

Cultural Integration through Foreign Languages Study (18th - 20th Centuries)

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Abstract: A historical study on the penetration of French language in Romanian culture and the important role of education in spreading this language undoubtedly contributes to a better understanding of the beginnings of Romania's opening to the West and to its humanistic values. This intercultural research aims to identify and analyze the contextual factors that favored the connection of Romanian culture to the western cultures, the transfer of norms and cultural values, and the evolution of schooling in relation to social class structure.

Keywords: French language, education system, social positioning, "Phanariote epoch", Western cultural models.

1. Introduction

Elements of multicultural and intercultural education occurred long before the twentieth century, although these concepts entered the current vocabulary and specialists' concerns only in the last century. Thus, since the eighteenth century, the study of modern foreign languages has become a characteristic of European culture and, consequently, of the Romanian one as well, raising both the interest of the nobility elite circles, and of the new class of the bourgeoisie.

The aim of this historical study is to analyze the penetration of the French language in the Romanian culture and the important role of education in spreading this language from the 18th to early 20th century. Backgrounded against an intercultural approach, our insight will contribute to a better understanding of the Romanian

culture opening to the West and the borrowing of Western cultural models.

The formalized instruction in a foreign language in a given geographic area should be placed in the context of cultural history, of the transfer of norms and cultural values, of the national history and of the evolution of schooling in relation to social class structure and positioning.

The Romanian culture mirrored itself in the French culture in a stage of the development of Romanian national identity consciousness. At a conference held in 1935, in Paris, the Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga (1871-1940) developed the thesis that, between 1830-1859, the whole ideological evolution and political acts of the Romanian Principalities were the result of an ideology determined by the French Revolution, whose ideas had been spread through French press and literature. These acts had also been brought by French teachers who taught in Romanian public or private schools and by young Romanians studying in France (Popescu-Teiuşanu, in Iorga 1971: XXV).

It may be considered that, especially in the 19th century, the French language was an important factor upon the Romanian society progress towards national freedom, democracy and defining national being. The Latinizing of the Cyrillic alphabet, a turning of literature towards the romantic West were also generated by the natural need to find our identity among the peoples we were related with by origin. Within this context, the study of Western languages was the ideological expression of new relationships that would work on the pace of Romanian society development.

2. The French language, a cultural vehicle in the 18th and 19th centuries' European space

French language penetration in different European countries should be analyzed as a complex phenomenon, with political, economic and social implications for the structure and development of the respective nations.

The predominance of French in Europe, in the 18th and 19th centuries, is linked to the formation of "elite behaviour patterns" (Frijhoff 1990: 17), summarized by the term "civilité", internalized and assimilated through education. In the 18th century, the Age of Enlightenment, with the rise of French aesthetics in the European arts and letters, French gets a global status, becoming a vehicle for a culture with French roots. It should be noted, however, that the dominant use of French was confined

only to the ruling classes, showing adherence to a superior culture and manifesting an opening tendency towards preferential trade connections.

Thus, by 1567, in the Netherlands, Florentine traveller Lodovico Guicciardini used to value the advantage of knowing French in dealing with the Dutch (Frijhoff 1990: 17). Yet, he was referring to contacts with merchants, officials of cities, representing about 5% of the population. French spread in the Netherlands through two channels: on the one hand, through the elite, who learned French by other means than school (home education by preceptors, good manners manuals and educational trips to France – “le grand tour”), and, on the other hand, through the schools in which the bourgeois were educated, the so-called “French school” that developed the foreign languages study (alongside with French, English and German).

The spread of French in Italy was favored by the historical and military context created by the French Revolution and the French invasion between 1792 and 1799. The Italian Durante wrote a French grammar book, entitled *Grammatica italiana per imparare la lingua francese*, which was mentioned as early as 1625 (Pellandra 1990: 46).

At the end of the 19th century, the philanthropic society “L’Alliance Israélite Universelle”, founded in Paris in 1860, established, in the eastern and southern Mediterranean countries, including Romania, a network of schools in which Jewish children were provided access to an education based on French language and culture.

3. A turn to the West in the Romanian Principalities in the 18th century

The 18th century is dominated by the private education system, which confirms that, in the Romanian Principalities, education is reserved for the offspring of wealthy noble and bourgeois families.

With the appointment by the Ottoman Porte of Greek Princes from the Phanar district of Constantinople (the “Phanariotes”) to the two Romanian Principalities (starting in 1711 in Moldavia and in 1716, in Wallachia), an epoch of reform and progress is about to begin by pointing to the West. As Iorga (1971: 76) argues, “Phanariote Princes’ turn to the West is also motivated by their desire for emancipation” (our transl.). Engaged in commercial activities with the West, familiar with Western languages and cultures, these Greek rulers of Orthodox religion, members of prominent cosmopolitan aristocracy who had acquired much

political influence and considerable wealth, allowed the introduction of Greek, Latin, Arabic, French and Italian languages and cultures in the reorganized Princely Academies in the Principalities.

Starting with 1776, by a decree of Alexander Ypsilanti¹, studies at the Academy of Bucharest were organized into five cycles, each lasting 3 years. In the third cycle, students were taught poetry, rhetoric, Aristotle's ethics, Italian and French (Camariano-Cioran 1971: 41). By this decree, Ypsilanti introduced, alongside Greek and Latin, the compulsory study of French in Wallachia (Giurăscu 1971: 213).

Beginning with 1714, the Princely Academy of Iași, in Moldavia, was brought to standards comparable to those of the European Academies of the time by the Phanariote polyglot Prince Nicholas Mavrocordat. Courses of mathematics and philosophy in this Academy were taught in French. A 1792 report by the Metropolitan of Moldavia Iacob Stamati says that “geometry must necessarily be taught in French, by a land surveyor which the French call engineer, and students, after learning it, should take it on their own language” (our transl., Xenopol and Erbiceanu, in Camariano-Cioran 1971: 190).

Following the model of private schools, home education was customary with the upper class children. There are many references in the Romanian historians' works of existing French tutors (preceptors) in noble families in the Principalities. Thus, Jean Louis Carra was mentioned as a teacher of Prince Grigore Alexandru Ghica's children and as the Prince's private secretary in 1774 (Camariano-Cioran, in Bârsănescu 1962: 61). By 1774, two French revolutionaries, Jacques Ledoulse and Cado de Lille, who came to Moldavia from Russia, were hired to teach French in rich boyars' families (*idem*). Alexandru Callimachi (Prince of Moldavia between 1795 and 1799) employed two French tutors, Jean Baptiste Trecourt in 1796 and Martinot in 1798, to teach his sons mathematics. Martinot appears to be a teacher in the houses of Prince Alexander Ypsilanti and of boyar Manu, as well (Iorga 1971: 70). Many of these preceptors will be hired, in the 19th century, in private or even public schools.

Among the first mentions of the use of textbooks in teaching foreign languages in the Principalities, in the 18th century, there is one in the Princely Academy of Iași

¹ Alexander Ypsilanti is one of the most progressive Phanariote princes who ruled in Wallachia between 1774-1782 and 1796-1797, and in Moldavia, from 1786 to 1788.

with a French Grammar of M. Restaut, *Principes généraux raisonnés de la grammaire française*, published in Paris in 1757 (Bârsănescu 1962: 83).

4. The catalytic influence of the French language in Romanian education in the 19th century

The special role that French started to play, beginning with the 19th century, in enriching our language with neologisms, especially in science, is illustrated by the school “Regulation” that John Caradja (Phanariote Prince of Wallachia between 1812-1818) issued in December 1817. This required the princely school teachers to use the “ordinary” Romanian, borrowing new “technical” words and “high ideas” only from French, close to Latin, the natural “mother tongue” of the Romanian language (Pârnută 1971: 302).

The period between the end of the “Phanariote epoch” in the Romanian Principalities (1821) and the European Revolutions of 1848 is significant in the development of French and its impact on Romanian culture. It marks the end of the supremacy of Hellenism in the Romanian education and the decisive step towards the education in the Romanian language. At the same time, it is a period of undeniable domination of French both as a share of teaching and as a cultural and ideological influence over the Romanian intellectuals.

In 1821, the Princely Academy of Bucharest has been abolished and replaced by the Saint Sava School, the oldest educational institute in Wallachia, where teaching was done in Romanian, founded in 1818 by Gheorghe Lazăr (Enlightenment scholar, 1779-1823). Young Romanian intellectuals who had studied in Paris were teaching French courses. In 1830, under the Direction of Petrache Poenaru at St. Sava School, in the second cycle of studies, 139 students learned French. In the third cycle, that was the beginning stage of the higher education, the study of French literature was included (Grigoriu 1978: 162).

A former student of Gheorghe Lazăr at St. Sava School, Grigore Plesoianu, was the first Romanian author of original textbooks in French and bilingual dictionaries. He printed *Abecedar francezo-român pentru tinerii începători* (*A French-Romanian ABC Textbook for Young Beginners*) in Craiova in 1829, and *Frumoase dialoguri francezo-românești* and *Limba franțuzească și ortografia ei* (*French-Romanian Beautiful Dialogues and French Language and Its Orthography*) in 1830. It is estimated that fifteen French textbooks were printed in Wallachia by 1839 (Iorga 1971: 108). In 1840, Petrache Poenaru, Florian Aaron and George Hill, teachers at

St. Sava School, published *Vocabular francezo-românesc* (*French-Romanian Vocabulary*), considered to be the most comprehensive French-Romanian dictionary throughout the 19th century that was elaborated by Romanian authors.

Alongside the education in Romanian, there is a great demand from the wealthy classes of cities and even of small province towns for the establishment of private schools in French. Two famous private schools of the French teachers J. A. Vaillant and Monty opened in Bucharest in 1835 and, respectively, in 1848, most teachers and textbooks being brought from Paris.

The massive influx of French teachers in the first half of the 19th century is confirmed by the publication of J. A. Vaillant's grammar book for the French who wanted to learn Romanian, *Grammaire valaque à l'usage des Français*, in 1836. The same author published *Vocabulaire roumain-français et français-roumain* in 1840 (Popescu-Teiușanu 1956: 321).

In the second half of the 19th century, due to the Education Act of 1864, foreign languages started to be school disciplines with the same curriculum both in public and private schools. The foundation of the two Universities, that of Iași in 1860 and that of Bucharest in 1864, contributed to the training of Romanian teachers of foreign languages. Following Spiru Haret's Law of 1898 on secondary and higher education, the school programs of study and the allocation of studying hours per school subjects showed the important place of French among other disciplines, especially in the modern languages section.

5. Conclusion

Until the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth century, culture in the Romanian Principalities was placed, through orthodoxy, under the influence of Eastern Europe, and, being under the Ottoman pressure, it was somewhat detached from the dynamics of Western modernity. At the same time, Romanian spirituality began to rediscover and affirm its affinities with the Latin area, to which it rightfully belonged.

French language and culture had a special significance in the development of the Romanian civilization, culture and language, fostering the Romanian people's return to Latinity, as well as the integration in the European cultural models. As Athanase Joja explains (1967: 280), "regarding the Romanian culture, the French influence did not serve as a mere model, but it was a prevailing catalytic because it helped the

Romanians mould their own psycho-ethnic background, their intimate and original, defining aspirations for clarity, lucidity, balance, moderation and realism, that they hold *ab initio*, that is from their primary trait roots” (our transl.).

From a support for cultural transmission of ideas, ideologies and values in the 18th century, French became in the mid-19th century a school subject that played, through the content of textbooks and the teaching methods, an important role in the students’ instruction and intercultural education, even though the latter was not a clear objective, assumed as such in the education of the young generation.

While in the 18th and 19th centuries, the Romanian spirituality represented a receptacle for the influences of the foreign cultures, first Eastern, later Western, the early 20th century witnessed a paradigm shift justifying the Romanian national culture as a partner in sharing European values.

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