

Lexical translations of Romanian post-communist mentalities

Abstract:

*The French school of pragmatics (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1980; 1994; Moeschler-Reboul 1999) as well as the expatriate Romanian linguist Eugen Coșeriu (1986; 1994) have argued that language serves as a means of expression of mentalities, while the cultural models which shape mentalities help create manifest expressions of culture. It is worth noting that the relationship between culture, language and mentalities was explored in Romanian linguistics since its modern beginnings, for example by Lazăr Șăineanu in his *Încercare asupra semasiologiei limbei române* (1889), before in mid-twentieth century the communist regime prohibited sociological and psychological research. By means of the “wooden tongue” (Thom 1993), or what the former political prisoner Ion Ioanid has called “the generalised socialist language” (1996:148) as a means of expression of communist mentalities, the regime strove for social homogeneity. After 1989, the transition from communism to democracy has involved the replacement of homogeneity with diversity and an unprecedented outburst of voices and (hyper)subjectivities. In the process, the communist “new man”/homo sovieticus gradually revealed his real face and character, so that many cultural analysts have increasingly come to deplore the degraded socio-cultural environment, including degraded language use.*

Starting from the perceived Romanian personality profile (IRSOP 2005) and English communications consultant Richard D. Lewis’s list of Romanian values (2006:352), the paper identifies the current Romanian values and beliefs as reflected in language use, since semantic changes are also markers of changes in mentalities. Such changes are at the centre of several debates on the present state of the national language. Beyond some centuries-old national peculiarities, such as verbal violence (Cesereanu 2003), in the context of globalisation there is a strong tendency to replace cultural diversity with a standardized international culture.

Keywords: Identity; Mentalities; Semiotics; Semantic change.