

New Europe College Yearbook 1994 – 1995



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Official Power Discourse in Post-totalitarian Romania (December 1989 – October 1995)

A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

I. A Society in Transition and a 'Language in Transition'

The collapse of totalitarian rule in ex-communist countries generated 'societies in transition', the language of which bears a distinctive imprint. In contemporary Romania the 'language of transition' reveals the coexistence of two divergent trends.

The first regards the **restitution of a normal linguistic behaviour**, deriving from the undoubted gains in public discourse following events in December 1989: freedom of speech, the media 'explosion', the abolition of major communist taboos, the suppression of censorship, dialogue instead of absolute political monologue, greater linguistic spontaneity, expressivity and vigour among others.

The second is manifest in the inertial or voluntary **preservation of the dogmatic language mechanisms typical of the former regime**. The subsistence of old communist mental attitudes is reflected in the linguistic expressions which still pervade the Romanian 'language of transition' used by people from various walks of life and, overwhelmingly, the political speeches of those in power.

Neither trend is manifest in a 'pure' manner in post-totalitarian Romania, as the completely confusing national linguistic background which seemingly dominated the early nineties favoured a paradoxical interference of the two. There is only one step from freedom of speech to anarchy in public discourse. The lack of interest in style, the 'personal' interpretation of grammatical norms (in both written and oral communication), the proliferation of slang and vulgar phrases, invasive neologisms and a quite arbitrary orthographic reform, all contribute to an appallingly poor standard in post-totalitarian public speech.

The present study limits its investigation to the official discourse of contemporary power, focusing on its main 'voices': the Presidency, Parliament and Government. The selection is not aleatory, since the 'deviational' linguistic behaviour analysed here is far more prevalent in the speeches of those in power than in the discourse of the general public in Romania.

An extremely large corpus of texts has been used, drawn from major publications representing the leading political parties: PDSR — The Romanian Social Democracy Party, its (permanent or temporary) allies, such as PSM — The Socialist Labour Party, PRM — The Great Romania Party, PUNR — The National Unity Party of the Romanians, and PDAR — The Romanian Democratic

Agrarian Party, as well as from presidential and official speeches, printed and verbal interviews, reports, parliamentary debates, newspaper and magazine articles, and public statements from representatives of the power, covering the period 22nd December 1989–October 1995.

Investigation has been limited to those areas in which the ‘marked-unmarked’ opposition operates with respect to established linguistic norm. On several occasions the chosen examples are double-marked, particularly in relation to the neutral everyday type speech and to standard Romanian linguistic codes.

The results are grouped in two separate chapters, highlighting, on the one hand, a resistant ‘stream’ of older linguistic clichés evocative of the ‘wooden language’ of the ‘past regime’, and on the other hand, those post-1989 tendencies aiming at the spectacular revival of the political discourse.

II. O lume mai bună și mai dreaptă — ‘A More Just and Better World’ The ‘Wooden Language’

II.1. The ‘Wooden Language’: a Profile

The term ‘wooden language’ is highly controversial and has already aroused lengthy debates. More and more linguists are distrustful of any possible scientific definition of its meaning, which is easier to perceive on an intuitive level, particularly by those who have already experienced totalitarian rule. The concept has been approached from various perspectives. Carmen Pineira and Maurice Tournier, for instance, studied the history of the term ‘wooden language’ since its initial usage in Polish as *dretwa mowa*, *drewniana mowa* or *język propagandy*¹ and compared it to its equivalents in other countries (*langue de bois*, *logocratie*, *totalitarian language*, *lingua di legno*, *holzerne Sprache*, *wooden language*, *limba de lemn*, etc.). Despite mixed fortunes in some parts of Europe, the term is largely unknown in Italy and Germany, for instance. Simultaneously, the term ‘newspeak’ coined by George Orwell in his novel *1984*, and its translations (*nowo mowa*, *novlangue*, etc.) became synonyms to the initial ‘natural’ designations the phrase evoked.

To better illustrate the meaning of ‘wooden language’ French linguists have suggested a host of possible antonyms: *le parler vrai*, *la langue relâchée*, *le langage populaire*, *la langue du coeur* to name but a few. It is obvious that ‘l’antonyme de la langue de bois se situe ainsi à l’opposé de la rigidité’² They also pointed out some contextual, partial antonyms such as ‘Stalinist’ language vs. ‘Gorbachevian’ language.

To what extent does *language* as a term appropriately define the phenomenon is another issue of debate, as all the lexical units, all the rhetorical and syntactic devices of the ‘wooden language’ are actually borrowed from the natural language. Some consider it ‘*more than a sociolect, but less than a proper language*’.³ It is difficult to say whether it is better to classify it as a linguistic ‘variant’, a ‘sub-code’ of the natural language or as a specific strategy of communication. The School of Linguistics of Saint Cloud has attempted to evaluate ‘wooden language’ in terms of ‘discourse’ rather than of ‘language’.

The area in which ‘wooden language’ is primarily used is that of politics. However, a difference should be inferred between political jargon and ‘wooden language’, although both forms of speech often use stereotyped phrases to denominate specific realities. Well-known syntagms, such as the ‘*division of powers principle*’, ‘*peace process*’, ‘*the iron curtain*’, ‘*market economy*’, ‘*state of law*’, ‘*the cold war*’, etc., have nothing to do with the ‘wooden’ clichés; they simply belong to an international political dictionary and one can come across them in many different languages, mainly as a result of their intensive circulation through linguistic borrowing and lending. Unlike them, the ‘wooden language’ is the product of a totalitarian regime which promotes the state over the individual. It becomes effective, even overwhelming, because of the absolute monopoly of the ruling power over the media.

Totalitarian language differs in space and time. The language of Mao’s propaganda is rather distinct from that of Ceaușescu, and the political speech of the fifties is quite different from that of the eighties in the Soviet Union. The distinct shades of ‘newspeak’ are also emphasized by the paraphrases that the ‘wooden language’ syntagm has already produced: ‘*tin language*’, ‘*lead language*’, ‘*cloth language*’, ‘*sawdust language*’, ‘*chewing-gum language*’, and so on. This is why French scholars prefer to speak of the plural: *les langues de bois*.

There are basically two trends in the interpretation of ‘wooden language’.

A number of linguists insist upon its formal aspect, describing it as a pre-vaillingly homogeneous, flat, reiterative language, ritualized by overuse. ‘*La langue de bois est vécue comme un ronron de par son aspect stéréotype, mécanique, ultra-répétitif parfois, qui rend impossible toute évolution, y compris tactique, et toute adaptation au réel. C’est alors une litanie sans racine et surtout sans présent, hors temps*’.⁴ Moreover, there is a certain tendency in Western European linguistics to extend its meaning to cover any stereotyped and redundant type of communication, pertaining to other neighbouring sociolects such as journalistic–journalistic, administrative, trade unionist, judicial jargon–*legales*, as well as to all societies, democratic or not.

Others, however, emphasize mainly the ideological function of ‘wooden language’. This is seen to be a vehicle of ideology in totalitarian states, a weapon in the hands of the ruling power. The language is conceived in order to confer

legitimacy to those in power and to control and influence peoples' thought and behaviour. *'The purpose of this language is ideological mythmaking, not the communication of social reality.'*⁵

'Wooden language' has been often portrayed as a false, artificial, deceptive language, as opposed to a true natural language⁶, intended to manipulate consciousness. Referentiality could be a key word in this respect. Its rhetorical strategies are meant to influence the emotions rather than the reason of the listeners, in order to make them act in 'unanimity' and not to think independently.

II.2. Totalitarian Language and Romanian 'National Specificity'

'The Romanian public has only recently become aware of the term 'wooden language'. Journalists, linguists and the translation into Romanian of Françoise Thom's *La langue de bois (Limba de lemn)*, Humanitas Publishing House, 1993) contributed to its quick spreading after the Revolution.

'Whereas in other ex-communist countries' 'wooden language' was perceived and discussed as a linguistic phenomenon, in Romania no attempts were made, during the Ceaușescu era, to 'single out' or to approach local 'newspeak' from a theoretical (not only paradoxical!) perspective. During the mid-seventies the language of communist rulers had already found a name, first for the Poles, then for the East Germans, Czechoslovakians, Serbians, Slovenians and Russians, while semi-official linguistic debates on totalitarian language were organized by Solidarnosc at the Universities of Warsaw (1978, 1981) and Cracow (1981), and books on the subject were published in Belgrade (1984) and in Moscow (1988).

While other totalitarian-ruled societies have been exposed to various types of ideologically driven linguistic guidance (from the exaggerated purism of Mussolini's regime to the strict vocabulary 'reforms' imposed by Goebbels, and from Lenin's essays on language to Stalin's lexical innovations), communist Romania had no similar compulsory, deliberate programme for perverting common language, such as the one Orwell prophesied in his 1984 utopia. The taboos were always implicit, the semantic distortions requested by the changing political contexts and 'the word cleansings' in dictionaries were conducted in silence, imperceptibly.⁷ Nevertheless, the 'great' Soviet model always subsisted in the phraseology, rhetoric devices, clichés, and even in the intonation of the activists. And it still continues!

Today it is possible to talk about 'wooden language' in Romania only in terms of 'relics of the past' and no longer as of a comprehensive, functional social 'institution'. Alternative outlooks and alternative voices drew it away from its absolute monopoly of official discourse.

Yet the vitality of past mentalities and linguistic patterns (increasingly visible with those in positions of power) is especially alarming due to their tendency to proliferate and contaminate.

The reasons for the survival of 'newspeak' elements can be attributed primarily to the fact that, for half a century, 'wooden language' has been perceived as the **unique** language in public life (as opposed to everyday Romanian spoken in private). Rodica Zafiu also points out *'le statut extrêmement fragile, parmi les variantes stylistiques de la langue roumaine, du niveau langagier moyen, situé à mi-chemin entre le style littéraire, cultivé, voire précieux, et le langage populaire ou familier. Les effets en sont visibles aujourd'hui dans les situations semi-officielles et surtout dans les interviews, lorsque beaucoup de gens cèdent à la tentation d'utiliser la langue de bois — tout simplement parce qu'ils n'ont rien de mieux à lui opposer dans leur compétence linguistique.'*⁸ The inertia of comfortable clichés can be another reason for the continuation of the phenomenon. Almost any political, social or economic problem can be 'dealt with' in no time by simply putting together 'prêt-à-porter' stereotyped phrases. Unfortunately, with local politicians it is only too often a matter of cultural mediocrity and lack of interest for style and eloquence.

The persistent use of the official language of the former regime is sometimes involuntary. However, it may also be interpreted as a strategy, or a 'coherent set of strategies.' First, an ideology must maintain its code. The codes employed in the use of 'wooden language' are the only unanimously understood or at least unanimously recognized. 'Just speak their language, and they will vote for you' is a simple, populist slogan. Second, 'wooden language', with its heavy, contorted phrases and vacuous tautologies, may really function both as a defensive and as an offensive weapon, as it frequently creates 'a fog effect' upon the receiver. Finally, there may be also a third explanation. To put it simply, the language of power is the same, because the agents of power (from the local administration to the Presidency) are almost the same or, in other words, the restoration of communism triggers a restoration of communist language.

In the following chapters I shall attempt to evaluate the extent to which the basic lexical, semantic, syntactic and stylistic devices of 'newspeak' have been inherited, revised, disseminated or abandoned in actual political discourse.

II.3. 'Wooden Language' and Referentiality

'Two and two makes five' was the obsessive slogan of the Party in Orwell's 1984. All factual reality was ignored and replaced by 'a more just and better world' imposed by Big Brother as the only existing reality. A number of philosophers, sociologists and linguists have been tempted to analyse the explicit

manifestations of a variety of totalitarian languages, and to overlap the features of utopian 'newspeak' to uncover the false nature of their codes in contrast to natural ones. John Wesley Young, for instance, speaks about the 'failure of totalitarian language to fit reality', about an 'upside-down language' which stands for a 'symbolic rejection of objective truth'.⁹

One might speculate whether **true** or **false** judgment is the most appropriate in the case of 'wooden language', as its main purpose has always been to **persuade** rather than to **communicate**. Therefore, its prevailing function (in terms of Roman Jakobson's theory) is no longer just **referential** (one traditionally associated with communication), but also **connative, inciting, perlocutory** (with the stress on the receiver), along with the **phatic** (with the stress on the contact). Authors like Charles Zaremba reject any referential value being applied to 'wooden language': '*Plutôt que de parler de <vérité> ou de <fausseté> de la langue, il faudrait insister (comme de nombreux auteurs, d'ailleurs) sur ce qui fait une des grandes caractéristiques du langage de la propagande, à savoir l'absence de fonction référentielle. Un texte de propagande (ou si l'on veut: en langue de bois) n'est ni vrai, ni faux. Il renvoie à sa propre surréalité et n'a donc pas à avoir de fonction de communication.*'¹⁰

Françoise Thom instead speaks about its self-referentiality, and not its un-referentiality: '*The referent of Newspeak is Newspeak. ... it aims to refer everything back to some previous statement.*'¹¹ To a certain extent, this can be validated by several of Ceaușescu's texts, which are impossible to summarize or paraphrase: they are simply self-sufficient.

A more subtle interpretation of referentiality is that advanced by Olivier Reboul according to whom '*le discours idéologique est un acte de dissimulation par la parole*', '*un brouillage des fonctions du langage*'¹², in which both the referent and the receiver become 'blurred' by the deceptive presence of the compensative functions: '*la dissimulation idéologique implique notamment le camouflage d'une fonction du langage par une autre. L'idéologie ne dit jamais le pourquoi véritable de ce qu'elle dit.*'¹³ This blurred — rather than false — manifestation of 'wooden language' is underlined also by Patrick Seriot: '*elle n'est pas une langue totalement coupée de la langue naturelle, mais l'utilisation malhonnête de cette langue.*'¹⁴

A first consequence of the 'blurred' referentiality of 'wooden language' would be its low translatability by reference both to 'norm' and to a foreign language. In the case of a foreign language this turns out to be particularly difficult as far as a logical language (such as English) is concerned, and apologies are in order for the vague and not quite 'wooden' equivalents offered in this study for a rather approximate selection of Romanian 'newspeak'.

A second consequence of the 'abolition of denotation' is the unlimited **vagueness** of such a language, which might cover a function of manipulation as

well. One of the most frequent categories of terms in totalitarian discourse is the one referring to 'global' notions, words indicating generality, such as '*planet*', '*mankind*', '*the working class*', '*the toilers*', '*friendship between peoples all over the world*', repeated use of which has the advantage of 'integrating' the listener into the overall uniformity desired by those in power. A good 'newspeaker' can add to such lexical selections '*grammatical constructions that avoid explicit reference to causes, agents, time and place.*'¹⁵ A random example of Ceaușescu's typical approach to foreign policy is illustrative: '*Life is permanently demonstrating that problems can be solved in the interest of peace and progress only with the participation of all nations, of all states.*'¹⁶ As one can easily notice, there are no proper names and no specific reference whatsoever is made.

Even in present-day Romania the **vacuousness** of political speeches seems to have been widely inherited. Romanian politicians seem to possess a subtle and refined technique for saying the least with the greatest possible amount of words. What follows is an abridged version of a statement made by the military advisor to the Romanian President, general Vasile Ionel, in an interview published in the *Observatorul militar*, 38 (301), of 20–26 September, 1995: '*Astfel, Consiliul a analizat aspecte importante privind realizarea cadrului legislativ adecvat realizării concepției fundamentale de apărare a țării (...), modernizarea conducerii și dimensionarea (sic!) resurselor necesare pentru susținerea eforturilor de apărare a țării.*' [(approx.): 'The Council has thus analysed some important aspects concerning the implementation of an appropriate legislative framework for the implementation of the fundamental outlook about the defence of our homeland (...), the modernization of the leadership and the shaping of the necessary resources for sustaining the efforts for the defence of the homeland.']

There are cases in which vagueness and vacuity are not only the signs of meaningless verbal delirium, but precise rhetoric instruments of **camouflage**. Evasive devices, euphemisms, deliberate ambiguity are often used to avoid delicate situations and direct communication. An example of the relativization technique that can be advanced here is that of Ceaușescu's penultimate TV speech of December 20, 1989, by far the most 'marked' text throughout his dictatorship; in it, after vaguely referring to 'the serious events which took place in Timișoara', he uttered the following exhortation: '*Să nu admitem ca armata să fie oprită să acționeze împotriva celor ce creează dezordine!*'¹⁷ ['Let us not allow our Army to be hindered from acting against those who create disorder!']

Similar euphemistical tricks, aimed at avoiding direct nomination, are still used by some representatives of the Presidency (e.g. the famous phrase '*o anumită parte a presei*' ['a certain part of press'] quickly abandoned under the onslaught of ironical quotations), or of the government, such as Iulian Mincu, Minister of Public Health, who declared on January 30, 1995, involuntarily witty, that Iasmina, a little girl with AIDS, was '*ușor seropozitivă*' ('slightly seropositive').

In 'wooden language', the association word-referent is more often than not uncertain. In the preface to his *Lexicon of Soviet Political Terms* Ilya Zemtsov identifies two main strategies which Soviet 'newspeak' has used in order to elude reality, namely 'fictions proclaimed as reality' and 'realities presented in the guise of fictions'. The first may refer to new words and phrases coined by communist propaganda, which actually find no referent in factual reality, such as 'surge of political and labour enthusiasm', 'the New Man', 'the triple quality of owner, producer and beneficiary' (Romanian workers were often referred to in these words), 'multilaterally developed socialist society' or such confusing oxymoronic phrases as 'democratic centralism' or 'the struggle for peace'.

Unfortunately, there were cases where the newly conceived fictions actually became realities and the diabolic embodiment of words brought about death and suffering. Olivier Reboul gives two examples of 'appellation qui crée son objet pour servir un pouvoir, en recourant, inconsciemment, au vieux procédé magico-religieux qui fait être une chose en la nommant'¹⁸: the terms 'enemy of the people' for communists and 'Jewish danger' for Hitlerites.

The category of 'realities presented in the guise of fiction' belongs to concepts having a very precise referent in the factual world, to which ideological constraints attached a lexical unit with a reverse meaning. A subtle device to designate phenomena by their contraries (magnificently illustrated by Orwell in Big Brother's paradox slogan 'War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is power') which triggers once again camouflage and euphemistic techniques. For instance, Soviet armed interference in the affairs of other communist states is referred to as 'fraternal help'¹⁹, forced labour was carried out by 'volunteers', and 'Sonderbehandlung' ('special treatment') was a code word for mass murder which Himmler ordered replaced in 1943 by a less transparent term.²⁰ **Double-think** and **double-speak**, the mechanisms Orwell conceived for inverting reality, operated also in Ceaușescu's speech of December 20, 1989 in which he mentioned the 'extreme patience and indulgence of the Army'; this was to be decoded as a two-day massacre in which the Army had been probably involved.

A great number of political key words seem to have expanded their semantic field in a most confusing way. Words like 'revolution', 'heroism', 'regime', 'clique', 'democracy' have acquired different meanings in post-1989 Romania. Of the semantic changes that may occur, the basic one concerns the **switch (shift) of referents**. 'Regime' is a negatively marked term 'for system', used both by the communists for labelling the imperialist power (in phrases such as *treacherous/reactionary/blood-stained regime*, according to Zemtsov's²¹ analyses of the Russian language, and by the democrats when naming dictatorship (*totalitarian/repressive/criminal regime*). Following the 1989 Revolution, in Romania the period 1945-1989 was often referred to by the opposition with the obsessive cliché 'regimul de tristă amintire' ('the regime to be sadly remembered').

The referents of 'bourgeois' and 'enemy' were certainly different for Mussolini and Stalin. Similarly, the word 'revolution' covers entirely distinct realities not only for Italian fascists, the Bolsheviks, the French, and for Ion Iliescu, but also for the latter's former ally, Corneliu Vadim Tudor, who stated in the party's official magazine that 'PRM promite pentru anul 1996 o nouă, pașnică și adevărată Revoluție în societatea românească'²² ('The Great Romania Party promises a new, peaceful and true Revolution in the Romanian society for 1996').

The opposite situation concerns unchanged phenomena with changed names, in other words same referent-different linguistic signs. As 'in political discourse language is used to define and redefine reality for the advantage of a dominant ideology'²³, one does notice the great flexibility and the ephemerality of formulas thought to be sacrosanct. According to Zemtsov²⁴, Lenin's famous syntagm 'the dictatorship of the proletariat' was substituted in the sixties by 'hegemony of the proletariat' and in the late seventies by 'state of all the people'. In Romania the change of sides during World War II (August 23rd, 1944), was first referred to as a 'palace coup', then as an 'armed insurrection', and finally as a 'revolution of national anti-fascist and anti-imperialist liberation'. Similarly, events in December 1989 have been qualified as 'revolution', 'coup d'état', 'popular revolt'. Such a 're-baptizing' process is by no means similar to synonymic proliferation, as the results can even be antonymic (as *rivoluzione* vs. *restaurazione fascista* in two distinct periods of Mussolini's dictatorship), and they normally occur in complementary distribution (because the different lexical choices are triggered by different mutually excludable political prerequisites). Their emergence is due to ideological rather than to stylistic needs. This is why, in contrast to the wide-spread exorcizing labels for Ceaușescu, such as 'the dictator', 'the bootmaker', 'the hateful', the emergence of headlines like: 'Nicolae Ceaușescu, the Romanian patriot murdered on Christmas day by Iliescu, Gelu Voican, Silviu Brucan...' (Politica, Oct. 21, 1995), in press considered to be extremist, hardly the expression of a simple, innocent personal point of view, is indeed the sign of a distinct, divergent programme for manipulating public opinion.

The situation described above points out a second dominant characteristic of totalitarian language, divergent from its vague referentiality: **specific labelling**. Nevertheless, the preciseness of words such as 'patriot', 'traitor', 'esteem', 'indignation', 'progressive', 'reactionary' etc. does not concern the clarity of concepts, but the emotional effects they have to induce in the receiver. Once again, the message is efficient not as illocution but as perlocution. The non-ambiguous words in an ideological discourse are always evaluative and the evaluation is but incriminatory or eulogizing, serving a good-or-bad mentality which is easier to induce and to maintain in mass. There is a strict **polarization** within the vocabulary of totalitarianism which consists in a *lexicon of peace, happiness, brotherhood and no less of hatred, vilification and murder*.²⁵ Unfortunately, a persistent

Manichean outlook is still to be detected in contemporary political life: the opposition *we–you* or *we–they* is often charged with rancour: ‘*Noi nu ne vindem țara!*’ (‘We are not going to sell our country!’ [implicitly ‘whereas you are!’]); ‘*ura voastră pentru tot ce este românesc*’ (‘your hatred for everything which is Romanian’); political interests cannot be other than ‘*majore*’ (‘major’) when referring to *us* and always ‘*meschine*’ (mean’) whenever referring to *them*.

II.4. Political Massage and Slogans

In political discourse the informative or the referential level of language is overcome by the phatic and the inciting function. ‘*Le propre de toute idéologie n’est-il pas en effet de prendre la parole, de la garder, de l’interdire autant que possible à ses adversaires?*’²⁶

Long before language theoreticians, Hitler intuited the importance of perlocutory devices for achieving the desired effect of collective enthusiasm or hatred in the audience. In *Mein Kampf* Hitler drew attention to the fact that the discourse of a statesman in front of his people should not be judged according to the impression it makes upon a professor, but according to his direct action upon the masses.²⁷

‘*Are you with me?*’ is the concern always voiced by every leader. Many Romanians, for instance, will long remember Ceaușescu’s unprecedented bewilderment at not being listened to during his last speech on the 21st of December 1989. His last official words were highly ‘phatic’: ‘*Alo, alo, așezați-vă liniștiți!*’ (‘Hallo, hallo, return silently to your places!’). The communication leader–masses interrupted then was resumed the following day by Ion Iliescu who made a historic TV speech which (accidentally?) began with the same old formula ‘*Dragi tovarăși*’... (‘Dear comrades...’).

Slogans are the most synthetic expression of phatic and connative messages. There is an undeniable development in the history of Romanian post-communist slogans in terms of style and spontaneity. Encomiastic rhymed slogans like ‘*Stima noastră și mândria / Ceaușescu–România*’ (Our pride and our esteem / Ceaușescu–România’) have simply disappeared, while the old meaningless overused imperatives like ‘*Să facem totul...*’ (‘Let us do everything possible to...’) are often quoted ironically in Parliament. The slogans of today oscillate between mere demagoguery [‘*Astăzi a venit vremea să dăm cuvintelor noastre greutatea faptelor*’ — ‘Time has come to give words the weight of our deeds’ (Ion Iliescu, August 17, 1993)], optimistic, reassuring messages [‘*Un președinte pentru liniștea noastră*’ — ‘A president for our peace of mind’, the official slogan during the presidential election campaign, ‘*Lumina caldă a Unirii să ne călăuzească pentru schimbarea în bine a României!*’ — ‘Let the warm light of our Union

guide us for Romania’s change for the better!’ (Ion Iliescu, Allocution in Focșani on January 24th, 1995)] and highly inciting, even aggressive exhortations [‘*Să-i dăm neamului românesc și statului românesc dreptul de a se apăra. Interzicerea UDMR este expresia unui asemenea drept*’ — ‘Let us give the Romanian people and the Romanian state the right to defend themselves. The interdiction of Magyars’ Democratic Union of Romania is the expression of such a right’ — PDSR senator Gheorghe Dumitrașcu, in an article published in *Cronica română*, October 5, 1993]. The 1996 election slogan of the PRM is even more thrilling: ‘*Doi ani de autoritarism!*’ — ‘Two years of authoritarianism!’.

III. Greaua moștenire (‘The Heavy Legacy’)

The following three sub-chapters deal exclusively with those lexical, syntactic and stylistic devices present in the speeches of those in positions of power which have been ‘inherited’ as such from the language of the ‘golden epoch’.

III.1. ‘Wooden’ Vocabulary and Phraseology

The lexical field is by far the most relishable and easily recognizable component of ‘wooden language’.

A first characteristic: an overwhelming abstractness. ‘*To organize, to fulfil initiative, force, development, effort, economy, homeland, struggle, powerful*’, etc. seem to be the most frequent words in every totalitarian lexicon. Adjectives represent the favourite rhetoric instruments in ‘newspeak’, but their function is strictly perlocutory. They frequently mark the typical binary oppositions of a Manichean mentality: *our entire people* vs. *isolated elements*, *so-called Romanians* vs. *true Romanians*, *sustained efforts* vs. *desperate endeavours*, *coarse assaults* vs. *justified protest*, a.s.o.

Much more tiring than abstractness is the incredible poverty of political vocabulary, in spite of a desired opening. Censorship disappeared, but ‘prêt-à-penser’ formulas are still alluring. ‘Personal contributions’ from statesmen to Romanian public language are more often than not unbearable barbarisms. Only from this perspective can we agree with Young who believes in lexical growth even under dictatorships: ‘*Although in fits of logocidal fury the totalitarians have indeed purged from the dictionaries or banned from the press a host of unagreeable words, on balance they seem to have added far more words to the language than have subtracted from it.*’²⁸

Nevertheless, there are certain semantic fields of ‘wooden language’ which have been paradoxically hypertrophied by means of synonymic devices. The special etymological position of Romanian allows for double series of synonyms — Slavic loan words along with Latin or Roman lexical units (as *in schimbări / prefaceri / mutații* — ‘changes’; *pământ / meleag / moșie / plai / teritoriu / țară* — ‘land’; *a construi / a edifica / a făuri / a clădi / a ctitori* — to build’; *realizării / împliniri / înfăptuiri* — ‘accomplishments’; *victorios / învingător / biruitor* — ‘victorious’; *garanție / zălog / chezășie* guarantee’; *standard / drapel / steag / flamură / tricolor* — ‘flag’). The abnormal vitality of the archaic or rare terms of such series is probably due to the ‘language of patriotic lyricism’ that flourished under Ceaușescu and which is still perceived by some of our politicians as a ‘high’ stylistic level of Romanian. *Flacăra veșnic vie* (‘the eternal blazing flame’), *unire în cuget și simțire* (‘unity in heart and mind’), *în lumina învățămintelor istoriei* (literally: ‘high in the light of our history’s teachings’), etc. represent only some of the ‘old’ repertory phrases President Iliescu has chosen on solemn occasions. More than by word selection, a ‘wooden’ utterance is defined by restricted and recurrent word combinatorial possibilities. The relative facility of politicians to produce apparently coherent discourses is explained by Olivier Reboul through a certain ‘*compétence idéologique qui ne peut produire que des performances prévisibles, des formules toutes faites, des clichés (...) en réduisant la vraie compétence linguistique.*’²⁹

The most frequent Romanian clichés inherited by post-totalitarian speech include a compulsory (tautological) verb determiner (*a acționa cu mai multă fermitate* — to act even more firmly’, *a afecta profund* — ‘to deeply affect’, *a aprecia în mod deosebit* — ‘to highly appreciate’, *a participa activ* — ‘to actively take part in’, *a se împotrivi cu încredințare* — ‘to unflinchingly resist’) or an adjective (sometimes in an emphatic word order: *nepieritoare glorie* — ‘immortal glory’, *înalt spirit de sacrificiu* — ‘high spirit of self-sacrifice’, *ferma convingere* — ‘unshakable conviction’, *greutăți temporare* — temporary difficulties’, *protest categoric* — ‘categorical protest’, *eforturi conjugate* — ‘joined efforts’, *spirit combativ* — ‘fighting spirit’, *unitate frățească* — ‘fraternal unity’ [no more *monolithic!*], *moment crucial istoric* — ‘crucial/historic moment’, etc.).

By comparing these examples with those included by Zemtsov in his *Lexicon of Soviet Political Terms* one can realize how small the percentage of Romanian ‘originality’ is in all these overused stereotypes: each and every syntagm quoted here (and this is only a tenth of possible similar examples) is nothing but a loan translation from the Russian language of propaganda.

The international circulation of clichés could be a separate topic of research. As early as 1946, Orwell³⁰, for instance, perceived the well-known ‘*to play a leading part*’ as an English cliché, while Romanian phrases such as ‘*vibrant omagiu*’ — ‘vibrant homage’, or ‘*voința de nestrămutat a neamului*’ — ‘the

unshakable will of the people’, have perfect equivalents in the Mussolinian ‘*vibrante omagio*’ and ‘*incrollabile volontà della stirpe*’.

III.2. Syntactic Level

If the lexical level of the ‘wooden language’ can be easily modified, as words and phrases may come and go, may be abandoned or replaced, its deeper syntactic level can hardly be dissimulated as it represents the real mechanism which generates the discourse.

The accumulative and emphatic techniques and the taste for heavy crooked phrases govern communist ‘newspeak’. The following is the official English version of one of the sentences Ceaușescu used very often, taken from the speech delivered on April 30, 1979: ‘*Life proves that the unity of all working people, irrespective of nationality, of our entire people under the leadership of the communist party is, in the conditions of the new stage we are traversing too, the decisive factor of the implementation of the great programme of building the multilaterally developed socialist society and Romania’s advance to communism, the source of all achievements in raising the homeland to new summits of progress and civilization, in defending national-freedom and independence.*’ The text still rings extremely familiar, maybe because of the vitality of such automatic word aggregation devices in present political oratory.

Nominal style is prevalent, while **passive voice** verb constructions are preferred: ‘*a avut loc sesizarea Parlamentului de către comisie în legătură cu*’... instead of ‘the commission informed the Parliament about’... Hence, an overload of **successive genitives** which make the utterance tiresome and difficult to follow. ‘*Recenta vizită a unei delegații a PSM în Siria ne-a oferit posibilitatea constatării, la fața locului, a identității de țeluri a (sic!) partidelor noastre, a marilor transformări economico-sociale obținute în Siria...*’ [approx. ‘The recent visit of a delegation of the Socialist Labour Party in Syria gave us the possibility of realizing, on the spot, the identity of purposes of our parties, the great economic and social changes which took place in Syria’ — Ilie Verdeț, President of PSM, in an article in *Vremea* (September 29, 1995)].

Françoise Thom³¹ noticed a tendency of ‘wooden language’, still persistent nowadays, whereby **periphrastic expressions** replace ordinary verbs: *a-și găsi reflectarea* — ‘to reflect itself’, *a acorda ajutor* — ‘to help’, *a exercita o puternică influență* — ‘to strongly influence’.

The preference for **unexpressed agent in passive constructions** and for impersonal forms often betrays the transmitter’s intention to avoid clarity and responsibility [‘*Trăim vremuri bezmetice în care e insultat poporul român și e ultragiată armata*’ — ‘We are living insane times when the Romanian people

is insulted and its army is outraged' — PRM senator Corneliu Vadim Tudor (March 19, 1993)], or '*S-a venit cu făina de grâu din import*' [hardly translatable in impersonal construction — 'one has come with import flour' instead of I / 'We imported flour', Valeriu Tabără, Minister of Agriculture, *Ziua* (August 1, 1995)].

One may also notice an abusive use of initial **gerund constructions** instead of normal dependent clauses: '*Răspunzînd reproşului că..., vreau să informez că...*' ['Answering the reproach that..., I'd like to inform you that...'], George Ioan Dănescu, Minister of the Interior, in *Monitorul oficial al României*, 153 (September 7, 1993), p. 12].

Real or formal **syntactic connectors** are expected to be frequent in a 'wooden' syntax for their insistent phatic effect, but in today's Romanian official discourse they simply became generalized 'tics': *de aceea, de altfel, totodată, din acest punct de vedere, practic, în primul rînd, astfel, în acest context, în ceea ce priveşte* ('this is the reason why', 'in the same time', 'from a... point of view of', 'actually', 'in this context', 'first of all', 'thus', 'as far as... is concerned', etc.).

Appositions are still a wide-spread technique aimed at inducing a specific evaluation: '*FDSN, formaţiune legitimată de un larg suport electoral, parcurge un firesc proces de clarificare...*' ['The Democratic Front of National Salvation, a political structure legitimated by vast electoral support, is now undergoing a natural process of clarification', Ion Iliescu in *Buletinul informativ al Preşedinţiei* (July 9, 1993)]; '*Noua lege a învăţămîntului din România — una dintre cele mai democratice din Europa*' ['The New Education Law in Romania — One of the Most Democratic in Europe', title of a booklet edited by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (August 1995)].

Asyndeton, inserts, syntactic splits, tedious repetitions are also typical not only of a 'wooden syntax', but also of bad Romanian language use: '*Pentru că treaba asta va mai dura, vreau să spun că, în cadrul comisiei, noi am fost de acord cu propunerile pe care le-a făcut comisia — de fapt, a urmat şi o parte din propunerile noastre, mai ales că, faţă de propunerile guvernului, s-a propus ca absolvenţii de învăţămînt de toate gradele, de învăţămînt superior mai ales, să fie declaraţi şi ei şomeri, aşa cum a fost până acum*' [approx.: 'As this is going to last, I'd like to say that, in the framework of our commission, we agreed with the proposals made by the commission, as a matter of fact some of our proposals were taken into account, mostly because, with respect to Government's proposals, they proposed that all graduates of all education levels, but most of all University graduates should be also declared unemployed, as they have been declared so far' — Mihail Viziru, PSM deputy, *Monitorul oficial al României*, 118 (June 9, 1993), p.5].

III.3. Stylistic Level

Unlike the language used by Italian or German Fascists, who were highly interested in the quality of their rhetoric, communist 'newspeak' lacks stylistic inventiveness and vividness. Its traditional catalogue of tropes is rather poor and predictable; the main function of the tropes is not ornamental, but reiterative and evaluative.³² Among tropes, metaphor scores very low whereas the frequent use of adjectives is redundant rather than epithetical.

Both on stylistic and syntactic level, the explicitly pedagogic aim of 'wooden language' is betrayed by its extreme **redundance**, as code and contact must be permanently stressed. A wide synonymy of assertion verbs have therefore infiltrated the discourse of power representatives: *aş vrea să încep prin a spunela vă informa că... aş dori să subliniez/afirm/puntez... vreau să reiterez/specific faptul că ...aş veni, de asemenea, cu o precizare...* (all variants for 'I'd like to say/underline that...').

Tautology, obtained by accumulation of semantic cognates, is sometimes a deliberate stylistic device used in order to make phrases even more persuasive: '*hotărîrea fermă de a se opune frontal dictaturii*' ('the firm decision to openly oppose dictatorship'), '*convulsiile unei răsturnări violente, nu presupuse comploturi oculte, nu aranjamente secrete ale unor cercuri militare restrînse*' ('the convulsions of a violent overthrow, not alleged occult plots, not secret conspiracies of restricted military circles'), '*a accelera reforma dîndu-i un nou impuls*' ('to accelerate reform by giving it a new impulse') [Ion Iliescu in TV speech (December 21, 1994)].

The old habit of passing comprehensive black-or-white judgments still pervades the discourse of those in power, which relies basically on two opposite stylistic devices: **euphemism** (altering reality by saving less about it) and **hyperbole** (altering reality by saying more about it). They are both defensive and offensive exaggeratory techniques for blurring perceptions of reality. Euphemisms were less frequent than hyperboles during Ceauşescu's dictatorship, as most mentions of 'unpleasant' realities were simply eliminated from his speeches. The all-encompassing ruin of Romanian economy was always referred to in terms like *e adevărat, se mai înregistrează din cînd în cînd şi unele neajunsuri*' ('It is true, from time to time some flaws may appear') or like *e loc şi de mai bine*' (approx. 'there is always room for better things'). Post-totalitarian official discourse is not alien to such 'edulcorating' devices: '*o anumită parte a presei*' ('a certain part of the press'), '*categoriile sociale cele mai defavorizate*' ('the most disadvantaged / the least favoured social categories'), '*disponibilizarea forţei de muncă*' ('making labour forces available').

The hyperboles appropriated by the cult of personality (*epoca de aur* — 'the golden era', *Geniul Carpaţilor* — 'the Genius of the Carpathians', *erou printre*

eroii neamului — ‘hero among our people’s heroes’, *savanta de renume mondial* — ‘the world-renowned scientist’, etc.) have often been perceived ironically even during Ceaușescu’s era, but some other superlatives or emphatic constructions have been ‘inherited’ as such and they represent favourite rhetoric strategies in the nationalists’ discourse: *întreaga suflare românească* — (approx.) ‘the entire Romanian people’, *voința unanimă a noastră, a românilor* — ‘the unanimous will of us all, of all Romanians’. However, overuse undermines the initial value of hyperboles: almost everyday there is a *crucial/major/unprecedented moment* to live: an *epoch making/life-generating idea* to follow or a *true landmark* to acclaim.

IV. O democrație originală (‘An Original Democracy’)

New Tendencies in Contemporary Power Discourse

IV.1. Vocabulary and Phraseology

After a long paralysis in communication imposed by dictatorship, there was a natural ‘explosion’ of Romanian public speech. Even in the discourse of those in power, in spite of all inertial tendencies, some splits of ‘picturesque’ in the inherited monochrome lexicon of the communist propaganda occurred. Political speeches today have no longer the stylistic purity of the earlier ‘wooden language’, the structure of which has changed under the pressure of an invading neology and of a doubtful grip on basic grammar rules. Nevertheless, the reiterative feature of the new lexical acquisitions may justify apprehension about a possible new ‘wooden language’.

Taboos disappeared but the retrieval of the notions which had been ‘banished’ by the communists is often awkward or deliberately improper. The religious sphere offers several examples in this sense. The national TV channel announced on Easter day 1995 ‘1995 (*sic!*) years since the Resurrection of Christ’, senator Vasile Văcaru, Vice-president of PDSR, stated, in June 1994, that ‘*Dumnezeu este pedeserist*’ (‘God is PDSR-ist’), while PRM senator Corneliu Vadim Tudor published in *Romania Mare* (October 20, 1995) an ode to the ‘betrayed’ Ceaușescu, based on blasphemous similarities with biblical images.

The language of Romanian politicians is now marked by an overwhelming number of terms belonging to technocratic jargon (*ecart, a implementa, accize, sponsor, management, dividende*, etc.) which rend their speeches even more abstract and opaque. Most of them also excel in the use of barbarisms: these are rapidly taken over by the media and finally by the rank and file speaker (*a opina, a prognoza, a cauza, a restricționa, a ordonanța, etapizare*, etc.), and

are used instead of the conventional Romanian terms for ‘to express an opinion’, ‘to make prognosis’, ‘to cause’, ‘to restrict’, ‘to release ordinances’, ‘stage division’). Dan Mărtian, leader of the PDSR parliamentary group in the Chamber of Deputies, pleads for ‘*forța reglementatoare practică a Constituției*’ [‘the practical regulating force of the Constitution’ (March 20, 1993)], Gabriel Iosif Chiuzbaian (Minister of Justice) hopes for ‘*maximizarea recuperării datoriilor*’ [approx. ‘to maximize the recovery of debts’ (December 5, 1994)], president Ion Iliescu speaks about ‘*o globalizare la scară mondială*’ [approx. ‘a worldwide extension of...’ (December 23, 1994)], and prime minister Nicolae Văcăroiu states that ‘*preliminăm o creștere de 5% a exportului*’ (approx. ‘we estimate a preliminary 5% rise in export’).³³

To the many ‘classical’ communist clichés, this period has added its own **transition clichés**. Some of the latter seem more ephemeral than the former; parodic overuse has soon shattered the position of phrases such as: *ca simplu cetățean* — ‘as a simple citizen’, *oameni de bine* — (approx.) ‘goodwill people’, *democrație originală* — ‘original democracy’, *deplin consens* — ‘full consensus’. Many transition clichés are adopted both by the Power and by the opposition. Some of them copy certain foreign patterns and therefore do not lend themselves to paraphrasing: *integrarea României în structurile euro-atlantice* — ‘Romania’s integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures’, *redresare economică* — ‘economic recovery’, *calea spre democrație* — ‘the path to democracy’, *mijloace de atragere a capitalului străin* — ‘means to attract foreign investments’, *redistribuirea fondurilor* — ‘redistribution of funds’, *costurile tranziției* — ‘the costs of transition’, *alinierea României la standardele occidentale* — ‘making Romania compatible with Western standards’, and so on. Others, instead, could be avoided or translated into *parler vrai*: *gravele probleme cu care se confruntă țara* — ‘the serious problems our country has to deal with’, *demararea rapidă a procesului marii privatizări și de deblocare economică* — (approx.) ‘the rapid start of large-scale privatization and economic clearing’, *demersuri pentru urgentarea procesului de ratificare* — ‘measures to accelerate the process of endorsement’, *ampla acțiune de control* — ‘down on...’, *întreaga problematică abordată* — (approx.) ‘the whole of the approached matters’, and so on. Romanian official language has already reached ‘*cote alarmante*’ (‘alarming levels’) of neology proliferation which is probably considered to be the hallmark of highly cultivated style.

Unfortunately, only too often one comes across ill-assimilated foreign words which spread easily from the authoritative field of politics to the language of the media and vice-versa. ‘*Fluidizarea fluxurilor tehnologice*’ — (approx.) ‘making technological operations even more rapid’, ‘*măsuri derulate în maniera constructivă*’ — (approx.) ‘efficient steps’, ‘*eforturi conjugate din partea tuturor factorilor decizionali*’ — (approx.) ‘joint efforts of all those who have the res-

possibility' are but a few examples of Romanian TV news language. Such phrases make their way into various other linguistic milieux in the most unexpected way. One can equally hear 'newspeak' and 'neo-newspeak' unfit neologisms in assemblies of the Romanian Academy, in interviews with peasants and even in religious comments: '*...pentru ca Prea Sfântul ei Fiu să apară pe arena-publică cu un prestigiu căruia să nu i se poată imputa nimic*' — (approx.) '...so that Her Holy Son may show himself on public arena with an impeccable prestige' [Father N. Grebencea in an article in *Credința neamului*, 70 (December 1994)].

IV.2. Disquieting Revivals

After a short period of overt public contestation of neo-communist tendencies in Romania, when the leaders who had just come to power still felt insecure and temporarily refrained from manifestations which might have reminded the public of the Ceaușescu regime, it is easy to see how they now tolerate and even encourage the return to some old totalitarian strategies: **glorification** and **vilification**.

On one hand, the practice of pompous national *manifestări omagiale* — 'homage manifestations' has been officially reinstated in the spirit of the well-known festivities of the golden era'. Apart from the celebration of the National Day (December 1st), other 'initiatives' to glorify Cuza's first Union of the Romanian Principalities (January 24, 1859), Avram Iancu's figure at Țebea (Transylvania), or Prince Michael the Brave's victory over the Ottomans at Călugăreni (August 23, 1595) provide excellent recurrent occasions for highly exhorting speeches containing many of Ceaușescu's triumphant clichés. 'Classic', indisputable national heroes are preferred in speeches of veneration in which *marile valori naționale* ('the great national values'), *momentele de înălțătoare glorie* ('the moments of soul-uplifting glory'), *galeria de mari bărbați ai țării* (literally 'the gallery of this country's great men', and *greul tribut de sânge al martirilor neamului* (approx. 'how our martyrs dearly paid with their blood') are exalted. Statesmen's allocutions are followed by programmes which echo a recently resumed twenty-year-old tradition of compulsory 'artistic programmes' comprising patriotic songs and poems, folk music and dances thinly disguised in the national festival *Cîntarea României* — 'Hymn to Romania'.

One can also notice a particular tendency to restore or, better said, to continue in a new shape of versified encomium the cult of Ceaușescu's personality presented now as a national martyr. The two fanatic promoters are his former devoted 'court poets', Adrian Păunescu and Corneliu Vadim Tudor, today devoted (to be more accurate, 'partially devoted'!) allies of the leading party as senators for two parties featuring strong national-communist tendencies.

Yet the most shocking development in official discourse today is, perhaps, its increasing **aggressiveness**. The violence of the language used by the representatives of the opposition (journalists, politicians, leaders of non-governmental associations, etc.), would be an interesting subject as well, but, in order to be consistent with the limitations set forth from the beginning, I shall try to identify only those discursive strategies used by wielders of the power in order to disqualify the opposition. Aggressiveness is not an 'innovation' of post-totalitarianism, although its unprecedented expansion has already been commented several times.³⁴ From this point of view, there are obvious similarities between Romanian political discourse and that in Poland, for instance. The latter has been described by Ryszard Siwek in the following terms: '*Il n'y a pas longtemps encore, l'agressivité, la brutalité et la vulgarité de l'expression n'étaient en usage que dans quelques milieux, assez restreints et enfermés dans leurs ghettos... Aujourd'hui, le phénomène en question est devenu omniprésent. La Pologne baigne dans l'expression qui frappe et blesse. Une sorte de malaise a touché tout discours. Le discours politique n'est pas épargné. Une fois libéré de sa gangue qu'était la langue de bois, il jouit d'une pleine liberté, mais d'une liberté difficile à gérer.*'³⁵

The most worrying aspect of verbal violence does not consist in accidental manifestations of irritation, improper for any official posture whatsoever (such as in President Iliescu's *măi, animalule!* — 'you, beast!', addressed to a journalist), but in deliberate techniques intended to stigmatize 'the other' and which may remind one of the violent initial stage of communist power.

More than 20 years after Ceaușescu's 'pink-coloured' ideology gradually banned all the negative words of the violent fifties, one notices in the vocabulary of those in power the surprising frequency with which words such as 'to deny', 'to disavow', 'to discredit', 'to misinterpret', 'to distort', 'to invent', 'to falsify', 'to demolish', 'to slander', 'diversion', 'plots', 'fanciful scripts', 'fabulations', 'ill will', 'provocations', 'tension', 'disparagement', 'malevolence', 'lies', 'inimical', 'offensive', 'dangerous', 'unjustified', 'subversive', 'hostile', 'coarse', and so on.

The idea of 'public enemy' is overtly set up once again, but, unlike the 'good' bad times of totalitarianism, power representatives in Romania are now visibly inconvenienced by criticism issued simultaneously from sources ranging from the opposition to the independent press. 'A certain part of the power' (frequently accused of extremism) adds at least two more names on the list: the Hungarians and the Jews. There is no 'consensus' yet among the representatives of power about the present status ('friend / foe') of the former imperialists', as, in spite of official statements about Romania's desired alliance with NATO, some representatives of the ruling parties inertially consider that '*căștile albastre sînt niște lotri*' ('the blue berets are nothing but highwaymen' — PDSR senator

Gheorghe Dumitrașcu), while the United States are labelled as ‘*jandarmi universali*’ (‘universal gendarmes’ — PRM senator C.V. Tudor).

Undoubtedly, the independent press played the part of the ‘enemy of the people’; however, the apparently defensive position of power representatives to media attacks are no less violent. The official statement to the press Traian Chebeleu, spokesman for the President, made on July 7, 1994, may well remind one of the virulence of many a dictator’s discourse: ‘*tagma prețișilor ziarști care răspîndesc fără jenă cele mai ignobile injurii, neadevăruri sau calomnii pe seama Președintelui ales al României (...), care publică asemenea informații neverificate, în total dispreț față de adevăr și depășind cu mult limitele bunului simț...*’ [approx. ‘the clique of so-called journalists who unsparingly spread the most ignoble insults, lies and slanders on account of the elected President of Romania (...), who publish such unverified information, by completely despising truth and overstepping the boundaries of common sense...’]. And this is just one of many possible examples.

Power makes use of various vituperative strategies which resemble very much the ‘classical’ communist methods of firmly ‘branding’ any manifestation of a different ideology, following more or less consciously the old slogan ‘*he who is not with us is against us*’.

Milder techniques of ‘gentle mockery’ may resort to euphemisms (*bruneți autohtoni* — ‘autochthonous brunets’; *creoli* — ‘Creoles’, *oameni de culoare* — ‘coloured people’ for ‘gipsies’, frequently used by some politicians with nationalist orientation)³⁶, to ironical diminutives [a motion brought forward by parliamentary opposition was qualified as *moțiunea* (‘motionlet’, ‘little motion’) by the leader of the PDSR parliamentary group, senator Vasile Văcaru (May 19, 1993)], or to a deliberate intromission of highly marked popular, informal elements in the obligatory formal level of any official speech: ‘*S-a făcut mare tapaj în legătură cu acest ex-rege și cu monarhia în România. Un amestec, o bălmăjeală generală în legătură cu această problemă!*’ [approx. ‘They so much kicked up a row about this ex-king and about monarchy in Romania! It’s a whole jumble, a huge muddle as far as this problem is concerned!’ — except from a speech delivered by President Ion Iliescu to foreign businessmen (*Buletin informativ*, November 30, 1993)].

There are cases in which transmitter’s negative passions such as intolerance, scorn, disregard and even hatred are supposed not only to become transparent, but also to contaminate public emotional reactions. This is the main function of what Olivier Reboul called ‘*les mots-choc*’. Extremely offensive and unfounded incriminations are produced in critical situations to definitively ‘label’ the enemy. There is a striking similarity between Ion Iliescu’s well-known ‘branding’ of the students gathered in the University Square in June 1990 as ‘*golani*’, ‘*elemente periculoase de orientare legionară*’ (‘hooligans’, ‘dangerous elements

of fascist orientation’) and Ceaușescu’s labelling of the revolutionaries in Timișoara as ‘*grupuri de elemente huliganice, elemente teroriste de tip fascist*’ (‘groups of hooligans’, ‘fascist-type terrorist elements’).

Violence in the language of present power representatives goes far beyond mere ‘*mots-choc*’, as it often turns into an entire ‘*discours-choc*’: incriminatory libels, trivial attacks to one’s honour, threats and provocations. Verbal extremism and the coarseness of the speeches of local leaders may sometimes remind of Nazi, Stalinist, or of Mussolinian rhetoric. Here are only some quotations: ‘*Ungurii trimit Europei pe ascuns, laș, un Memorandum mincinos. Este un act de dușmănie față de statul român...*’ [Secretely, in a cowardly manner, the Hungarians have sent Europe a Memorandum full of lies. It is an act of enmity...’ — an article published by PDSR senator Gheorghe Dumitrașcu in *Cronica română* (October 5, 1993)]; ‘*Votați-l pe Coposu și o să vă aducă înapoi moșierii!*’ [‘Vote for Coposu and he will bring back the landed gentry for you!’ (Ion Iliescu, during the 1992 presidential election campaign)]; ‘*Principalul vinovat pentru dezastrul României este Ion Iliescu ... este piaza rea a poporului român ... care a rămas un simplu activist de mână a doua ... om slab față de dușmani și periculos față de prietenii, care duce România spre o catastrofă sigură ...*’ [‘The main culprit for Romania’s disaster is Ion Iliescu ... the ill omen of the Romanian people ... who is nothing but a mere second-hand activist ... a man weak to his enemies and dangerous to his friends, who is dragging Romania towards an incontestable catastrophe ...’ — PRM senator Corneliu Vadim Tudor before breaking the alliance with the leading party, in *Politica* (October 7, 1995)].

IV.3. The Grammar of Power and the Power of Grammar

In many respects the official language of the nineties is far less monotonous than the previous one. There was precious little room for invention then, whereas now there is plenty of room for it. More speakers, more inventiveness. And more risks, too.

The prevailing oral form in political discourse nowadays has involuntarily highlighted how difficult standard Romanian may sometimes be. More than once local orators have proved that humour, the main element which is lacking in political language, may be easily retrieved, even if involuntarily.

The individuality of local politicians often surfaces in their most personal use of the Romanian language, which bears an imprint easily recognizable from that of others. Despite the apparent homogeneity typical of contemporary political speech, distinguishable voices do exist in the extensive chorus of those in power. The reiteration of the same specific patterns in a peculiar, predictable way could

make us state the existence of a highly personalized **idiolect** in the case of some statesmen. Let us dwell upon three examples.

Rhetoric interrogatives, exclamatory utterances, highly offensive threats and inciting provocations made on behalf of **all** Romanians are marks of any verbal intervention and written text by PRM senator Corneliu Vadim Tudor: '*Deci dumneavoastră acționați pe față pentru sfîrtecarea teritorială a României, iar noi care vă atragem atenția să nu vă jucați cu focul ... sîntem insultați în țara noastră! Cînd va lua oare sfîrșit batjocura asta?*' ['So you are overtly acting for Romanian territories being torn apart, and we, who are warning you not to play with fire ... we are being insulted in our own country! Will this indignity ever come to an end?'] — speech delivered in Parliament on March 19, 1993, *Monitorul oficial al României* (March 20, 1993)].

Prime Minister Nicolae Văcăroiu's discourses instead are easily distinguishable from those of others, owing to their confusing vacuousness and intricate syntax: '*Ceea ce este important este că tema pusă în discuție este, într-adevăr, de foarte mare importanță, de mare actualitate și eu aș dori să fiți convinși că echipa guvernamentală cunoaște fenomenele, le-a identificat, însă doresc să știți, în același timp, că combaterea corupției în România nu se realizează așa cum am dori, într-un timp relativ scurt*' [approx. 'What is important is that the topic suggested for today is indeed of great importance, it is the topic of the day, and I would like you to be sure that the Government team knows the phenomena thoroughly and has identified them, but I want you to know, in the meanwhile, that fighting corruption in Romania is not accomplished as we would like it to be, that is in a short time']; speech delivered in Parliament on September 5, 1993, *Monitorul oficial al României* (September 6, 1993), p. 52].

The most striking features in President Ion Iliescu's idiolect are two. On the one hand, the recurrence of highly individualizing 'emblem-words'³⁷ such as *emanație* — 'emanation' (frequently used when referring to his party's emergence as a 'natural emanation of the Revolution'), *consens* — 'consensus', *platformă* — 'platform' [for instance in '*platforma de comunicare și înțelegere*' — 'platform of communication and understanding', *Buletin informativ* (November 30, 1993), '*platforma de conlucrare a tuturor forțelor politice*' — platform of cooperation of all political forces', TV speech (April 12, 1995), and even '*consens pe platforma interesului național*' — consensus on the platform of national interest', speech at Focșani (January 24, 1995), or *liman* — (approx.) 'shore' (*să avem puterea să ajungem la limanul de liniște și de belșug atît de dorit*) — 'may we have the power to reach the shore of peacefulness and wealth we all dream about', *Buletin informativ* (February 7, 1993); '*să fim capabili să ajungem la limanul regăsirii de sine, al liniștii și bunăstării, pe care îl așteptăm cu toții*' — 'may we be able to reach the shore of self-redescoving, of peacefulness and abundance, which we are all waiting for', *Buletin informativ*

(April 11, 1993)]. On the other hand, President Iliescu's discourses, both oral and written, are full of syntactic constructions obtained by tautologically joining synonyms which aim at a greater pedagogical persuasion: '*În fond au fost atîtea decenii de despărțire, de înstrăinare, de lipsă de contact, de lipsă de cunoaștere. Toate acestea au creat rezerve, rețineri, suspiciuni ...*' [(approx.) 'As a matter of fact, so many decades of separation, of estrangement, of lacking contacts, of lacking acquaintance have elapsed. All these things generated attitudes of reserve, of restraint, of suspicion ...'] — TV interview, *Buletin informativ* (May 7, 1993), p. 23]; *există și teama, spaima de necunoscut* — 'there is a certain fear, apprehension of the unknown', '*lumea reală, concretă, pragmatică*' — 'the real, concrete, pragmatic world', '*parteneri de dialog, de idei și opinii*' — partners of dialogue, of ideas and opinions', in *Revoluție și reformă* (Editura Enciclopedică, 1994, pp. 275, 190).

The individuality of contemporary Romanian leaders is also manifest in their most personal language usage with respect to language norm. Their original options as far as linguistic correctness is concerned do not regard exclusively their own persons but, being so much the focus of the media, they may and they actually do contaminate common usage by creating the alternative paradigms of the 'language of transition'. The following paragraphs attempt to review some of the most frequent deviations from what is usually called 'good Romanian' language.

At the **phonetic** level, misplaced accents (*prevederi, diaspora, trafic, mafie, etc.*), cacophonies ['*Au făcut totul ca să facă ca România să fie pronunțată cu respect peste hotare*'] — (approx.) 'They did everything possible for Romania to be pronounced with respect abroad', PDSR President and President of the Romanian Senate, Oliviu Gherman on July 14, 1994)] and involuntary links [such as in... 'in this short time Prime Minister Nicolae Văcăroiu'] may contribute to the general carelessness of contemporary political speech.

As far as **morphology and syntax** are concerned, derivation is unpredictable ['*servicii ocultice n-am făcut*'] — (approx.) 'I have never dealt with any occultic jobs', Virgil Măgureanu, Director of the Romanian Intelligence Service, November 24, 1994)] and superlatives are always possible ['*nu manifestă nici cea mai înfîmă adversitate*'] — (approx.) 'it doesn't manifest the least infinitesimal adversity', PDSR senator Oliviu Gherman in an article in *Cronica politică* (October 24–30, 1994)]. Normal verb agreement may be optional [*Afirmația dl. președinte Funar sînt simple supoziții*'] — Mr. president Funar's statement **are** mere suppositions', PUNR deputy Corneliu Bălan, in a press conference on November 5, 1995)] or simply rejected from a law item by the vote of 18 senators! ['*capitalul nominal și capitalul vărsat se stabilește*'] ... (approx.) 'nominal capital and rolling capital is to be established ...', *Adevărul* (June 4, 1994)]. Anacoluthon and syntactic splits seem to be generalized devices in the

highly elaborated elocution of those in power: ‘*Situația e grea. Faptul că se mișcă ceva, trebuie să demolăm în continuare?*’ — (approx.) ‘The situation is difficult. The fact that some are thriving, should we continue to demolish?’, Prime Minister Nicolae Văcăroiu, addressing Parliament in *Monitorul oficial al României* (September 6, 1992), p. 52]; ‘*Putem sprijini pe cei care sînt în măsură să dea măsuri, spațiile verzi ... Eu cred că nu face o impresie bună pentru nimeni care ne vizitează țara și văd șoselele noastre, pentru că așa s-a descoperit că popul crește foarte repede*’ [(hardly translatable) ‘We can support those who have the ability of taking steps, those in charge of verdure spots ... I think it is not a good impression on anybody who visits our country and they see our roads, because this is how it has been discovered that poplar trees grow up very quickly’, Viorel Mărginean, Minister of Culture, quoted in *Ziua* (May 9, 1995); ‘*Sînt niște lucruri pe care nu le pot spune acuma ce gîndesc ...*’ [(hardly translatable) ‘There are some things which things I can’t tell now what I think ...’, Petru Crișan, Minister of Commerce, quoted in *Ziua* (May 9, 1995)].

The **semantic** status of words represents another tremendous trial to our leaders. The speech of many of those in positions of power often reveals abnormal extensions of meaning [e.g. *a derula* ‘to unroll’ may accept in ‘neo-newspeak’ almost any abstract direct object: *a derula sarcinilor/măsurilor/comerțului/resurse financiare/initiative* etc. (approx. ‘to unroll tasks/measures/trade/financial resources/initiatives’, etc.)] or unfit figurative sense [‘*Să nu sacrificăm economicul pe altarul reformei*’ — literally ‘Let us not sacrifice the economy on the reform altar’, Ion Iliescu, TV speech (April 12, 1995)]. The struggle between neologisms and politicians makes new victims everyday: ‘*Am venit să vă conștientizez și să vă aduc la cunoștință* [(hardly translatable) ‘I came here to make you realize consciously and to make you aware of ...’ (Florin Georgescu, Minister of Finance, *Adevărul*, October 15, 1994)], ‘*reevaluarea tuturor bolnavilor de SIDA*’ — (approx.) ‘the reassessment of all AIDS patients’, Dan Georgescu, State Secretary, Ministry of Public Health, TV interview (February 1, 1995)], ‘*să se consfințească în stenogramă că nu mi s-a dat cuvîntul*’ — ‘let it be consecrated in the short-hand notes that I was not given the floor’, Ioan Timiș, FSN deputy, *Monitorul oficial al României* (March 26, 1993)]. There are also more spectacular cases in which the correct meaning of a neologism is not only unclear to the speaker, but even replaced by the contrary meaning of its antonym. Here are only two examples: ‘*în ultimul timp toată lumea consideră că trebuie să vorbească despre frații noștri de peste Prut. Este o adevărată moldofobie*’ — ‘Lately, everybody considers it right to speak about our brothers across the Prut. It is a real ‘moldophobia’ [instead of moldophilia], Cornel Brahaș, former PUNR spokesman (April 1993); ‘*să scăpăm din acest miraj sau marasm al sărăciei care s-a instalat în România*’ — ‘let us leave behind us this mirage or this mire of

poverty which tyrannizes Romania’, PUNR senator Ioan Joarță, *Adevărul* (October 29–30, 1994).

The ‘stylistics’ of power oscillates between two undesigned basic devices: glaring tautologies and exquisite tropes. Careless pleonasms are overwhelming: ‘*acțiunea constantă a guvernului pentru a stîrpi acest flagel nefast (...), nu se poate decît concludînd împreună să combatem acest flagel*’ — (approx.) ‘the government’s constant action to extinguish this ill-fated calamity (...), only by cooperating together could we extirp this calamity’ [Prime Minister Nicolae Văcăroiu addressing Parliament, in *Monitorul oficial al României* (September 6, 1993)], ‘*trebuie să ne înfrățim cu frații noștri de peste Prut*’ — ‘we must fraternize with our brothers across the Prut’ [PDSR senator Vasile Văcaru, *Adevărul* (June 11, 1994)].

Skillful (but completely involuntary!) puns upon words of all sorts have a similar hilarious effect. Honorary prizes are weekly awarded by several Romanian autonomous newspapers (*Academia Cațavencu*, *Adevărul*) to the top felicitous phrases of the rhetors representing power. PDSR President Oliviu Gherman, for instance, is able to produce surprising personifications [‘*starea sănătății piciorului senatorului Văcaru*’ — ‘the state of health of senator Văcaru’s leg’ (November 23, 1994); Dan Marțian, leader of the PDSR parliamentary group in the Chamber of Deputies, is a master of even more surprising paradoxes [‘*această opinie aruncă o umbră de lumină*’ — (approx.) ‘this opinion casts a shadow of light’ (June 17, 1994); ‘*opoziția trebuie să promoveze unele finalități*’ — ‘the opposition must promote certain finalities’ (July 7, 1994)]. Many witty writers could envy the subtlety of the calembours created by power representatives, such as: ‘*săpăturile de la Cluj nu sînt politice, sînt pur arheologice*’ — (approx.) ‘excavations in Cluj are not political, but merely archeological’ [PUNR senator Ioan Gavra, *Adevărul* (July 9, 1994)] or ‘*pentru crucea pe care o purtăm în inimă, în suflet și la gît*’ — (approx.) for the cross we bear in our hearts, our souls and around our necks’ [PDAR President Victor Surdu, TV interview (October 19, 1994)].

V. Some Possible Conclusions

Far from being an exhaustive catalogue of ‘transition’ language phenomena, examples such as those mentioned above reflect, to a certain extent, the linguistic and, implicitly, the cultural level of contemporary Romanian political leaders. Although dominated by a ‘wooden legacy’, post-totalitarian official language seems to have lost the ‘purity’ of ‘golden era’ ‘newspeak’, due to its new ‘gains’: expanding aggressiveness and illiteracy. As long as the linguistic situation of a society is judged in terms of the opposition *langue de soi* vs. *langue de l’autre* suggested by Patrick Seriot, in other words, as long as the interference between

we and they is no longer seen as a challenge, there is little to be done about improving public language, because 'il n'existe pas de langue-refuge, où l'on pourrait être à l'abri des paroles de l'autre, à la fois hors soi et en soi'³⁸.

The only valid solution would be the return to the **parler vrai**, the true antidote of all 'newspeak' or 'neo-newspeak' tendencies. This could be achieved through the 'joined efforts' of a better education system, a linguistically more (re)active opposition, a more independent position of the media, a greater interest from the part of linguists in identifying usage and norm and, last but not least, through native rulers of better quality. For the time being, the most effective and the less institutionalized instrument for exorcizing 'wooden' or simply bad Romanian is, beyond doubt, the **parodic detachment** of the people. To give only a few examples, such ironic attitude has been very helpful in changing the status of transition 'emblem-words' by granting them a new, reversed, meaning which, in its turn, has triggered their substitution in official speech. For instance **comunist** — 'communist', has turned from the 'highest possible honour' to '*mai bine mort decât comunist*' — 'better dead than a communist', and **golan** — 'hooligan' has become an honorary degree as in '*academician golan*', *ambasador al golanilor*' — hooligan academician', 'ambasador of the hooligans', whereas in President Iliescu's discourse, PDSR, the ruling Party, is no longer referred to as *emanat* — 'emanated' but *propulsat* — 'propelled' by the Revolution, while *consens* — 'consensus' is being replaced by *concordie* — 'concord', a.s.o.

One should not give up hope for 'a better and more just world' in so far as local political discourse is concerned. But for the time being, as Nicolae Manolescu bitterly noticed, '*în România politica se face din vârful limbii de lemn*' — 'in Romania politics is played from the tip of the wooden tongue'.

Notes

1. Carmen Pineira, Maurice Tournier, 'De quel bois se chauffe-t-on? Origines et contextes actuels de l'expression langue de bois', *Mots*, 21 (Decembre 1989), pp. 5–19.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
3. Sorin Antohi, 'Studiu introductiv', în Françoise Thom, *Limba de lemn*, (Humanitas, Bucharest, 1993), p. 19.
4. Pineira and Tournier, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
5. Ilya Zemstov, *Lexicon of Soviet Political Terms. A Guide to the Soviet Orwellian Alteration of the Russian Language* (Hero Books, Fairfax, Virginia, 1984), p. XIII.
6. This is, maybe, too simplistic a description according to Charles Zaremba, 'Le diable a une langue de bois. A propos des travaux récents en Pologne', *Mots*, 21 (Decembre 1989), p. 116.
7. See the articles by Nicolas Trifon, 'La destalinisation dans la lexicographie roumaine (I, II)', *Mots*, 21 (Decembre 1989), pp. 102–108, and *Mots*, 22 (Mars 1990), pp. 43–56.

8. Rodica Zafiu, 'La variante roumaine de la langue de bois — esquisse diachronique', *Journal of the American-Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 16–17 (Davis, California, 1992), p. 217.
9. John Wesley Young, *Orwell's Newspeak and Totalitarian Language. Its Nazi and Communist Antecedents* (University Press of Virginia, Charlottesville and London, 1991), pp. 1, 225.
10. Charles Zaremba, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
11. Françoise Thom, *Newspeak. The Language of Soviet Communism*, translated by Ken Connolly (The Claridge Press, London and Lexington, 1989), p. 96.
12. Olivier Reboul, *Langage et idéologie* (Presses Universitaires de France, 1980), pp. 81, 118.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
14. Patrick Seriot, 'Langue de bois, langue de l'autre et langue de soi. La quête du parler vrai en Europe socialiste dans les années 1980', *Mots*, 21 (Decembre 1989), p. 55.
15. Paul Chilton, 'Newspeak: It's the Real Thing', in *Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984*, ed. by Paul Chilton and Crispin Aubrey (Comedia Publishing Group, 1983), p. 38.
16. Nicolae Ceaușescu, *For the Unity of the Democratic, Progressive and Revolutionary Forces All Over the World* (Meridiane Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981), p. 13.
17. Nicolae Ceaușescu, in *Săpămîna* (December 22, 1989), p. 1.
18. Olivier Reboul, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
19. Ilya Zemstov, *op. cit.*, pp. 100–101.
20. John Wesley Young, *op. cit.*, p. 223.
21. Ilya Zemstov, *op. cit.*, p. 209.
22. C.V. Tudor, *Politica* (October 30, 1995), p. 8.
23. Paul Chilton, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
24. Ilya Zemstov, *op. cit.*, pp. 78–81, 242–243.
25. John Wesley Young, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
26. Olivier Reboul, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
27. See Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, II (Beladi Publishing House, 1994), p. 93.
28. John Wesley Young, *op. cit.*, p. 220.
29. Olivier Reboul, *op. cit.*, p. 173.
30. George Orwell, 'Politics and the English Language (1946)', in *A Collection of Essays* (A Doubleday Anchor Book, 1954), p. 166.
31. Françoise Tom, *op. cit.*, p. 31.
32. *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.
33. About neology proliferation in Romanian after December 1989 see: Dorin N. Uritescu, *De la chioscari la vesternizare. Mic dicționar de termeni actuali* (Humanitas, Bucharest, 1993).
34. See Rodica Zafiu, 'La variante roumaine de la langue de bois — esquisse diachronique', and Liviu Papadima, 'Homo duplex et le langage', in *Journal of the American-Romanian Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 16–17 (Davis, California, 1992), pp. 210–219 and pp. 200–204 respectively.
35. Ryszard Siwek, 'La nouvelle expression du discours politique en Pologne', *Mots*, 42 (Mars, 1995), pp. 27–35.
36. See Rodica Zafiu, 'Eufemisme', *Luceafărul*, 48 (1990), p. 4.
37. On certain post-totalitarian 'emblem words' see Rodica Zafiu, 'Cuvinte-emblemă', *Luceafărul*, 21 (1990), p. 4.
38. Patrick Seriot, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

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