

MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION  
IN A SPECIFIC REGION:  
ROMANIA

THE PARADIGMS OF ROMANIAN LANGUAGE AND  
LITERATURE CURRICULA IN THE SECOND HALF  
OF THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY AND THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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**Abstract.** This article is the synthesis of research focused on the history of the Romanian mother tongue language and literature curricula of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. The curricula I analysed comprise a history with complex syncopated rhythms, periods of re-constitution and re-crystallisation alternating with periods of deconstruction and repression. The changes of rhythm are the result of the dialogue between the institutional policies of the Ministry of Education and the language, literature and education sciences. This dialogue was a positive and constructive one in the periods of socio-cultural and economic evolution of the country and absent or extremely tense during the communist

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period. The article presents a history of the curricular projects for the study of the Romanian mother tongue language and literature<sup>2</sup> by middle and secondary school pupils<sup>3</sup>.

## 1. A HISTORY OF THE CURRICULA FOR THE STUDY OF ROMANIAN

The process of setting up and reforming the study of Romanian extends over three periods of time: the last four decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the two halves of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Each of the periods witnessed major reforms: in particular those of 1864 and 1899 and those of 1948 and 1995. These reforms coincide with major events in the history of the country:

- 1) 1859 Alexandru Ioan Cuza<sup>4</sup> united the Romanian Principalities
- 2) after 1866 under Carol I<sup>5</sup> the building of Modern Romania
- 3) 1947<sup>6</sup> the change of the country into a communist republic
- 4) 1989 revolution and the anticommunist movement.

## 2. THE FIRST PERIOD

The first period (1864-1898) of the history of teaching Romanian as a mother tongue was one of pre-structuring in order to create an autonomous and coherent school subject. This period extends from the appearance of the Education Law during the time of A. I. Cuza to the Reform of Spiru Haret<sup>7</sup> and covers two intervals: one between 1865-1880 and the other from 1880-1898.

The first interval (1865-1880) is defined by the co-existence of Romanian and Latin within the same school subject - "Romanian will be forever studied in comparison with Latin" – and by the focus on the teaching and learning of the Latin culture. The Latin culture was understood to be the origin of the Romanian one and also

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<sup>2</sup> *The Romanian mother-tongue language and literature curricula refer to reading, grammar, oral and written communication in the syllabi for middle school and language and literature in the ones for the secondary school.*

<sup>3</sup> *The ages of middle school pupils are between 11 - 14/15 and the ages of secondary school pupils are 14/15 - 18/19.*

<sup>4</sup> *Alexander John Cuza (common English rendition of Alexandru Ioan Cuza who lived between 1820 - 1873), Romanian, was a politician who was elected and ruled as the first prince (Romanian 'domnitor') of the United Principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia (the first name of Romania) between 1859 and 1866.*

<sup>5</sup> *Carol I of Romania (who lived between 1839 - 1914), German prince, was elected prince (domnitor) of Romania in April 1866 following the overthrow of Alexander John Cuza. Carol I was proclaimed king in 1881. He was the first ruler of the Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen dynasty which would rule the country until the proclamation of the "People's Republic" in 1947.*

<sup>6</sup> *On December 30, 1947, the Communist Party's power was consolidated, King Michael was forced to renounce the throne and the "Romanian People's Republic", firmly aligned with the Soviet Union, was proclaimed.*

<sup>7</sup> *Spiru Haret was the minister of education during the reign of Carol I and is considered to be the founder of the modern Romanian School System perfectly synchronised with the French and German ones.*

an ideal cultural model. The second interval (1880-1898) is constantly oriented towards establishing Romanian as an autonomous school subject. This orientation is noticeable in the thoughtful choice of the lists of contents (grammar and rhetoric) and in the effort of imposing the image of the Romanian culture as a national value as well as an integral part of both the antique and the modern European culture.

The contents of most of the curricula consist of lists of domains grouped according to the linguistic fields (etymology, historical and synchronic grammar, the history of the language, rhetoric) but also literature under the vague term of texts that are "writings of value". The linguistic fields and the texts are representative of the major culture of the time and allow one, explicitly or implicitly, to realise the prevalent learning methods of the time. Learning was based on the learning by heart and word by word of the texts considered models, on rigorous rhetorical and grammatical analysis, and on writing according to consecrated textual patterns. The major concern in the beginning of the period was the study of language, but towards its end the interest in reading literature for its logical and aesthetic values is apparent, as well as an interest in the teaching of literature.

The curricula are printed using only the Latin alphabet while the textbooks of this period use both the Cyrillic and Latin alphabet. The textbooks require the Romanian language to be studied comparatively and the literary texts are studied for their written structure and their moral values. The school books of this period - from the point of view of their structure and function - can be considered to be either readers or anthologies of texts (classical Latin texts, Romanian moral and educational narratives, often Biblical stories) or treaties of historical grammar, of poetry writing or of stylistics.

The textbook authors often speak of the difficulties they encounter in the writing of a schoolbook due to the absence of literature for young people and due to the small number of Romanian literary texts, which proved troublesome when the author wanted to illustrate different genres. Due to this insufficiency of Romanian literature the authors had to resort to the translation of texts from foreign textbooks or to the writing of 'pieces' which would suit their pedagogical aims.

### 3. THE SECOND PERIOD

The study of the school subject, Romanian mother tongue language and literature, gained precision, unity and prestige after the first Education Reform designed and brought into being by Spiru Haret. The documents published in 1899 show a coherent and substantial object of study and open the most constructive period in the history of Romanian as a school subject. This second period of development extends till 1947 (when the curricula first exhibit the communist ideology) and is defined by successive refinements of the curricular patterns and of the textbooks. The development of the 'Romanian curriculum' was achieved in three stages.

The curricula that belong to the first stage (1899-1927) build a correct relationship between the linguistic and educational sciences and the school subject. The study of Romanian has a practical character unlike before when it was mainly theoretical. The new orientation is also visible in the organisation of the object of study,

which is divided into reading, theory and composition. The new structuring confers reading a central role in developing the “noble feelings of the youth”, the religious, the national and the aesthetic feelings. In order to achieve this role the authors of the educational projects create a reading process scenario which starts with the understanding of fictional literary worlds, continues with the development of analytical and interpretative skills and ends before graduation with a review of the evolution of Romanian literature.

There is an obvious concern to clarify the contents of Romanian as an object of study. But there are also attempts to structure the literary patrimony according to the criteria of cultural and aesthetic representativity and to restructure the study of grammar to support the imperative of correct written and spoken Romanian. These tendencies crystallise within the Second Education Reform (1908) achieved during the time Spiru Haret was the minister of education. The Second Reform emphasises and uses the educational values of the study of Romanian aimed at both individual education (the development of all “the powers of the soul”) and at the education of citizens capable of contributing to the development of modern Romania.

The curricula that belong to the next stage (1928-1932) are characterised by a concern with the substance of the study of Romanian and less with the development of a “national feeling”. This change is visible in the construction of a stable literary canon and the reshaping of the study of language from a lexical and stylistic perspective. The construction of the literary canon is achieved in agreement with aesthetic criteria and is supported by the compulsory reading of texts that have artistic value. The study of language is extended to creative writing and text analysis. The aim of the educational activities linked to the study of Romanian literature is to develop the pupils’ personality by allowing space for reflection and evaluation during the lessons.

The model of the Latin culture and that of the national culture had previously been the super-ordinates of the school subject Romanian. The mother-tongue study was to be shaped by the ‘laws’ of artistic beauty. The major objectives were the opening of routes of access to the “essential beauties, shapes and harmony of the works of literature” and the development of capabilities of “correct and if possible beautiful” expression in Romanian. The explanation for this change of ‘vision’ may be the result of either the massive and intensive concern with literature at the time or with the attempt of the school to keep Romanian far from the influence of the ideology of the extremist right wing movements.

The last stage of the second period (1933-1946) is concerned mainly with the shaping of the Romanian national consciousness, this tendency being obvious in the wording of the objectives for the study of Romanian and the lack of interest in non-Romanian literary creations. At the same time the documents published between 1933-1935 still preserve the characteristics of the previous curricula, all the elements specific to didactic structure, contents and methodology. Besides these the documents mentioned above exhibit for the first time a coherent vision of curricula production and a persuasive recommendation for the active method in the teaching of Romanian as a mother tongue.

The textbooks published during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century render the Romanian literary and linguistic phenomenon thematically, typologically or diachroni-

cally. The Romanian literature textbook starts by supporting a completely 'free' kind of reading of literature in the series produced according to the 1899 curricula. Then the reading of literature is accompanied by bio-bibliographic elements in the textbooks produced according to the 1929 curricula. In the last set of textbooks produced at that time, in the year 1933, the literary reading is accompanied by biographical information and explanations. The chapters or books concerned with the study of language aim to develop the understanding of how the language functions and the intuition of the expressive force of the language; the acquisition of meta-language was almost non-existent. As far as values are concerned, the textbooks shape a stable system of values that centers round moral, aesthetic and national values (except for 1929-1933).

#### 4. THE THIRD PERIOD

The essentially positive dynamic of Romanian language and literature study is brutally interrupted in 1947 when the first curricula based on communist ideology appear. The next decade is a period of dramatic deconstruction of Romanian as a school subject. This decade is followed by several attempts at restructuring the internal coherence and the contents of the school subject, which resulted in partial achievements. The achievements depended on the ebb and flow of the ideologies of those times and continued till 1991 when the post-revolution curricula were written.

The deconstruction stage, covering the period from 1948 to 1965 and having only one moment of revival in 1957/1958, is characterised by the complete ideological transformation of the study of Romanian which was to be taught in agreement with the materialist view of world and of life. According to this view language is a "means of communication" and "a tool for social development", while literature is a "means of understanding the real world" and "a tool for social persuasion". The new curricular paradigms are the result of the adoption of the soviet educational model ("the most progressive in the world") and the annulment of any relationship with the Romanian tradition.

Thus the study of language abandons the functional approach and opts for a systematic approach to the morphology and syntax. The study of literature abandons the primacy of the literary text and focuses on the social and political contexts that influenced the writer and the work. Consequently, the reading of literature, is diminished to highlighting the ideological contents and sometimes describing elements of "artistic craftsmanship". In the 50s, as a result of the re-evaluation by the party policy makers of the study of literature, the canon is eliminated and a new one is constructed with the aim of creating the image of a socially progressive Romanian literature under the influence of the Soviet Russian culture which supposes the obedient assimilation of 'pre-fabricated knowledge' about language and literature.

The textbooks of the time, which are unique and compulsory, faithfully embody the curricula and are obviously instruments of the communist propaganda. They do not display the authors' names till 1953; they are very rigid, crowded with texts and exercises to be taught and therefore annihilate the teachers and students' freedom completely. The textbooks, as well as the curricula, separate the study of language

from that of literature. Literature is bourgeois or communist, unrealistic or realistic, expresses either hatred or love.

The 1957 curricula and the 1958 textbooks exhibit a slight tendency towards the separation of the study of literature from politics; ideology is less present and there is an attempt at the re-construction of the canon. But the subsequent documents diminished the effect of the attempts at re-building the mother tongue language study and extended the crisis till 1967.

The true liberalisation period is that between 1967-1976 when the model of the working class culture loses its importance and the study of language becomes, even if mostly declaratively, functional (after 1972/1973). The curricula of this period eliminate almost completely the communist ideological discourse and partially recover for the study of literature the aesthetic dimension and the model of the national culture.

Among the manifest effects of this change in vision are the re-instatement, even if hesitantly, of the inter-war literary canon and the stimulation of independent reading, even if not completely free of the social perspective. Other changes include the reduction of the social criteria, of the biographical, monographic and historical contextualisation of literary works, of the reference to social and ideological contexts of artistic creation.

The period between 1977-1991 continues the openings of the previous decade but will also continue to be culpable of political permeability. However, the intentions of restructuring some of the middle school and the entire secondary school curricula (1978-1982 and 1985-1987) fail to restore the study of the mother tongue to what it ought to be. The study of the mother tongue lacks the concrete aspects of language and literature offering meta-linguistic and meta-literary knowledge and discourse. The study of language conforms with the accuracy imposed by the linguistic sciences and can be considered to have negative effects only in terms of the amount of time spent in teaching it and in the lack of a functional approach. The literature component is viewed as having direct harmful effects because it invalidates the pupil's reading by shaping an un-true image of the Romanian literature. The commentaries and explanations which accompany the textbook presentation of a literary piece are redundant and tedious in the beginning and become hymn-like, exaggerating the 'riches' of the Romanian language and literature in order to generate national pride. The textbooks construct the image of a literature that is "at the top", among the "spiritual values of humankind", a literature full of "gems", "pearls", "peaks" which due to so much "height and brilliance" had no real substance for the learners.

The period of curricular re-shaping continues after 1989 when there are important adjustments, which refer to the purpose of Romanian as a school-subject, to the study of language, the canon and the interpretative discourse. But the real restructuring begins only after the Education Law of 1995. Completely restructured in 2000, the new paradigm synchronises the mother language study with the European patterns and re-establishes the relationships with the Romanian school tradition of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The last curricula of the century can be also considered to be a reply to the communist curricular pattern. The new curricula allow for the manifold formative approach to the study of language and literature. The main mid-

dle school curricular requirements are the achievement of communicative competence and its improvement and also the development of literary receptive skills. The skills are focused on developing 'attitudes and values' such as: the pleasure of reading and the aesthetic taste, the encouragement of autonomous reflexive and critical thinking, the sensitive response to reading, the shaping of a cultural representation of the values and evolution of Romanian literature. The curricula contain open lists of contents and suggestions for lesson planning and also refer to learning activities as well as to the practical application of knowledge in various contexts. All the components of the new curricula replace the emphasis on contents of the communist time with an emphasis on skills, on a coherent 'dialogue' with 'an other', with a text and with the present. The textbooks corresponding to this last reform are characterised by a great diversity of the 'readings' of the curricula, and of the theoretical and interpretative discourses they suggest.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The image composed by the succession of curricula and textbooks for the study of Romanian language and literature, is a dynamic one, which can be interpreted in relation to the following definitions:

- 1) the national language is a socio- political and cultural phenomenon, represented as a relationship of systems which correlate, which can be represented differently and which are submitted to temporal changes;
- 2) the national literature is a complex cultural phenomenon represented as an aesthetic, psychological, philosophical, ideological and social discourse that shapes possible worlds or replies to reality according to the reader and to the reading..

An extremely simplified sketch of the curricula and of the textbooks for the study of the mother tongue point out the alternation of moments of emphasis of cultural values with moments that abolish the diachronic representation. I refer to the manifold and comprehensive presentation of language development in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (etymology, language history and historical grammar), the restricted but comprehensive image at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (language history and literary language history), a perspective that disappears in the first decade of communism to appear thirty years later (elements of language history) but only for a short time as it is missing from the present day curricula. At the same time the Romanian language curricula take both theoretical as well as functional approaches to language study. The curricula of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century see language as consisting of several systems and favour the application of language knowledge in oral and written communication.

The two types of alternatives are informed, in my opinion, by the vision regarding the identity profile promoted by educational institutions, in the first case, and by the roles attributed to the study of the synchronic grammar, in the second case. But, at the same time, both categories of alternatives are influenced by the development of linguistic and educational sciences in the period the curricula were written. I also believe that the study of Romanian as a school subject cannot exclude the diachronic perspective and that the synchronic perspective cannot be limited to an exhaustive

pattern presentation. In a world in which oral communication is essential, the descriptive approach can only be justified to the extent to which it is used in language practice activities and in discourse and text analyses.

Both the Romanian language and literature curricula and textbooks map out a complex and rhythmical design influenced by the same discursive instances. Read from the perspective of the way they point out the cultural dimension of literature, the educational documents I have studied propose different solutions. First, I refer to the projection of the history of Romanian literature against the background of some cultural areas that have real or false integrating peculiarities (national culture, European culture, universal culture, soviet culture) and also to its setting directly descending from cultural times considered exemplary (Latin culture). The types of contextualisation presented above have a major formative impact; their effects are evident in the image of Romanian literature that the school subject offers pupils and are extended in the beliefs and attitudes related to cultural facts. The exclusive setting of literature under the heading of national culture can generate nationalist representations (documents published in 1933); the options for unsafe surroundings – Russian and soviet culture – generate distorted images (the curricula and textbooks in the 50s), while the integration of Romanian culture in the European culture leads to a more honest and genuine representation. The exclusive projection of literature against the historical background in the first official communist educational documents can be compared with the image of the Romanian literary phenomenon in the European artistic currents especially in the period from 1979 to 1985. There are, however, some other ways of contextualisation namely: literary phenomena related to national history (social, political and economical events) or to art history (development of aesthetic formulae), or to the history of ideas. The Romanian language and literature curricula have chosen the first two ones but I hope they will soon integrate some aspects connected to the history of ideas.

The curricula and textbooks can also be read from the point of view of the features of literary works: the discursive ones and the aesthetic, philosophic, moral and ideological ones. The first approach takes into account the relationship between author, text and reader. The texts and the readers are advantaged in the paradigm of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and in some aspects of the paradigm that ends the century, while the author is a central figure in the documents of the middle century. The privileged positions of the text and the reader are justified by the aims related to the pupil's personal development (in terms of the major impact that the genuine encounter with literature has on pupils' development) and it is sustained by a vision that values the emotional feature of the literary message or by reader response criticism. On the other hand the privileging of the author figure and the monographic study aim to instigate the admiration for the major personalities of national culture. The curricula addresses the power of the literary text by underlining and instructively drawing attention to its aesthetic dimensions. There is one exception to that pattern, namely the first communist curricula that ideologically alter the genuine idea of literature.

Diversity characterises not only the didactical approach of the author-text-reader relationship but also the conception of the literary interpretation of the text. The reading methods are focused upon moral and philosophical ideas (sustained by rhe-

torical and grammatical analysis on the one hand and rhetorical and stylistic analysis on the other hand) in the earliest official documents. In the 1920s they emphasise the thematic and aesthetic values of the literary work but in the 1950s they focus on the ideological trends of the artistic world. In the 1960s the aesthetic dimension of literary study is the *sine qua non* condition of literature but the ideological perspective doubles it while in the 1980s there is only the aesthetic perspective that prevails in the literary text interpretation. But unfortunately, the aesthetic pattern gives too much weight to structuralism and stylistic analysis. The same documents support an interpretation of the fictional world that seems to be a better way of understanding literature, one that does not eradicate but improves and provides sense to structural and linguistic analysis.

The history of the curricula for the study of Romanian language and literature invites some considerations about the structure and the orientation of the present-day curricula. There are two main trends: the first refers to the influence that the linguistic and educational sciences have on the curricula and the second refers to the influence of institutional policies and the curricula. In connection with the first, one cannot conceive of present-day curricula that do not take into account pragmatics, response theories and constructivist pedagogy. Therefore the objectives in the curricula refer to communication skills, literary competence and methodologies that involve the learner, or active learning.

The new rapport between institutional policies and the school subject is explicit in the ideological framework of the curricula. The new historical contexts present objectives that refer to the identity and the personal development of pupils and which target values that are specific to open and democratic societies. As a result, the encounter with literature needs to be re-thought in terms of the values that the text reflects and not only in terms of thematic, structural and stylistic analysis. Moreover there is the need to integrate the study of national language and literature within contemporary European cultural realities.

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