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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 (I)

Dr. Brîndușa Nicolaescu
Faculty of Political Science
University of Bucharest
E-mail: brindusa.nicolaescu@fspub.unibuc.ro

Dr. Brîndușa Nicolaescu is a lecturer at Bucharest University, Faculty of Political Science, where she teaches ESP, Academic Writing and Literature vs. Politics. Her current research interests are creative methodologies of teaching Academic Writing, literary criticism, dystopian fiction as social critique.

Abstract

This article, the first part of a broader research project, attempts to analyze the evolution of the status of foreign language teaching and the subsequent methodology in Romania under the communist regime, especially under the totalitarian rule of Ceaușescu. The languages taken into account are French, English, German, Italian and Spanish, among which the first two are given more importance in the documents used in this research: scientific journals, specialised reviews.

Keywords: *sources of information, documentation, working tools, pdagogy, specialised reviews, methodology, foreign language teaching, political ideology, socialist nationalism*

Preamble

This article stands as the first part of a broader project that attempts to analyse the situation of foreign language teaching during the communist period starting from the 1960s, others than Russian – as that one was almost nonexistent in the documents we have found and used until now in our research process. The status of the Russian language, fallen out of favour, could be explained by the increasing efforts made by the

Romanian regime to get autonomy from the Soviet power, by means of concrete actions such as those in 1963, when Russian lost its "compulsory" character and the Russian Institute from Bucharest was shut down for good. (1)

The research question we started our endeavour with was the following: In the restrictive sociopolitical context of the totalitarian regime established in Romania, followed by Ceaușescu's dictatorship, what was the general methodological framework like for the Romanian teachers of the humanities, especially those of foreign languages, i.e. what were their sources of information and documentation, taken into account they taught the western languages spoken in the capitalist system, harshly criticized by the Romanian political ideology? And the main research question to deal with has thus entailed as follows: To what extent the intrusion of the political ideology, the interference of the socialist nationalist propaganda affected the scientific and pedagogical activity regarding foreign language teaching?

The Role of The School Tribune and The Review of Education

For this first part of the research we shall outline the context mentioned above, namely the methodology of foreign language teaching in the Romanian schools under Ceaușescu.

The languages considered are French, English, German, Italian and Spanish, among which the first two are given more importance in the documents used in the research. As main sources of documentation and information we take into consideration *The School Tribune* and *The Review of Education*, from which we shall present instances of the preoccupations at the time which created guidelines for the Romanian pedagogy, with repercussions over foreign language teaching as well. In addition to these two publications, there were three other similar scholarly journals: *Tanügli Uiság* (the Hungarian counterpart of *The School Tribune*), *The Vocational and Highschool Education* and *Forum – the Review of Higher Education*. All of them were edited by the Romanian Ministry of Education, except *The School Tribune*, which was edited also by the Confederation of the Unions of Education, Science and Culture and which was the ideological spokesman of control and therefore the most obviously and intensively politicized, as it becomes evident after analysing the contents of its issues during the first year of publication.

The School Tribune and The Review of Education in 1971

Issued for the first time in May 1971, just before the famous "July Theses", *The School Tribune* was somehow exempt from a planned political pressure, at least for its first issues. (2) In the editorial on the first page, the vice-minister of Education Traian Pop pointed out the main objective of the journal, that is to put into practice the policy of the party and of the state "in order to promote everything that is novel and useful in science, art and literature, in national and international pedagogical thought" and that the teachers should use the review as a source of information, as a working tool, as "an authentic tribune of theory and advanced practical pedagogy". (3) In this first issue as well Mircea Malița, the minister of Education, wrote a very interesting article on the "diversification" of education, to the benefit of a balance between the vocational education and general

education. (4) The same Mircea Malița had delivered a lecture at the national colloquium “Interdisciplinary Research in Education” in 1970, published the following year *The Review of Education*, together with some other papers of an authentic scientific value, which emphasized the high quality of scientific research at the time. (5) A significant example for the real scientific value of the contributions to the review is a very good article focusing on the methodology of teaching French. The author dealt with relevant issues that are still valid today, questioning the role of technology in teaching, the selection of bibliography, various possible ways of teaching literature. (6)

In 1971 *The Review of Education* had already had a rich tradition in debates, points of views in the domain of the sciences of education. According to the explanations offered by the the site of the review, “in the period 1952-1963, Soviet teachers were required texts as reference systems for ideas promoted by the magazine, the magazine during 1964-1969 has become a way of promoting and analysis at the level of specialists in the field of Theoretical teaching and the period 1970-1979 was devoted to education in the context of Romanian science ... by the biggest names of teachers, psychologists and scholars of Romania at the time”. (7)

If one takes a look at the headlines of the issues of *The School Tribune* throughout the year 1971, the conclusion that can be drawn is cristal clear: politicization had been getting more and more prominent. „The models and the scientific languages of the reality” were increasingly mirrored by the methodology of foreign language teaching, with a special focus on commercial and tourist aspects. (8) The last page of the review, entitled “Meridians” presented external news, mostly encomiastic reports of “working visits” of Nicolae Ceaușescu to China, North Korea, Vietnam and Mongolia. Issue no. 9 appeared only after the Executive Committee of Romanian Communist Party passed the “July Theses”, in 6 iulie 1971. (9) As an immediate consequence, the review changed its graphic design, using big red bullets in order to accompany supersized indications and guidelines written by Ceaușescu himself and first page could read headlines such as “Total Devotion” and “a wise programme of strengthening political educational work”. Among the last interventions within the specialized field is one small article posited down the page, that challenged with good arguments the topics dealt with by the textbooks of foreign languages which were artificial and did not bring about real communication. (10) The contributions on foreign language teaching were decreasing both in number and in quality, for instance an article on “transfer and interference” does not go beyond the level of shere verbosity and theoretical cliché despite the expectations given to the reader by a big title. (11) The controversy triggered by the choice “language vs. literature” in teaching foreign languages could get ambiguous overtones, because when the author recommended teachers should avoid the classical authors in studying literary [French] language, the suggestion “a new orientation” alluded probably to the imposed political ideology. (12) But the teacher Mihai Hopulele was but ambiguous when he concluded his article following the nationalist socialist imperatives of his time that required a specific type of topics: by means of “additions from our national history ... we shall achieve together a harmonious colligation of patriotic education and internationalist education”. (13) Broadly speaking, in 1971 few articles to be called properly scientific were to appear in the last issues of *The School Tribune*, which promoted mainly the devotion of teachers to the unity of the nation and the party, the art of scholarly education becoming just a

necessary part of the mobilizing programme of socialist education. As the ultimate example of what was going on, issue no. 22 reproduced on nine pages (out of twelve) an important speech delivered by Ceaușescu, whereas the visit of Jean Piaget in Romania was mentioned in one column article on page ten. Needless to add more to this grotesque reversal of values. (14)

As *The Review of Education* is concerned, the political intrusions have also pernicious effects onto the scientific level of the publication. The issue no. 2 is dedicated to the celebration of the Romanian Communist Party that had completed fifty years of exemplary activity and issue no. 3 set a new direction for the following issues: lessons of Marxism-Leninism and ideological education. (15) The main objective was entirely political: science of education was equaled altogether to the new ideological propaganda. And while these new instructions and commands, meaningless pedagogically speaking, occupied the first part of the review, useful articles were tolerated in the last part of the review, such as “The improvement of the educational technology”, where valuable articles were published. (16) Another surprising example – given the context - in the field of foreign language teaching is a very good technical article on the methodology of teaching advanced English, published in the 11th issue of the review, where one can easily notice a ratio favourable to the real scientific contributions, which implied nevertheless the consistent presence of the authoritarian discourse, in the form of the first articles and moreover the preface of the editorial staff: “The dynamics of education in tune with the dynamics of the improvement of the socialist society multilaterally developed”. (17)

Notes and references

- (1) DELETANT, Dennis. *Romania under Communist Rule*. Bucharest: Civic Academy Foundation, 2006, p. 152. Vezi și BRAHAM. L. Randolph. *Education in Romania; A Decade of Change*. New York: The City College of the City University of New York, p. 4. The growth of the socialist nationalism was accompanied by desovietization measures: “external de-Sovietization or desatellization was coupled with a general de-Russification of internal institutions. One of the most dramatic changes was the transfer of Russian from a required to an elective course in virtually all educational institutions.”
- (2) Vezi DELETANT, Dennis. *Op. cit.*, p. 166-167. The expectancies of liberalization created by the reforms during the years 1965-1968 (including the reformation of education) and which led to the independence from the Soviet Union did not affect the internal position of the Romanian Communist Party, which was in control of all spheres of social, public activity, education included. See BRAHAM. L. Randolph. *Op. cit.*, p. 8. “The determining role of the Communist Party in educational matters as in all other spheres of public life is sanctified by law.”, for example the Decree 1171/1968 stipulated the Ministry of Education was under the guidance and rule of the Central Committee of the party.
- (3) POP, Traian. La început de drum. In: *Tribuna școlii*, an I, nr.1, 7 mai 1971, p. 1. All the political references were made rather formally in the first issue, using the political clichés of the period. They seemed to be subsidiary to the main objective of the review, which is a professional, specialised source of “information and documentation”. Besides this fake

- article, required by the censorship, the author also wrote in the same issue a scientific paper, well documented “More creativity in organising and holding the lessons”.
- (4) *Ibidem*, p. 3.
 - (5) MALIȚA, Mircea. Renovarea științei și educației în spiritul științei moderne. In: *Revista de pedagogie*, XX, 1, 1971, p. 17-28.
 - (6) EFRIMESCU, Cristina. Contribuții la modernizarea predării limbii franceze în școli. In: *Revista de pedagogie*, XX, 1, 1971, p. 95-99.
 - (7) *Revista de pedagogie. Theme and role in the scientific community*. [Online]. [Accessed at 3 December 2016]. Available at: <http://revped.ise.ro/theme-and-role/>
 - (8) RACHICI, D.. Liceele cu predare în limbi moderne. In: *Tribuna școlii*, an I, nr.7, 18 iunie 1971, p. 3.
 - (9) CEAUȘESCU, Nicolae. *Propuneri de măsuri pentru îmbunătățirea activității politico-ideologice, de educare marxist-leninistă a membrilor de partid, a tuturor oamenilor muncii*. [Online]. [Accessed at 3 December 2016]. Available at: http://ro.wikisource.org/wiki/Tezele_din_iulie.
 - (10) SELAGEA, S.. Livresc și uzual în studiul limbilor străine. In: *Tribuna școlii*, an I, nr.9, 9 iulie 1971, p. 6.
 - (11) RARINCA, Eufimia. Transfer și interferență în învățarea limbilor străine. In: *Tribuna școlii*, an I, nr.18, 8 octombrie 1971, p. 4.
 - (12) ANGHEL, Florin. Ce învață elevii în liceu: limba sau literatura franceză? In: *Tribuna școlii*, an I, nr.19, 15 octombrie 1971, p. 9.
 - (13) HOPULELE, Mihai. Elemente formative în lecțiile de literatură franceză. In: *Tribuna școlii*, an I, nr.20, 22 octombrie 1971, p. 9.
 - (14) MALIȚA, Mircea. Piaget. In: *Tribuna școlii*, an I, nr.22, 5 noiembrie 1971, p. 10.
 - (15) CERGHIT, Ioan. Cultivarea dragostei [sic!] pentru PCR – latură esențială a educației patriotice. In: *Revista de pedagogie*, XX, 2, 1971, p. 36-41. RIZESCU, Ioan. Rolul științelor sociale în educația politico-idoelocică a elevilor. In: *Revista de pedagogie*, XX, 3, 1971, p. 11-21.
 - (16) BOCU, Marian. Metodica lecțiilor de limbi moderne. In: *Revista de pedagogie*, XX, 3, 1971, p. 102-107.
 - (17) DRAGOȘ, Liliana; SEMILYÉN, Eva. Strategii euristice în predarea limbii engleze. In: *Revista de pedagogie*, XX, 11, 1971, p. 83-86.