WOODEN LANGUAGE: PAST AND PRESENT

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The analysis of the manipulative politically engineered English in the time of the communist regime and its development into a new natural wooden language in the post totalitarian age claims the awareness on the phenomenon outcomes, its extra linguistic motivations and solutions. The article adds to the definitions of the wooden language syndrome based on the new motivations and developments and interprets its linguistic rhetoric impact on social, cultural and economic levels. Our reference to the wooden language metaphor encompasses the totalitarian processed linguistic newspeak and the contemporary Romanian vernacular and professional jargons accompanying the process of globalization. The analysis of the totalitarian linguistic instrument is extended to the present wooden language capacity to be the carrier of global knowledge and communication. Our study calls for the wooden language split from the living reality and subscribes for appropriate education and training and language standardization policies instead of regulatory measures. The zetetic and trans-disciplinary approaches of the analysis are added the insights of personal participative observation of the language shifts and their social and professional consequences.

Key words: wooden language syndrome, manipulative rhetoric, extra-linguistic factors, language accommodation, linguistic carrier of knowledge and communication

INTRODUCTION

Mankind invented language...or perhaps language invented mankind? Language creates and re-creates the complexity of the world as an undying phenomenon and supports its evolution. Our thorough and trans-disciplinary approach to the study of wooden language phenomenon and its axiological developments is dedicated to the consideration of its driving social and professional force and the prospect of its appropriate handling.

Our reference to the wooden language metaphor encompasses both the definition and interpretation of the totalitarian processed linguistic newspeak (Orwell, 2016) aiming to control and brainwash an obedient population, deprived of its capacity of thinking and communicating and the contemporary Romanian vernacular and professional jargons accompanying the process of globalisation with reference to the blank English language units making them vague and almost meaningless.

The article does not refer to the political correctness issue.

The zetetic approach to the issue is added my personal informal insights of a long-term participative observation of both communist and free political regimes in Romania to highlight the instrumental similarity of the intentional processed language typical for any totalitarian rhetoric. Historical research, socially grounded analysis of scholarly and ideological works (Verdery, 1991), linguistic anthropology (Duranti, 1994; Negrea, 2015 ) and social psychology (Sanderson: 2010) answer to the cross-disciplinarity of the analysis.

The question of wooden language might be considered obsolete as the Eastern totalitarian regimes vanished if new situations were not still coming into view under new forms of language accommodation. (Hickey, 2013) The process goes with the social, economic and psychological motivations (Bearin Bavelas, 2005) raised by contemporary extra-linguistic factors: the new industrial revolution (Anderson, 2012), freedom of movement (Condinanzi et al 2008), cross-cultural communication.
(Matsumoto et al. 2008) and technology which make the language get lost in a new reality and turn into a blank misleading instrument of knowledge and communication. Hence, the full value of our former political language investigation is given by the need to understand the sense of its present syndrome. The original conceptual definitions are developed critically in terms of the current global social, political and professional settings.

The relevance of the selected English and Romanian language twist samples are needed to make theoretical arguments develop the issue accurately and illustrate the linguistic outcomes of the intrusion of the former political discourse and the latter new playing extra-linguistic factors. The development mechanism of language instrumentality and functionality in terms of extra-linguistic factors is illustrated by the following diagram:

![Diagram: Language instrumentality and functionality in terms of extra-linguistic factors](image)

**Figure 1.** Language instrumentality and functionality in terms of extra-linguistic factors

The classification of wooden language as the controlling and restrictive instrument of the obsolete communist regime is added the analysis of its operational purpose at present and answers to the question of making it the instrument of global knowledge use and communication. Our study calls for the prevention of wooden language split off from the living reality and subscribes for appropriate education and training and language standardization policies instead of regulatory measures. (McClelland, Winter, 1969; Inkeles, Holsinger, 1974)

**Wooden language: a brief theoretical update**

The interest for the “real socialism” robotic language was encouraged by the experience of Françoise Thom (2005) in the former USSR who studied the relationship of language evolution and its specific cultural, political, social, and psychological factors. The follower of Alain Besançon (2015) produced a noteworthy doctoral thesis on the political language of the communist regime in 1987 which made her an authority in the domain.

The phemomenological analysis of the wooden language concept and its real-life outcomes goes with the extension of the successful totalitarian experience that deprived Romanian language to the English language instruction which was similarly reduced to a manipulative instrument through a process of linguistic engineering that isolated it from its own culture, sense and experience. (Comenius, 1657)

The compound word wooden language appeared in the early 20th century in Russia dubovyj jazyk i.e. „oak language“ (Ušakov, 1935) with the meaning of manipulative language. The Polish drewna mowa, translated as of frozen language" or “monkey language”, the Czech - mrtvý jazyk („dead language”), and the Hungarian bukkfanyél („beech language”) defining the same „meaningless”, „flattened”, „hidden” language, was technically described by jézyk popagandy („propaganda language”). The metaphors were picked and investigated in the Francoise Thom’s book. (2005)

The prominent Romanian linguist George Pruteanu defines wooden language as a „jargon of lexical, grammar and stylistic complexity” when referring to the politically processed language developed by totalitarian regimes to disseminate their real political discourse. (1997)

Wooden language prevents linguistic transparency and calls for interpretations between the lines as it „hides realities into encapsulated engineered linguistic forms aiming the people homogenous and leveled down: nobody is allowed to step out the obedience line. The language must be the carrier of imposed discipline and submission and the citizens must use its rigid patterns and choppy style”

When the disputed Soviet linguist Nicolai Iakovlevici Marr (ру́ськ: Никола́й Яковлеви́ч Марр) produced the monogenetic hypothesis on the human language, which was officially accepted till 1950, I.V. Stalin repelled to him in his article Marxism and Problems of Linguistic, originally published in Pravda newspaper. Referring to the new language mutations that were coined in the time of the Bolshevik revolution, he disqualified language instrumentality which blurred it into political nothingness. He claimed that Russian was replenished with new words and expressions as a result of the development of the „new socialist production, culture, social relations and morals” which eliminated the capitalist base. He proclaimed the dominance of materiality against the social structure which reflects the interests of the rulling and controlling alterations. He claimed that Pruteanu Act was enforced in 2004 as a symbol of Romanian national dignity.
class. Consequently, language is not a political instrument aiming the people level down and their obedience, but it is the result of a new dominant social materiality. (Stalin, 1950)

Similarly, the German totalitarian Nazi regime refreshed the language with new vague meanings aiming to destroy human capacity of thinking and effective communication. The Nazi used to say: *Wer denkt, zweifelt schon* – the one who thinks has already doubted which is not convenient to manipulative rhetoric and might challenge the totalitarian dominance. The process was named *sprach lenkung* and later it was used to describe the linguistic manipulation of the communist regime in the German Democratic Republic. (Shachtman, 1995)

The study of the vehicular omnipresence of the linguistic engineered inflexible forms, syntactic juxtaposition simplicity, lexical scarcity and null meanings reveals the political intentional brainwash through language disimulation, and meaning expropriation.

The self-sufficient pathology derives from the need to avoid realities and replace them with meaningless mind-puzzling clichés, no matter how stupid they are. The phenomenon has been paralleled to the break-down of moral principles, values and their formal individual and social representations that made possible the loss of language authenticity and significance. (Markova, 1997) The imposed political correctness of the commanding regime empowers the wooden language codes as a solution for group discipline, cohesion and efficiency and as a way to discriminate and discourage opposition of resisters. (Stoica, 2016)

The post-totalitarian developments of the Romanian wooden language correspond to the interpretation of globalization phenomenon as a major factor that makes languages of the world uniform and standardized through the democracy of technology, media, commerce and culture. The process was defined as “hybridization” (Nederveen-Pietersen, 1995) or “creolization”. (Grey Thomason & Kaufman, 1988)

We consider the post-totalitarian wooden language in terms of transcultural linguistic cut and mix hybridization which produce articulate behavior and practices based on new trans-local cultural expressions which merge endogenous/exogenous understanding of culture.

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**English instruction hijacked**

When the diabolic innovation has proved to be effective to the vernacular language, the manufacturers of the Romanian prolet-culture (Fitzpatrick, 1992) extended the linguistic project to the schooling of foreign languages which outside their political influence. English, as a curriculum subject, was turned into an instrument of ideological closure through the same mechanism of confiscating its cultural identity and communication value. The suggested analysis of the English text books that were used in Romania schools between the two political education reforms in 1948 and 1968 (Bârsănescu, 1978) disclose the wooden ideological load by which English was given the role of brainwash and indoctrination. The English corpus selected from the 8th school grade manual provide the particular lexical and syntactical features used to convey the ideological nothingness. They provide information about the linguistic process of replacing the referential function of the language by making it a colage of ideological semantic clichés that hide real information and aim manipulation. It expresses arbitrariness of an unlimited power through a poor conceptual universe filled with the artificial pathos of an abstract reality:

...*Lenin, the great leader and friend of all the workers and the working peasants...* 
...*the workers and the working peasants are all over the world and love him. Under his leadership they fight for a lasting peace...* 
...*a sure road to a better life...* 
...*out march towards Socialism...* 
...*we grow like the corn of our country*

A great deal of politically processed emblematic vocabulary translated from Russian into Romanian was operated similarly into the curricular English language which made it empty of its cultural identity as if the communist regime was in service on its speaking territory. English is squeezed into devalued terms like the „new citizen” who refers differently to the world and society: the unknown, obedient and silent worker, or peasant, the comrade, the member of the committee, addicted to his work exceeding the plan in a nationalized economy and praized on the wall gazzette...

*Our Party is building not only a new country, but also a new youth, a new citizen".* (pp. 125)

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2 Portmanteau word derived from the combination of proletariat and culture which was coined by Alexander Bogdanov (1873-1928), a key philosopher of the Bolshevik movement (1984)

3 We refer to the language functions named by Roman Osipovich Jakobson, an American linguist of Russian extraction, a pioneer of the structural linguistics, which dominated the early 20th century. He claims that the language denotative, or cognitive function make the relationship between the message and its referential linguistic context

4 Linguistic phenomenon consisting in associating new meanings to the words; loan translations; the borrowing of a word or phrase from another language through semantic translation to create new lexeme in the target language; from fr. calque.
The workers gave us a friendly smile as we passed without interrupting their work as they were busy increasing the output in order to exceed the Plan. Socialist emulations are in full swing.” (pp. 147)

The political and social phenomenon of personality cult\(^5\) (Heller, 2004) which openly manifested in Romania, developed the linguistic instrument of escalating sophisticated language combinations that were calqued into the English curricular texts. Positive words hide disastrous outgrowth effects. The dying wooden metaphors\(^6\) turned into increasingly longer sentences with required adjectives making impersonal forms and slogans legitimate and urgent. They dressed Romanian political realities into an English language that did not exist.

The hagiographic typology of the cult of personality could not be transferred and integrated into English due to the democratic nature of the language\(^7\), which makes the message cripple. The extension of linguistic commonalities to world dimensions make the language communicate nothing.

“Lenin, the great leader and friend of all workers and leading peasants showed mankind the sure road to a better life. Under his leadership, the peoples of Russia began their march towards Socialism”. (pp. 117)

“...The Romanian Worker's Party guides youth on the way of constructive work. (pp. 125)

The existence of Western languages in the school curriculum in the time of the totalitarian regime and their wooden linguistic processing ground the questions on the aims of such a school training. It is quite clear that its political formality targeted the quasi-professionalism of their subjects producing self-confidence breach and obedience, easy to control and difficult to reverse. Our history lesson is called to draw attention to the role that language can play on falsehood, dreamlike power, and demagogical emptiness. The speech delivered by the US president Franklin Delano Roosevelt on the first January 1941\(^8\) can be considered as making reference to the universal truth: "The first is freedom of speech and expression everywhere in the world."

New axiological developments and their motivations

Our thorough trans-disciplinary approach to the study of the post-totalitarian wooden language syndrome and its axiological developments is dedicated to the appropriate consideration of its driving social force.

The post-revolution public and private space opened instantly to the overwhelmingly rapid process of globalization and to its corresponding linguistic transformations which were favored by the free movement, cross-cultural contacts and the egalitarian technological democracy. Romanian language has been challenged by the new wooden language expansion (McLuhan, 1994; Dânilă; 2014) which made it a linguistic mosaic, sometimes difficult to understand even by the natives.

After the collapse of the totalitarian regime in Romania the new versions of language twists subscribed to the new global quotidian social, economic and professional circumstances as an outcome of differently motivated parameters. The second wave of sociolinguistics provided new insights on the phenomenon under consideration. (Clem, 2016) The newly emerged social network characteristics are suggested to be the main external factor influencing the dynamics of post communist wooden language syndrome in terms of prestige, although it cannot be adequately analyzed due to its size and complexity. (Milroy, 1980) Recent contributions of computational linguistic models confirm the major role of the loose social network in wooden language disorder and the process of its accommodation. (Fagyal et al., 2010)

The imposed feeling of national pride, the cult of personality, the censorship that pervaded every detail of private and social life in the time of the former regime, denying the manifestation of individuality, resulted in the post totalitarian outburst of attachment to foreign culture values and euphoria of experiencing the former prohibited paradise. (Bugheşiu, 2015) The appreciation of the Western culture values, which were formerly blamed, discouraged and punished by the authorities, turned vigorously into definite linguistic manifestations. Approximations and accommodations of English to Romanian language made the vernacular appear closer to the reputation of the strongest English speaking countries. The phenomenon corresponds to the rise of a large loose social network which chose to move upwards on the social scale to achieve professional and economic success. Its members recognized norms of socially prestigious standards of different cultures, namely the English speaking ones, and made the two conflicting social forces – status vs. solidarity – work for a new Romanian cultural identity. (Hickey, 2013) The new wooden language syndrome worked aggressively for the rapid change of the Romanian language which stagnated for 45 years. The vernacular has been overwhelmingly infused with English professional terminology and current vocabulary although it resulted meaning alterations or deviations more often

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\(^{5}\) Cult of personality or cult of individual: the phrase appeared in English in the nineteenth century. First with no political connotations then it was associated to the Stalinist regime (Klaus, Heller:2004)

\(^{6}\) Name given by G. Orwell to the metaphors which are not based on real analogies (1968)

\(^{7}\) The author makes reference to the English language which does not have pronouns of politeness as in Latin languages which define a distinct type of social relationship

\(^{8}\) [http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrthefourfreedoms.htm](http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/fdrthefourfreedoms.htm)
than not. It was the result of the historical hiatus that cut off Romania from political, social, cultural relationship with the world, and separated it from the science and technology developments, prevented the natural and gradual development of its language.

The massive foreign investment of the multi-national companies after 1990, the Romania join to the European Union in 2007 made the English language offensive much stronger, contributing to the „othering” process of the vernacular. (Vișan, 2016) The teamwork, e-work and e-learning changed the way knowledge and technology are shared in conversations like the following one:

“ Crezi că face sens să forcastăm în continuare pe pipeline-ul deja existent, în care customizăm produsele de end-user? ” “Poate dacă sharui și cu headquarter-ul și ne dau ok-ul pentru adresarea ultimelor probleme de suportare a clienților.” “Pe ce anume te focused in analiză?” “Pe noile aplicații la poziții de top sau pe damage-ul din exit?” (Nicolescu, 2015)

“Do you think that it makes sense that we forecast the existing pipeline to customize the end-user products? We can share the information with headquarter and get the OK addressing the problems of clients’ support. What is the focus of your analysis: the new applications of the top positions or the exit damages?” (auth. translation)

The quantitative analysis of the newspeak word-style reveals 50% English overload in a current professional conversation in domains like marketing, management, IT, etc. which derives its correlation to the extra-linguistic factors interference. (Nicolescu, 2015)

Romanian language seems to have lost its firmness and became a potpourri of features accommodated from external models. The intrusive linguistic movement could not be slowed down and hygienized (Cameron: 1995) by the Act of Romanian Language proposed by the distinguished professor George Pruteanu and enforced in 2004. The regulation stipulated the legal requirement of Romanian language for any document or speech dedicated to the public use on the Romanian territory, their compliance to the Romanian academic grammar norms, a clear and adequate draft. Nevertheless, the substantial fees for disobedience did not discourage English accommodation and Romanian change into a new wooden language. The strongly tied-up solidar part of the society has not been definite enough to defend the vernacular integrity against the destructive alterations. (Hickey, 2013)

The new wooden linguistic syndrome confirms language creative capacity to accommodate as an undying witness of the mankind history. (Zafiu, 2007)

CONCLUSION

This paper acknowledges the inherent new developments of the wooden language syndrome and argues openly for its systematic and consistent support. The study of the contributing extra-linguistic factors drives our understanding of the phenomenon as the emergence of a new structural culture of cooperation instead of a negative globalization.

We suggest that the newspeak should not be rejected, but on the contrary, be assisted to accommodate and standardize appropriately to the vernacular and make it the needed linguistic carrier of knowledge and communication with its corresponding expected economic, social and cultural chain reaction.

We need to open ourselves to the truth of things and consider them with respect. The modern-day wooden language syndrome is negatively referred to as the outcome of a linguistic and cultural crisis but we consider it a new beginning of the humanity evolution. Nevertheless, it is the way of how we take advantage of its polluting characteristics and make them an individual, national and universal asset. Our study calls for the prevention of wooden language split off from the living reality and subscribes for appropriate education and training and language standardization policies instead of regulatory measures. (McClelland, Winter, 1969; Inkeles, Holsinger, 1974)

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