

On Post-communist Mentalities Illustrated in the Romanian Vocabulary

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Résumé : Notre travail se donne comme but l'approche des phénomènes linguistiques et, en particulier, des mutations survenues au niveau du lexique, dans certaines conditions historiques, du point de vue de la philosophie du langage, ce dernier fournissant des informations en mesure d'expliquer une série de phénomènes qui font l'objet de l'histoire des mentalités.

Mots-clés : lexique, mentalités, idéologie politique, philosophie du langage

There is a correspondence between the economic and political structures of a society, and its cultural foundations. An analysis of the political culture presupposes taking into consideration all these components, the most significant being political values, ideologies and mentalities. It is imperative to discover the correlations among beliefs, ideas, values, attitudes and behaviours, which represent the backbone of political culture. As it is well known, mentalities represent the most profound element of collective psychology and the structures which prove the most reluctant to change. That is why the change of political mentalities is a central analysis topic in understanding the post-communist transition.

A heated debate is in question nowadays, regarding the relations between the cultural, political and economic structures of a society. The issue is whether the political structures of democratic inspiration and the mechanisms of market economy which became dominant in Western societies are compatible with the cultural structures of non-Western societies, such as Asian, African, etc. Cultural structures refer here to religion, art and philosophical thinking, customs and beliefs, lifestyles, traditions, family and behavior types, morals, representations of divinity, nature, humanity, forms of educations, etc. What is the influence of all these aspects on a political and economic level? Any national economy is supported by the people lifestyle, their mentalities and their economic and social behavior, their specific cultural context.

Specialised literature often deals with the possibility of a convergence between language philosophy and the study of mentalities. Thus, the authors of the *Encyclopedic Semiotic Dictionary* consider that “(...) *the facts regarding the world are often discovered through the analysis of the language by means of which the world is talked about.*” (our transl.) The same authors reflect on the possible relations between language philosophy and the study of mentalities, as they occur if an analysis is performed upon the contextual meanings of certain words at a given moment and their definitions in explanatory and encyclopedic dictionaries.

In an attempt to find the essence of language philosophy, the starting point may well be the comprehensive definition provided by Eugen Coșeriu who, in *Introduction in Linguistics*, states the following: “*Language philosophy does not study language in itself and for itself, but in relation to other human activities, first of all in relation to thinking, trying to establish the essence and place of language among the phenomena expressing the human essence. The fundamental issue of language philosophy is to answer the “What is language?”, while Linguistics attempts to find not necessarily what language is, but rather the manner that language manifests itself in its historical forms, which are languages.*” (our transl.)

Thus, it may be considered that the approach of linguistic phenomena from the point of view of language philosophy, especially the mutations occurring at the level of vocabulary, under certain historic circumstances, may explain a series of facts related to the study of mentalities.

So, our purpose is to demonstrate this hypothesis by the contextual analysis of the definitions provided for a number of meanings for two verbs, as they are recorded in various Romanian dictionaries.

An initial illustration is the verb *a da* used with the meaning of the verb *a vinde*. The second edition of the DEX, as well as the first edition (1975) register under point 7 in the definition of the verb *a da* the colloquial synonym "a vinde", in the phrase "*Cum dai merele?*". The same meaning also appears for the verb *a da* in the *New Universal Dictionary of Romanian Language*, which defines it under position 8 as synonymous with *a vinde*, *a oferi contra plată*: "*Dă odăi cu chirie.; Cum dai pepenii?*". *A vinde* as an explanatory synonym for *a da* is absent in all editions of Șăineanu's dictionary (1896, 1906, 1914, 1922, 1925), as well as in the dictionary of Candrea and Adamescu (1931) and in *The Academy Dictioanry* (1915-1940). In fact the explicit form of the question *Cum dai merele?* / *Cum dai pepenii?* As well as its accurate formulation is "*Cu ce preț vinzi merele / pepenii?*". The construction *Cum dai merele?* implies the possibility of negotiation specific to the trade in local markets, also reinforced by the use of the second person singular for the verb, instead of the plural, which is specific to official, standard, impersonal relations. That is why the use of the verb *a da* meaning *a vinde* is not practiced and recommended in fixed-price stores. However, during the communist era constructions of the type: "*Se dau banane la alimentara.*" instead of "*Se vând banane la alimentara.*" were quite frequent.

After the 80s, food products were ever harder to find, and their distribution was rationalised, thus leading to the idea that occurred in the collective mind that these products were a gift from the leaders and not "sold" and "bought". The communist state policy was to inculcate the idea that elementary rights were favours the citizen had to be grateful for. That is why phrases like "*Se dă carne la alimentara, dar nu am bani să cumpăr.*" were quite common – in which the verb *a da* is exclusively a partial synonym for "a vinde".

The 1989 revolution and the following period determined among others a progressive abundance of food products on the market, which resulted in decreasing the use of the verb *a (se) da* meaning *a (se) vinde*, especially among the young people. An interesting phenomenon takes into account the age of the subjects. Thus, many of those who in the 80s used to employ the verb *a (se) da* instead of *a (se) vinde* have ceased to do so when referring to the present, but still do it when referring to the past. This is why formulations of the type: "*Merg să cumpăr 1 kg de banane. Pe vremuri erau cozi immense când se dădeau banane.*" should not sound surprising, especially when uttered by older persons.

A similar approach is to be seen in Cristina Florescu's article "*Au-delà de la langue de bois. Une interprétation sémantique*", who registers the semantic richness, the multitude of denotative and connotative meanings of the verb *a vinde* from a diachronic perspective. To sum up, the author makes a number of observations, among which the following: "In the 80s, (...) in colloquial language, there is occurs a spectacular distortion: it seems as if nothing were sold anymore at the endless lines characterizing that era and social mentality, and the merchandise were given away, instead of sold. People almost no longer ask "*Ce se vinde aici?*" "; but replace the question by "*Ce se dă?*" ". Thus the verb *a vinde*, semantically mutilated because of the more general *a da* seemed irreversibly deteriorated. (...) Linguistically speaking, the hope remains that one day when talking to our confused children that, in an era that has disappeared forever, *a vinde* was almost completely superseded by *a da*, our children will ask in stupefaction: "*Dar cine dădea?*"

In a similar situation from several points of view is *a lua*, which used to be employed as a potential synonym for *a cumpăra* or *a încasa o sumă de bani*. These meanings are registered in both editions of the DEX (1975, 1996), but are absent from all the five

editions of Șăineanu's dictionary, from the dictionary of Candrea and Adamescu and *The Dictionary of Romanian Language* (1965, -). These facts support the theory according to which before 1950 the verb *a lua* was not used in free variation with *a cumpăra* or *a încasa o sumă de bani* and much less as their replacement. Nevertheless, it is common occurrence to hear, even in young subjects, formulations such as: „Și-a luat o casă / mașină / obiect vestimentar nou(ă).” In fact, the subjects in questions did not take these objects, but bought them, participated in a transaction, did not benefit from a charity or steal them. Also as a result of communist power, which attempted to impose in the collective mentality the idea of "favor", the phrases: *Se dă salariul. Se dau banii de concediu.* instead of "Se plătesc salariile." took shape and imposed themselves in the language. As proof of the deep rooting in the collective mentality one may also quote phrases used in advertisements of all types. For example: "*Ia-ți abonamentul promoțional de Crăciun...*" – where it is obvious that the verb *a lua* is used in order to mean *a cumpăra*. Even if in the daily language they occur quite frequently, specialised dictionaries (the two editions of the DEX, *The Academy Dictionary*, *The Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, the dictionary of Candrea and Adamescu) do not register *a da* instead of "a plăti", nor *a lua* instead of "a încasa". It is a sign that these expressions may disappear from the vocabulary, even if mentalities are known to evolve slowly and with difficulty.

In guise of conclusion, it may be said that the studies of language philosophy cannot alter mentalities, but may lie at the foundation of in-depth analyses of such phenomena which, in turn, should be actualised in a number of explanatory normative texts.

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