

## NEW PERSPECTIVES UPON TRAINING ROMANIAN MOTHER-TONGUE TEACHERS

Roxana Maria GHIAȚĂU<sup>a</sup>, Liliana MĂȚĂ<sup>b\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University, Teacher Training Department, Iași, RO-700554, Romania,

<sup>b</sup> “Vasile Alecsandri” University of Bacău, Mărășești Street, 157, RO-600115, Bacău, Romania

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### Abstract

*The purpose of this study is that of delineating and analyzing the framework for the training of Romanian mother-tongue teachers starting from the distinction between various levels of performing their training. The contemporary educational, cultural, economic, and political context (national as well as international) has imposed a new view upon the issue of teaching Romanian as mother tongue. Thus, we build the theoretical body of the paper on the following premises: a) the definition of the concepts of mother tongue and training of mother-tongue teachers; b) the analysis of the context of achieving their training in the communist and post-communist period in Romania; c) the reforming changes from theory to practice. The approach to this issue will be continued through exploratory studies focused on the identification of the change areas of the initial training programmes for forming mother-tongue teachers. The scope of these areas ranges from the innovation of curricular areas, to curricular policies and training specialists.*

**Key words:** educational reform, mother-tongue teachers, teacher education

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### 1. Conceptual framework

The concept of mother tongue is very complex, being compared with a product of utopian thinking which can hardly survive the confrontation of social reality (Kroon & Sturm, 1988). The same authors distinguish between more meanings: the primary socializational meaning – mother tongue is the language taught by parents, especially by the mother, without any other participation of school or other institutions; the politico-cultural meaning – the concept of mother tongue is connected to the shaping of national and regional identity or to the shaping of the state (the

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\* E-mail address: liliana.mata@ub.ro

literary transition, the elite are the agents of this meaning of language of the fatherland); the educational meaning – the stress is laid mainly on the interviewing of knowledge of the real world and language and language use: language is the symbolic representation of that knowledge.

Love and Ansaldo (2010, p. 589) propose an explanation of mother tongue by revaluing the first meaning, the primary meaning: “If you were born and brought up from birth to speak a given language, for preference in a family where the parents or other adults had the same experience with the same language, then you are a native speaker of that language, which is your mother tongue.” The distinguishing between the three meanings is very important because this is how we can understand why there occur difficulties of understanding for what mother tongue is; it is obvious that in different contexts there occur different meanings. In school, for instance, the politico-cultural and the educational meanings are valued more through the study programmes.

Another concept we will approach raises the issue of the denomination of a discipline which ensures teachers’ psycho-pedagogical preparation for teaching mother tongue. In Eastern Europe, including Romania, the notion of *methodology of teaching* was traditionally used, this syntagm being closely connected to the integrating field, didactics. The ‘70s and the ‘80s were the glory years of methodology and then a slow transition was taken towards branch didactics/disciplinary didactics/ specialty didactics. Ionescu (2001, p. 2), a Romanian pedagogue, author of a textbook of didactics, presents the study fields of didactics: teaching in its entirety, on all levels of school and self-training, in which case we speak of *general didactics*; the process of education from the pedagogical perspective of teaching and learning subjects, case in which it is termed *special* or *methodical didactics* (each subject has, therefore, its own didactics/ methodology, which studies the content, the principles, the methods and forms of organization of that particular subject in its concrete, applicative details); self-training; adults’ didactics; academic didactics.

For Kairaitis (2009, p. 140) branch didactics are not synonymous with methodologies. Branch didactics answer the question “what to teach” while methodologies deal with “how to teach.” Despite these differences, in practice, many Romanian authors entitle their works either methodologies, or didactics, without any special mentioning. Other attempts have been made of integrating psycho-pedagogical knowledge and abilities of all the teachers who teach languages under the heading of some common principles and models, thus other denominations appearing such as the *didactics of languages*, the *didactics of plurilingualism*, and the *didactics of Language and communication curricular area*. All these fields are based on a cross-linguistic and interdisciplinary approach.

In France, Puren (1999) uses the notion of *didactique des langues-cultures DLC*. This is the *discipline focused on the observation, analysis, interpretation and intervention regarding the mediums, practices and processes situated in and inter-relating the teaching and learning of languages and cultures*. DLC was built through successive additions, on three levels: *methodological, didactic, didactological*. The *methodological level*, sends to the means and techniques of teaching languages. As a historical period this is situated between 1890 and 1970. The exaggerated stress on this level transforms the educative action in a series of prefabricated recipes and sends to the putting into action of some fix schemes of action. As a derivation to this level there appear the methodologies we spoke about earlier. The *didactic level* (meta-methodological) gives equal attention to the separate extra-methodological elements of the didactic action (objectives, contents, means of teaching-learning and evaluation) and to their relationships and permanent reflection upon methodologies. Within this approach, the method is a component of a permanently changing ensemble, and it is also just a means, not a purpose. The *didactological (meta-didactic) level* – pinpointed to the ‘80s of the previous century – developed under the pressure of the vocal requirement of teachers’ preparation periods, in order to meet the demand for reflection over the didactic level.

From an epistemological viewpoint, DLC includes the following components: *the field* – language and culture; *the actors* – students, teachers, textbook editors and authors, trainers, didacticians; *a subject* – teaching/learning languages; *a project* – improving the process of teaching-learning language and culture; *an issue* – of the actors, objectives, contents, didactic strategies; *theoretical instruments* – concepts which are specific to the organization in more or less extended configurations, respectively models, theories, principles, norms.

In the Anglo-Saxon literature the notion of language didactics is not used, but the concept of language education is used instead and this includes not only the perspective of the didacticians but also that of the policy makers who make to make sure that the policies they introduce meet the learners’ demands and the teachers’ possibilities and are in tune with the general cultural and political context. In England the issue is a bit more complicated because it also entails issues of immigrant culture, bilingualism, multilingualism or international relations (Thompson, 2004) as matters to be taken into consideration when designing a language education policy. Other aspects brought by this expanded perspective, in which a conscious inclusion of social and political issues and purposes is encouraged, were that language education meant preparing an individual for a discursive society, the business sector had to be involved to support a sector that would give its future specialists, that cultural diversity had to be respected (Bourne & Reid, 2003).

## **2. The context of achieving Mother-tongue teacher education in the communist and post-communist period in Romania**

We can approach the issue of studying Romanian language as a mother tongue from two distinct perspectives (Pamfil, 2007): the achronic perspective, situated beyond the specificity of each age, and the diachronic perspective, focused on the changes in vision determined by the (re)orienting of educational policies and by the modification of the areas of knowledge in the basic fields.

We cannot separate the evolution of a field of knowledge from the transformations occurring at a political, economic and social level in a country. Consequently, we can assert that the changes in the field of mother tongue didactics are in close connection with the ideological changes that Romania passed through. Language is an identity, social and cultural marker and, therefore, the processes of teaching-learning a language are influenced by the system of social and political values in which it is performed.

From a diachronic perspective we can relate to historical contexts. Teaching any mother tongue, encounters major changes, in a consensus with the political changes in that respective country. The curriculum is strongly influenced by ideology (Apple, 1979), and mother tongue represents a significant political, cultural and educational capital.

### *1.1. The training of Romanian language and literature during communism*

Historians identified different stages of the communist period, which we will use in our study. Thus, we distinguish 3 periods, according to the dynamics of the political regime, determined, in its turn, by the Soviet model and control (Frunză, 1990; Marino, 2000).

The first stage, of Stalinization (1944–1964) is characterized at the level of language through a great number of borrowings from the Russian language, which are understandable under the conditions of a general tendency of the Romanian social, political and economic system of copying the Soviet model. The mother tongue textbooks of this period included study texts which belonged to the Soviet leaders, and so did the methodology books for teachers. The texts of the Soviet leaders were used as guides for teaching. A series of Romanian specialists designed autochthonous methodologies and syllabi, laying the bases of some research in the field. In the book *The Methodology of Teaching Romanian Language* (Berca, 1964), Lenin is quoted from time to time. From a thematic point of view, the book contains: teaching phonetics, teaching vocabulary, teaching morphology, teaching syntax, teaching orthographic and punctuation norms. At first sight we can say that the methodology of teaching languages is the work of linguists and yet there are these political influences throughout a particular age.

The second stage of the communist period is comprised between 1964 and 1971 and it is known as the “defrosting” period being equivalent with the gradual coming out from under Moscow’s power. This short return to a state of normality is also reflected at the level of language through a significant reduction of the number of borrowings and calques from Russian, concomitantly with the return to the common sources of borrowings for the Romanian language – French and English. More and more studies are produced and works from other cultural spaces are exploited.

The third stage is that of the national communist regime, between 1971 and 1989. The most striking phenomenon at a social level is the cult of personality in the case of the two leaders, the dictator Ceaușescu and his wife, which is reflected at the level of language through an impressive proliferation of the cliché. The specific form of expression is the wooden language which can be considered an atypical language, put into the service of an ideology and characterized through a series of specific lexical, morpho-syntactic and pragma-semantic features (Dinu, 2010). The wooden language is present in the media, in students’ textbooks and in the manuals for teachers’ training. It is obvious that the study of the Romanian language and its corresponding methodology were affected. During the ‘80s this period reached its peak. The texts comprised in all studies of pedagogy and methodology reveal deep alignments from an ideological point of view. We quote from a work of mother tongue methodology (Bojin, 1980, p. 3): “At the basis of the studies which form the present volume there are the guidings given by the party documents regarding the role and the tasks of studying Romanian language and literature in school, the materialist-dialectic and historic view in whose light the language and literature phenomena must be considered in order to achieve their comprehensive study.”

At a practical level, for the teachers of Romanian language from the communist period, many things were clear. There were several methodology textbooks written by known authors and which represented the basis for the preparation of the exams for their future careers. In that time, they worked with unique textbooks, in which changes were minimal. Practically, throughout a period of 15–20 years in a Romanian language and literature textbook almost nothing changed. There was school syllabus which was in close correspondence with the textbook. It is in relation to this syllabus that school planning and lessons plans were designed with a clear structure in which there were enumerated the general objectives of the lessons, the operational objectives, the stages of the lessons, etc.

### *1.2. The training of Romanian language and literature teachers during the post-communist period*

As in many other European countries, the '90s of the previous century brought a remarkable wave of changes for the teachers from Romania. Many things differed from what had existed in the past and the educators' working instruments attained a new face making them learn many new things.

At the theoretical level of the fields of psycho-pedagogical knowledge, a massive conceptual input appeared. The long-disputed *theory of the curriculum* reached Romania subverting thus, at least in appearance, the old general didactics. The theory of the curriculum provides the language of the educational reform in Romania, putting in difficulty the decision-makers, the pedagogy specialists and teachers alike. Thus, a series of new terms occur which seem very strange to the teachers trained in the communist period: National Curriculum, curricular design, hidden curriculum, frame objectives, reference objectives, competences, etc. Paradoxically, there also appeared new fields which incorporate the denominator *didactics* namely, special didactics, branch didactics, discipline didactics. Discipline didactics appeared in France during the '70s (Sarremejane, 2001), and in Romania they appeared in the '90s and 2000s, the political regime being the one responsible for this delay. The adoption of the new name, specialty didactics, is not lacking in pedagogical and even political significance. It highlights even a paradigm shift (Kairaitis, 2009, p. 142). The appearance of branch didactics in Romania had different motivations in comparison to other countries: it was generated by the conceptual adaptation and recovery and less by epistemological, research motivations, as it happened in other countries (Caillot, 2002, p. 402).

At a practical, actional level, we register a series of common changes for all teachers, regardless of their specialty:

- the introduction of the new school syllabi, called National Curriculum, within which there were substantial changes. Obviously, new textbooks also appeared in agreement with the philosophy of the new syllabi. The passing from the unique textbooks to alternative textbooks is also of great importance.
- the appearance of some new methodologies of teaching-learning-evaluation, such as the methodology for the development of critical thinking, of American origin;
- the appearance of the NICT through which the computer was introduced in the act of teaching;

- the objectives of the lesson have become general competences and specific competences, the planning got a new structure, the school curriculum required a personalized reading.

Specific changes also occur for the teachers of Romanian language. The discipline Romanian language and literature is seen as a part of a group of disciplines called curricular area which also comprises foreign languages. The purpose of this reorganization is that of integrating all the languages taught to Romanian students in light of some common finalities, respectively the finality of building abilities of communication on the axis reception–production of meaning. The ‘90s are characterized through curricular design focused on objectives. At the end of 2000s, school syllabi were drafted from the perspective of the passage towards the model focused on competences. Competences are defined as ensemble of knowledge, skills and aptitudes which are to be formed by the end of the obligatory period of school.

In the school syllabi for Romanian language and literature for the 5<sup>th</sup> up to the 8<sup>th</sup> grades from 2008 (*Revised school syllabus. Romanian language and literature. 5<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> grades, 2008*), the purpose of studying Romanian language and literature during the obligatory period of school is presented as follows: “to form a young person with a basic communicational and literary culture, capable of understanding the world, of communicating and of interacting with his/her peers, of using efficiently and creatively his/ her own capacities to solve some concrete problem of daily life, of being able to continue the process of learning in any phase of his/ her existence, of being sensitive to the beautiful from nature and the beautiful created by man. The authors of the syllabi declare from the beginning their adherence to the *communicative-functional* model, which would be adequate not only for the specificity of this subject, but also for the modes of structuring students’ communication competence. At a declarative level, there occurs the shift to the “learning to learn” syntagm (Bonset and Rijlaarsdam, 2004), thus keeping pace with the changes in other European countries.

### 3. Conclusions

Concluding, we can assert that the Romanian ideal during the communist period was the shaping of the multiply developed personality, a paradigmatic type of communist individual. The objectives of the Romanian language subject are politically deformed, this contributing to the “shaping of the revolutionary consciousness of the young generation, based on the endless devotion towards the socialist organization” (an example of linguistic cliché from the pedagogy textbooks). All the issues connected to the process of education are three-dimensional comprising the following aspects: scientific-didactic, ideological-didactic and technical-didactic. The didactic

methodology incorporated the methodology of the scientific and dialectic materialism. Teachers studied scientific socialism, as an important subject in the exams for the promotion in their didactic career. Despite the interferences of the communist doctrine, methodology textbooks also contained consistent materials, technically presenting useful models for the teaching of mother tongue. Part of them represent a didactic resource even for nowadays' education.

All changes from post-communist period could not remain without an echo in what Romanian language didactics is concerned. Some authors refused the change, others embraced it. Thus, some authors prefer the old denomination – methodology – remaining faithful to some themes of linguistics considered obsolete by Romanian language teachers, themes that do not have any connection with the educational practice, while other authors wrote didactics books versatily integrating the occurring changes. Thus, in these didactics books there appeared themes which use the language of reform and grant importance to teachers' daily work (Ilie, 2008): the curriculum and the curricular products specific to the subject Romanian language and literature, planning in Romanian language and literature, ways of performing and organizing the didactic activity, methods and procedures used in studying literature, didactic means in the literature class, evaluation in the literature class. There are also situations in which the replacement of the paradigm “methodology” with “didactics” was only a surface one. But the consistency issue is closely connected to the content of these works, which do not differ through anything from the content of the old methodology.

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