to constantly follow is the formation of the communist moral features.”
- (17) *Ibidem*, p. 125.
- (18) See *Inventar anii 1977-1989*, Fond Comitetul Central al Partidului Comunist Român, Secția Propagandă și agitație, Arhivele Naționale, p. 2: for the period 24th Jan. –13th Dec. 1977 there are for example resolutions such as „Hotărâri ale Cancelariei CC al PCR însoțite de note și propuneri ale Secției Propagandă a CC al PCR, privind editarea de cărți străine consacrate activității lui Nicolae Ceaușescu, secretar general al PCR”. [Online]. [Accessed 30 June 2017]. Available at: www.arhivelenationale.ro/.../inventare%20grigo/unite%20propaganda%2076-89.pdf.
- (19) Law 28/1978, Art. 14: “In the elementary and secondary schools, the study of two foreign languages (to be chosen) is mandatory. In the higher education system, regardless the specialization, the students are offered a thorough training in order to improve their foreign languages.”