

Situating language, situating the stakes

On the subject of the translation into Romanian of the European Vocabulary of Philosophies

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Situating language, linking it to the internal processes of translation that, between Greek, Latin, Slavic and Ottoman influences have made it, is to pose the political – and not just linguistic – stakes of the translation into Romanian of the *European Vocabulary of Philosophies* (EVP). The first section of the logbook is based on the notes that were prepared for the working seminars on the translations of the

Romanian belongs to the family of Latin languages. If the documentary proofs of the language spoken in the region – which correspond to the current territory of the country – go back to the first millennium, on the other hand, the first written texts conserved are no older than the 16th century. The first text conserved is a *Letter* from 1521, written by a merchant from Braşov (in Transylvania), which announces an imminent Turkish invasion of the city to his fellow citizens. In the absence of explicit documents, it is difficult to make the tradition of written Romanian texts go back any further than this date. However, it should be noted that less than forty years after this letter, a considerable number of canonical books translated into Romanian appear: *Catehismul românesc* by Coresi, in 1559 (adapted from Luther's *Small Catechism*) and following this (1559 – 1581) from the same printing press as Coresi in Braşov-Schei: 'Tetra-Evangeliary', The Acts of the Apostles, Psalms, The Evangelist Explained (*Evanghelie cu tâlc* or *Cazanie*), etc. And twenty years later the monumental *Palia de la Orăştie* appears. It was the first translation into Romanian of the Old Testament, the books *Genesis* and *Exodus* in 1581 – 1582, in a Calvinist context, following the Hungarian, the Latin (the *Vulgate* of Tübingen) and the Slavic (Ostrog, 1581) texts. The first edition of this text will be published by Mario Roques in Paris in 1925.

Now this proximity of dates is troubling. The Romanian literary tradition was evidently not constructed in a few decades, between the first writing to be conserved - which has nothing literary about it - and the quantity of translations which flourished immediately after. This proximity -which is doubtless fortuitous - allows three historical aspects to be set out. Half way through the 16th century, Romanian is a language capable of appropriating the biblical tradition by working the translation of texts starting from several ancient and modern languages, with a declared desire to go back to the "sources" and to compare the different versions. The conservation of written Romanian texts corresponds to the epoch of the setting up of the first printing presses (notably those introduced by Coresi in Wallachia and in Transylvania) and it is thus – at least in part – due to the number of copies put into circulation thanks to print technology. This relatively high number denotes the demand, the interest, of communities for the text written in Romanian. Finally, it appears clearly that the literary

formation of language happened thanks to translation and that translation equally furnishes the first terrain for a critical reflection on the status of language in relation both to the translated text and with the community who shares that language and imprints on it its destiny. An extract from the preface accompanying one of the first Romanian translations of the New Testament, published in Alba-Iulia (Belgrad) in 1648, written by Simon Stefan (bishop of the orthodox Romanians of Transylvania) testifies to this critical and historical reflection on language, which accompanies the work of the translator:

“...words must be like coins. The best coins are those that circulate in all countries, and the best words are those that everyone understands. And we, for this reason, we have gone to a lot of trouble to “render” [the text] in such a manner that all can understand; but if, despite everything, certain people don’t manage to understand, that is not our fault but the fault of he who scattered the Romanians across other countries and gave them to mix up their words, in such a way that they no longer all speak in the same manner”.

This translation was made following the Greek, the Latin (of Jerome) and the Slavic (an edition from Moscow) texts. But it privileges the Greek, as the writer of the preface affirms, concerned at the same time for both fidelity (to the *spirit* as much as to the *letter*) and for the legitimation of the Romanian text in relation to the “canonical” texts, because the Greek, Simion Stefan recalls, is the origin of (all) other versions. In this translation, a certain number of Greek words are simply transliterated, and the writer of the preface explains why: there are no Romanian names for certain things (such as certain precious stones for example), because these things do not exist in “our lands” [poss countries]. In reality the translators principally took up in this version translations that were a hundred years old, due to Deacon Coresi. Originating from a Greek family from Chios that emigrated to Romanian lands around 1500, Coresi was a translator and publishers of books, the founder of the first printing presses in Wallachia and Transylvania, in Braşov-Schei around 1550. Inscribing itself in the tradition of Coresi, the statements of Bishop Simion Stefan on translation, and above all the comparison of the circulation and universal value of words with money would become *topos* of old Romanian literature [1].

The first Slavic/Romanian dictionaries appeared ninety years after the first translations: the monk Mardarie de Cozia in 1649, and Mihail Logofătul, Târgoviste, 1678 were the authors of the oldest dictionaries. The numerous copies of these dictionaries that were printed demonstrate the frequency of translation of canonical Slavic texts into Romanian in the 17th century – translations that solicit the use of these dictionaries.

But although it was the language of worship for orthodox Romanians, Slavic is not the primary basis starting from which Romanian, a Latin language, structures and fixes its literary and religious status.

The translators of the 16th and 17th centuries constantly appeal to Latin, in testifying explicitly to the radical proximity that is felt with the “mother tongue”. I will take a typical example of the juxtaposition of Slavic and Latin terms in the Romanian translation of the *Old Testament* of 1581 (*Palia de la Orştie*). A passage from Genesis I, 26-27: “*s? facem omul pre chipul ce s? fie asem?nare noo...?i Domnezeu f?cu pre om lui pre obraz, pre obraz lu Domnezeu f?cu el*”. “Let us make man in our image and likeness (*kat’eikona kai homiosin*)...God made man in his image and likeness”. One will notice the typical juxtaposition of terms with a Latin origin (*asem?nare* – similitude) and with a Slavic

origin (*obraz* for *ad imaginem* or *kat'eikona*), on the basis of a Latin syntactic structure. This type of juxtaposition and the frequent presence in Romanian of synonyms which derive from the two source languages, Latin and Slavic – in liturgical or literary language above all – has been retained in modern Romanian. To stay with the same example: “image” is sometimes *imagine* (a generic modern term), sometimes *icoană* (icon: solely for the object specific to Christian Orthodox worship), sometimes *obraz* (cheek or face, but also an old Slavic term for “icon”), or even *chip* (face, expression, character, photo, but also mode, modality, and in compounds like *închipuire* the term *chip* signifies imagination, *phantasm*), and sometimes *față* (face). Furthermore, what should be retained from this example is that the “face” (*chip*, *obraz*), is not properly speaking an “image” in Romanian (nor a “representation”), but an expression, or more precisely an impression of the features/traits of a person (their visible part, emerging out of their “character”), corresponding to what in Greek is designated by *prosôpon*. Under these two terms, *chip* and/or *obraz*, the “face” designates the visible part of the life and the nature of a living thing, a condition proper to the view of the existent starting from the projection received from its part in the imagination, memory and intellect. In this case, the visibility of an individual corresponds more to its definition than to the apprehension of its physical appearance.

Libraries, writings and teaching

Let us recall, moreover, some markers of intellectual life in contemporary – or nearly contemporary - Romanian lands, with the activity of translation in the 16th and 17th centuries. The existence of a school for higher studies on the model of the *Scola monastica* in the [heart] of the monastery of Putna in the second half of the 15th century, where the arts of the *trivium* and of the *quadrivium* were probably taught, and rhetoric and the illumination of manuscripts, amongst other sciences and arts, certainly were. Teaching was most likely in Slavic and perhaps in Latin. It was the epoch of Stephen the Great, - from the cultural point of view, one of the richest in the entire history of Moldavia. Let us also note the presence of manuscripts (from the 16th century) and Greek-Slavic printed bilingual books in the libraries of the monasteries (at Neamț, for example, but also at Putna), and also numerous manuscripts, then books of patristics, theology and Greek canonical law. The libraries of Moldavia were highly reputed and were the workshops of the copyists. Requests for copies of rare books in the 16th century came from [as far away as] Moscow.

The teaching of philosophy begins around 1690 in Bucharest and Jassy within the framework of the royal Academies. It took place in Greek and was directed by Theophilus Corydaleus on the basis of Averroist commentaries on Aristotle's treatises (the manuscripts are in part in Bucharest in the library of the Romanian Academy). Amongst the first original philosophical writings are those of Dmitry Cantemir, prince of Moldavia at the start of the 18th century, a refugee in Moscow after the defeat at Stănilești of the Moldavian army by the Turkish army in 1711, the father of Antioch Cantemir, one of the founders of “modern” poetry in Russia. Cantemir the father (Dmitry) was a scholar with a European-wide reputation, known in Istanbul, in Paris, and in Berlin, speaking and writing Greek, Russian, Turkish, Latin...and certainly Romanian. He was at one and the same time a historian (*History of the Rise and Fall of the Ottoman Empire*), a musicologist (the author of one of the first writings on the Turkish musical system), a historian of religion, knowledgeable about both Islam and Christianity, a diplomat, writer and philosopher. Amongst his philosophical writings in

Romanian: *The Banquet or the Quarrel of the Sage with the World* and *Hieroglyphical History*, a sort of ironico-allegorical poem – a curious mixture of Platonic themes, Aristotelian logic, and skepticism. Besides, a renewal of the orthodox and philocalic theological tradition took place in Moldavia in the 18th century, at the monastery of Neam? and in Wallachia (Târgovi?te, Câmpulung). And let us also recall that the biggest library of South-Eastern Europe at the start of the 18th century (the library of Prince Mavrocordat) was to be found in the monastery of V?c?re?ti in Bucharest – a monastery that was razed to the ground in 1986!

Language and the National Spirit

In the direct line of this cultural and historical tradition, has there been a philosophical or critical reflection on the specificities of Romanian in philosophical expression? Assuredly – and it is a matter of reflection tinged with nationalism that is more or less disguised as philosophical reflection or philological study. There are numerous examples in the 19th and 20th century of the study of language and its origins, of the work of enrichment by the multiplication of translations and genres of writing, and no less of reflections on the mutual relations between language and nation. Amongst the most notable examples of critical and historical work on language, one may cite the essays by Ion

Heliade Rădulescu on Romanian grammar at the start of the 19th century (see *infra*) or etymological work on vocabulary and research on Latinity and the other strata (Slavic, Turkish, Greek, German, French, Italian) of language by I.B.P. Ha?deu (*Cuvente den b?tr?ni*, 1878), A. Cihac *Dictionnaire d'Etymologie daco-romane, elements latins* Frankfurt, 1870), and L. ?aineanu (*Dic?ionar universal al limbii române*, 1896). These three works are the first scientific instruments for the analysis of language.

Concerning reflections in which language, people and culture cross over, let us cite some examples that are amongst the most striking and have most marked the modern intellectual history of the country. Many of the writings of Constantin Noica, including his book *Crea?ie ?i frumos în rostirea româneasc?* (*Creation and Beauty in the Romanian Language [Logos]*, 1973) have played an important role in the intellectual landscape of communism. One finds considerations on literature, history, folklore, and grammar cited in the book. The theoretical writings of Lucian Blaga on Romanian folklore and transcendence, in the 1930s, have also made a lasting mark on the tradition of a “Romanian consciousness” defined via artistic and linguistic forms. Considered as one of the most important Romanian poets of the 20th century, Blaga had a philosophical training, and his theoretical writings, close in spirit to the thinking of Heidegger, include reflections on the structural forms (which he calls “stylistic matrices”) of culture and the Romanian language.

But reflections on language and nation equally represent the terrain of choice for several thinkers who gravitated round the journal *Gândirea*, a breeding ground for the nationalist camp in the inter-war period. In the 1930s, as in the 1970s, the creation of a whole, specifically Romanian philosophy and an (archaistic) language with philosophical and theological resonances, was attempted. The journal like movements such as “orthodoxism”, “personalism”, *Tr?irism* (the Romanian version of existentialism), opposed to “modernists” or to the “avant gardes” united a good number of the cultural and political personalities most implicated in the nationalist debate. One finds amongst them philologists, historians and philosophers: Dobrogeanu-Gherea, Nae Ionescu, Nicolae Iorga, D.D.

Ro?ca, Vasile Conta, Mihai Ralea, Emil Cioran, Mircea Florian, Ion Vianu. Language had the place of choice in debates concerning national specificity: certain words were raised to the rank of “concepts”, and *topoi* were created in their entirety. Topoi like “spa?iul mioritic” (the “space of young ewes”, that of a pastoral culture), stylistic matrix, undulatory structure, cosmic energy, anthropology-cosmology, *dor*, *tain?* (mystery, secret), *doin?* (popular lyrical song), *fior* (shivering, hypersensitivity), *jale* (pain, metaphysical despair)... Similarly, certain popular religious practices were analysed as so many expressions of national “genius”, according to a long dominant identitarian equation of Romanity and Orthodoxy, which was really only the product of the “romantic nationalism” of the last two centuries, reorganized by the different political systems of the conservative right and communist left that have ruled in the country. Reactions were not lacking. For example, in the 1970s and at the start of the 1980s, in a half-serious, half-ironic fashion, Nichita Stănescu – the most remarkable poet of the communist era – foiled the ideology of the ruling party by reflecting on the “mother” tongue and on Eminescu, the “national bard”...starting with nationalist clichés and on so-called “specific” words taken literally. A form of critique without saying a word...as if by default, in some way, because no explicit contestation could be envisaged.

The destiny of language, the factory of words

However, to think the philosophical stakes of translation and reflection in the dialogue of languages, in the Romanian case it seems more interesting to me to go back to before the nationalist controversies and ideological confrontation of the 20th century. For this reason, I will illustrate the philosophical, historical and political reflection on the specificities of the Romanian language with some examples chosen from amongst the Transylvanian intellectuals of the first half of the 19th century (*?coala transilvan?*), representatives of a current deriving from the Lumières and from a nationalist awakening specific to the context of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. These examples permit an understanding of the point to which the destiny of language is linked to the work of translation, of the transcription into another language of the fruits of thinking and the literary genres practiced in other languages. It also permits an understanding of the point to which one only masters one’s language by rubbing it up against the experience of other languages, in specific situations of the practice of language in the domains of knowledge, religious experience, and – more particularly – in frontier cases, where cultures and languages mix but aren’t confused, since in all this time they have acquired the practice of dialogue.

Most of the texts cited further on are taken from the writings of Ion Heliade R?dulescu: a complex intellectual, poet, philologist, a belated illuminist philosopher and romantic “genius”. An author from the same school, Ion Budai-Deleanu, equally a thinker of language, and a poet, undertook to write an epic of an original Homeric type in Romanian, so as to form and enrich the language, at the start of the 19th century. Called *Tiganiada*, it was supposed to recount the exploits of Tsigani heroes speaking languages and dialects mixed together following the regions they passed through, rediscovering – through the porous frontiers of words that pass from one language to another – an archaic matrix of the tale of heroic acts of love and war, in the context of a Rousseauistic reflection on political systems and on the place of man in the world. This poem is very difficult to translate into another language. I will content myself with citing other texts, principally those of Heliade R?dulescu, and of some other contemporary authors, especially around the effort of Romanian intellectuals of the era of the first revolutions – intellectuals educated in Germany (for the Transylvanians) and France (for the

Moldavians) – at conquering the Romanian language, at appropriating it by making it into a language of culture, reflection and creation. They all talked of the necessity of “purifying” language (as it is heteroclit on the lexical plane), of “disciplining” it by stabilizing [its] grammatical rules, of enriching it with a scholarly vocabulary, and of creating original oeuvres in order to render it worthy of figuring in the ranks of European languages. Of course, they didn’t ignore the past, but they wanted to break with tradition, sometimes in a brutal and artificial manner (forced Latinisation, an Italianising style...). Language, culture and nation are, for them, inseparable, although they didn’t make an explicit ideology from this unity.

“Our language – said Heliade R?dulescu in 1847 – is Roman, like Latin, but in another phase: it is a matter now in the first place of cultivating it, and cultivating it signifies purifying it, ennobling it, forming it according to nature, [an] education to which we must pay particular attention”. (*Vocabulary of Foreign Words in Romanian*)[\[2\]](#).

“To cultivate a language....signifies assigning it its place in each thing and in each utterance [parole], baptizing each idea with a name, ridding it of everything that is equivocal and rendering it susceptible of expressing what one thinks and nothing else [...] It is by the examination of names or utterances [paroles] that one succeeds in giving the true definition of each thing....the beginning of philosophy and the study of names are synonymous operations” (from the Preface by Heliade R?dulescu to the

“I say then that if one wishes to show Romanians the path of philosophy – says Heliade R?dulescu in an article in *Curierul românesc* in 1839 – one must first work at forming and completing their language. The level attained by national consciousness and their spirit of justice corresponds to the level of the development of language”.

“People of letters forge terms for themselves when they have acquired ideas, and the common follow those who have endowed language with terms and forms proper to its nature” (Heliade R?dulescu, once again, in a work entitled *Paralelism între limb? româna? ?i italian?* from 1840).

A bitter controversy took place, lasting until the middle of the 19th century, between advocates of neologisms necessary to the accomplishment of language by a renewal of the adequation between thought and expression (“modernists”, “rationalists”), and the advocates – who were not inevitably conservative (“purists”) – of a just equilibrium between the existing language and the necessity of enriching it solely where it lacks vocabulary concerning logical rigour or the beauty of style, of the art of rhetoric.

“Because if our language needs to be improved, how could one succeed in doing so if one does add anything new to it?”, with this definition of the word as sign: “one knows through logic that words are the signs of the perception of intelligence, it thus follows that each word is linked to the perceptual activity of our intelligence”. “Words must agree with the nature of the things or the facts that it is related to” (Paul Iorgovici *Observatii de limb? româneasc?*, Remarks on the Romanian Language, Buda, 1799)

“[Men and women of] letters only forge words for themselves when they possess ideas...Each language needed new terms when it began to cultivate itself” (Heliade R?dulescu)

“There are so many ideas that would remain incomprehensible, if instead of making use of the foreign terms that designate them (*foreign* words but ones that have become familiar), we made use of their Romanian equivalents” (Mikhail Kogălniceanu, Moldavian politician, statesman and writer, in a text from 1855 regarding the Romanian language, written on the eve of the first constitution of a modern Romanian country through the unification of Moldavia and Wallachia, in 1859. It was an act for which Kogălniceanu played a major diplomatic role)

“We give advice...in order that through the intermediary of those who speak it, language may give us words that are not simply words, but jewels, not utterances but roses” (Ioan Piurariu-Molnar *Retică, adevărată învățătura și întocmirea frumoasei cuvântări* Rhetoric, that is, teaching the good composition of a discourse, Buda, 1798)

“Hitherto we have complained of not having books in Romanian that are composed in an elevated style so that through reading them we can acquire a taste for good composition...” (Simeon Marcovici, *Cours de rhétorique*, Bucharest 1834)

“Gentlemen philosophers of Romania, when will you give permanent laws to our language?” (Gheorghe Barițiu, in the journal *Foaie pentru minte, inimă și literatură* Folio for the Mind, Heart and Literature, 1841)

We are no longer at that stage, to be sure. Romanian has its grammatical rules and also its habits of translation – generic or idiomatic as the case maybe - with the possibility of playing smoothly on the letter or signification. But it remains a matter for reflection where words are concerned, the meaning of their journeys, migrations and returns, from one language to another so as to express the renewed rigours of thought or the impetuosity of sentiments, to express them, to *speak* being or *inhabit* the world – not just in order to communicate.

In the cauldron of quarrels

The translation of the EVP into Romanian arrives on this terrain, where the quarrels of the 19th century – revived in the 20th century – have not been extinguished. It is a terrain where it is important to be able to respond in a transversal and universalist manner to certain of the questions that had already been posed by Romanian intellectuals living in the multiculturalism and multilingualism of a world traversed by contradictions and inequalities as was that of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman empires. But this translation of the EVP into Romanian also tries to do something more than to instruct and to help in the correct and coherent translation of classical and modern works of philosophy. It is a matter of admitting the current political and cultural questions of Europe, in sum, the great difficulty of understanding - which has deep roots in the respect or non-respect for the other, with the internal difficulties of each language, difficulties that make for the great richness of every language, the slightest and least apparent of bodies. [3].

The aim of the Romanian edition of the EVP is thus to constitute a tool of philosophical work which, on the one hand, establishes a Romanian philosophical vocabulary corresponding to the current stage of language and, on the other hand, recuperates the historical thickness of Romanian philosophical vocabulary by showing the specificities (the specialization) of the Romanian lexicon.

A complete Romanian edition of the French version of the *European Vocabulary of Philosophies* should appear in 2012 with Polirom, directed by Alexander Baumgarten (the University of Cluj) and Anca Vasiliu (CNRS, Paris), with the collaboration of a team of thirty translators, most of whom are young doctoral or post-doctoral students in the arts and/or philosophy in the Universities of Cluj, Timisoara, Bucharest, Iași, Oradea. One should make it clear here that the decision to translate the EVP into Romanian was taken in the context of a scientific policy followed by a group of researchers in and teachers of ancient philosophy (Mediaeval and of Antiquity) and of classical philology, who have been publishing Romanian translations of Ancient Greek and Latin authors for ten years. For the first time, the complete works of Aristotle, Plotinus, Origen, Thomas of Aquinas have been or are in the process of being translated. These translations, which are numerous and are being undertaken according to a coherent programme for the constitution of a corpus of ancient and Romanian philosophy, have already established a specific, quasi-standardised, Romanian vocabulary.

The translation of the EVP into Romanian will permit a supplementary historical reflection on the linguistic bases and cultural elements proper to the Romanian tradition to be added to this concerted and controlled translation effort. The theological context, dominated by mediaeval Slavic; the first Greek philosophical teaching, with commentaries on Aristotle following the Averroist school of Padua, but in Greek not Latin; the first reflection on language, grammar and logic, in the context of the Lumières, modified – under the banner of the “modernization” of Romanian – at the start of the 19th century (the “Transylvanian School”), with the insistence on the Latin base of the language – to the point of creating a “pure” Romanian language (that is to say, one “purified” of its Slavic lexicon), considered a “literary” language, a language of “worship” and a “modern” language. In sum, the translation of the EVP into Romanian is in the process of bringing new responses to questions formulated throughout the history of the formation of the language, because since the 16th century, the Romanian language hasn’t stopped forming, reforming and unfolding itself as a language, in translating and “deterritorialising” words at the same time, through appropriation and re-semanticisation. This includes the framework of specialist texts, those destined to restricted groups, those for whom access to the original texts would be more justified than the recourse to translations. It is not possible at the same time to take stock of the history of the determining relation between the autonomisation of a philosophical thinking, in relation with the thinking of a language, and a thinking of national identity. Perhaps the tool represented by the EVP in Romanian will constitute precisely the element that sets off such a study, on new philosophical and philological bases.

[1] The comparison is cited and developed by Hașdeu, a Romanian historian and linguist from the end of the 19th century, in *Principiul circulației cuvintelor* (“The Principle of the Circulation of Words”). C.f. N. Cartoian *Istoria literaturii române vechi* (Bucharest: Minerva, 1980 [1940]), pp. 94 – 100 (Coresi), p.184 (Simion Stefan). The translation into French of the passage cited in old Romanian is by Vasiliu.

[2] All the quotes in this series here are taken from the article by A. Marino ‘Les Lumières roumaines et l’illustration de la langue’ in R. Munteanu (dir.) *La culture roumaine à l’époque des Lumières* (Bucharest: Univers, 1982) pp.322, 344 – 49, 352 – 53, 360.

[3] An allusion to a passage from Gorgias *Encomium of Helen* §8 4-5

Notes
