The Didactic Speech in a Semiotic Context

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Abstract: This article aims to trace the guiding lines of didactic speech in the context of semiotic mechanism activation and to outline a strategy to streamline the teaching process through paratext which follows the route of constitutive steps of the didactic speech.
Keywords: didactic speech, semiosis, paratext, production, reception.

What seems to define the mental configuration of today's student is a continuous agitation to obtain information necessary to his academic education as easily as possible, without a sustained and conscious effort. Frome here we conclude that the didactic speech needs to undergo a revival process, a re-calibration meant to determine its adjustment to the needs of both the didactic recipient and the emitter, given the transformations of the age we live in. The change, a constant presence in the contemporary society, affects the human existence in all its fields of expression, be they social, cultural, economic, political or emotional. Thus, the didactic speech contains irregularities depending on the configuration of changes that occur in the user's mind.

Considering all of the above, we intend to find a strategy for making the didactic speech more efficient, starting from its production stage to its reception. We shall journey through the field

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of the didactic speech, in search for its building steps, focusing on the paratext role in the development of teaching.

The signifying space which forms the connection between the production and the reception areas of the didactic speech is built on an extension of the meaning of the text which propagates in the paratextual area.

We will start from the idea that the speech represents a "general way of achieving semiosis" (Blommaert, 2005:2) (o.t.); thus, the entire scaffolding of signs that are part of the interpretative area of speech forms the semiotic atmosphere of text-speech, receiving new traits each time it comes into contact with signs from other *signifying universes* (*the signifying universes* represent the multitude of signs which put together form a sense). The direction of sense in speech is given by the communication process.

Communication in general represents a way of transmitting information, attitudes, feelings, opinions through certain communication sequences linking the transmitter to the receiver. The communication process occurs using every transmitting items and maintaining the fluency and coherence of the message.

"The teaching context to which we reffer is a carefully and especially built one, created to have evocative power, being tantamount to what we call a learning situation, a learning experience" (o.t.). (DUMITRU I, UNGUREANU, C, 2005:270)

In the didactic communication, the message plays an important role in the way the text is sequenced by logically ordering the ideas in terms of maintaining a permanent contact between the participants who take part to the dialogue. For this, we resort to informational items reformulation as well as to building an argumentative reasoning in order to facilitate an easy and comprehensive navigation through the didactic message.

Pedagogical communication is a complex multi-phase transfer, made through multiple channels of information between two entities (individuals or groups) that simultaneously or successively assume the roles of transmitters and receivers, signifying desirable contents in the context of the educational process. The

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teaching communication involves a feed-back type interaction, regarding both explicit information, as well as the adjacent (intentional or formed even during communication (CUCOŞ, Constantin, 1996: 66 (o.t.).

The notion of communication implies a certain reciprocity. So, the communicative pairing of the two actors involved in the didactic process: the teacher, respectively the student, lies at the basis of the didactic speech stages. Corroborating data about didactic speech evolution provided by teachers such: Comenius, J. H. Pestalozzi, K. D. Uşinski, W. Rein, A. W. Diesterweg or K. Mager who offer organisation models for the didactic activity, we will create a structural model of didactic speech composed of a logical sequence of constitutive steps.

The didactic speech starts from the establishment of an *conceptual embryo* which forms the first phase of the epistemological route established by the speech producer. This stage of speech conception will take into consideration both the epistemological items from the school textbook and those from the scientific memory of the teacher, emitter of the speech and not at least the class of receptors to whom it is addressed.

All the operations of didactic speech nature lead to the production of the structural frame of the speech in order to validate its effectiveness.

The accuracy with which the didactic speech is composed is well- known, irrespective of which form it takes (oral or written), so its structure follows a fixed presentation formula (definitions, examples, illustrations, exercises and evaluations) on which then may be grafted auxiliary speech constructions such as those of semiotic type (creativity, interpretation exercises etc.).

The connecting area of the didactic speech production zone with that of its reception is built onto the speech orbit of paratext assembly, meant to represent the bond between the two steps of constituting the didactic speech. The above-mentioned area is the

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intermediary stage which constitutes the didactic speech which we call the *interaction, communication* stage of the didactic speech.

The *communication* stage from the didactic speech subtends the transformation zone of didactic signs into meanings likely to be exposed under various forms, both by the speech producer and also by the receivers, following the continuous interaction between them. The semiosis uses the capacity of the didactic speech to persuade, to explain, to exemplify or illustrate the educational approach, so that the speech can exit its corporeality, receiving other interpretative meanings. In the *communicative* stage, that of *interpretation of* the didactic speech, the activation of semiosis in the paratext is produced as a link between production and reception of speech signs. In this speech area, the didactic approach diverts from its author to achieve the *semiotic freedom* (infinite interpretation).

Starting from the statement belonging to Deleuze in *Dialogues with Claire* Parnet according to which "the author's shortcomings are related to the fact that he is considered the starting point, the person the text originates from, the person who sets the topic of enunciation on which depend all occuring expressions and that who gains recognition and identification within an order of dominant meanings and preset capabilities" (DELEUZE, Gilles, and PARNET, Claire, 1997:111.), we emphasize that this paratextual space represents the place where the author is lost, disappears, merges with the meaning of the text and builds another identity, passing from its subjective side to the objective one.

This shift from the author's fading away in favour of the signification is achieved only in the case of the paratext belonging to the didactic speech. Having this idea as a starting point, we believe that the *paratextual rhetoric* (the form of sugestive emphatic expression increasing the power of plasticity of the paratextual language) has the capacity to determine the passing of the text's author from the school textbooks into the background. He will then watch from a distance the interpretative approach, from the

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subtext of the introductory space, leaving his mark on the paratext.

For example, in English language textbooks for secondary education there are texts produced by textbook authors, printing a certain style of written texts, depending on the objectives proposed by the author. In this type of text, the author is present only through his intervention in the text, through the imprint he leaves on it, becoming inherent to the paratext (manifesting himself inside the paratextual entity, representing a milestone in the construction of the analysis unit, of explanation, clarification and illustration of text). For example, the existence in the manual High Flyer for seventh grade, the average level, from Longman publisher, of a text with the title „Thrillers", announces the author's presence in the lesson's text from the learning unit number 4, by the editing style and organization of paragraphs (*Picture 1*). The author's existence is extended in the paratext through the requirements formulated in connection with the opinion of the didactic recipient related to text.

The last stage of constituting the didactic speech is the *reception* stage of signs by the beneficiaries of the didactic approach: thus students building a feedback, whether positive (understanding the concepts and their correct use in the context), or negative (familiarity with the existence of a certain concept having a defective understanding of its sense) ensures the perpetuation of didactic message. Rebuilding the didactic message by building collateral speeches, repeating certain notions, making the reception stage extend its duration.

The way in which the didactic message reception is achieved shows how the reception of the epistemological flow is achieved within the educational, social and emotional context of the receiver, linking previously acquired knowledge with the newly acquired one in order to perpetuate the semiosis. By its very iterant nature, of organizing argumentation, explanation and illus-

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tration strategies, the didactic speech is capable to generate signs which in their turn generate other signs capable to transform themselves into meanings subsequently perpetuated in the extra-speech.

We imagine the didactic speech as an entity of continuous semiosis which involves interpretative approaches on both sides of the main channel for transmitting the information.Thus, the participants in the didactic speech permanently transform the informational substance into one of a semiotic nature, which adds up personal interpretations to the didactic approach, forming a membrane of interpretative transparency. The didactic speech is subject to constant changes depending on the interaction nature between the receiver and the transmitter in relation to the development of didactic course of the lesson. The speech actants' interaction and this one in relation to the speech, takes place especially in the paratextual ensemble.

The paratext in the didactic speech appeals to a cultural semiotics related to the natural use of signs, focusing on the representation and communication function. The purpose of the didactic speech is the transfer of knowledge. Through its redundant character, the paratext receives a paraphrase dimension, because it repeats the ideas in the text, paraphrasing them, representing a real argumentative process. The paratextual discursive strategy is determined during the didactic speech depending on the desired pedagogic finality. This type of paratext receives an extra persuasion, through the achieved degree of relevance. The paratext, in this case, has the task of textual reformulation and argumentation.

Therefore, in order to acquire epistemological traits and to use them in a communicative context, the effective didactic strategy is related to connecting knowledge to the interest area of recipients, permanently calling upon the visual record to emphasize the importance of the introduced concepts. The decisive role in building an interactive didactic speech facilitating the effectiveness of teaching-learning process lies in the duty of the didactic predicator.

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In the first instance, the visible one, the teacher, emitter of the didactic speech, has to establish the construction axes for the didactic approach, the achieving targets for the teaching-learning process, such as the explanation, illustration, argumentation, translation, reformulation, making and remaking the sens of knowledge objects. Secondly, implicitely the teacher becomes the director, psychologist, coordinator, actor, mediator and producer of social and psychological signs, especially of signs leading to semiosis. The paratext as a construction element for the communicative area activates the intervention of the didactic emitter, correlating it with that of the recipient in a perpetual process of semiosis.

The emitter's relationship with the paratext is based on establishing an intervention system in order to activate the paratextual construction, a system composed of semiotic operations such as: rhetorical acts, proxemics, gestures, mimicry, psycho-pedagogy (pronunciation of words in a certain way to call upon the recipient's attention, using a vocal timbre to seduce the recipient, using the semiotic silence for composing moments of suspense, of waiting for what ist o follow, eg*: now let's see who can apply the model we introduced to you in the following exercise*, generous and large hand gestures signifying altruism, kindness, communication, sometimes directed to orient the recipient's sight to an object for analysing, combined with an open, positive, emotional mimicry).

The paratextual didactic speech benefits from the attribute of „mimicry, by the fact that the recipient is invited to participate in the composition/ restoration of text's world based on the details offered by the author." (BORNEDAL, Peter, 1997:150) (extrapolation of R. Ohmann's affirmation related to literary speech).

The didactic speech, through the paratext of the communicative area, achieves by its unpredictability, a creative communication, surpassed by the intrinsic meaning of the text, launching a hypothesis which is intended to outline paratext which appears subsequent to the text.

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Thus, the didactic receiver builds its paratext modeling role through its constant and repeated interference, influencing the structure of the didactic intercession so that the adequacy process to the objective of teaching act should be continuous.

Heteroclite elements of paratext have informing, designation, assertion, argumentation and persuasion purposes making the object of the didactic strategy. The didactic recipient has access to the text proposed for teaching, to the objects of knowledge targeted through the use of didactic paratext which orders the textual substance abiding by teaching rules (of concise, schematic, clear transmission of knowledge).

The communication situation specific to the didactic speech offers the recipient the opportunity to appeal to a model of understanding knowledge objects favourable to their assimilation. The co-lateral information of nucleus-text having the prerogatives of directing the reception within the student receiver universe is created firstly by the textbook author and secondly by the teacher according to the didactic representation requirements. The activation of didactic strategies made by the teacher that prepares its reception is observable using the paratext, by convening cognitive, menmonic and psychological means.

The model according to which the didactic process is performed using the paratext is reduced to the existence of some elements of a cognitive structure (knowledge objects) which are transformed into didactic symbols through a specific language used for a certain subject (the symbols from Mendeleev's periodic table in Chemistry, numbers and mathematical symbols, grammar concepts in teaching language) are organized into didactic units of meaning (explanation, illustration, argumentation, evaluation statements) which under the influence of the recipient's perception receives communication facets (Picture 2).

The paratext mantains a permanent relationship with the receiver student through the orally formulated instructions, or the written ones on the board (*say aloud the following words*).

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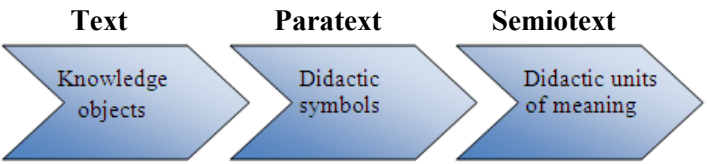
The teaching act is centered on the receiving student, therefore the paratext is put to its service so that it should acquire particular traits appropriate to a certain teaching subjet matter, achieving the optimisation of communication. The paratext combines the knowledge field of the didactic-epistemic authority with that of the recipient (inferior to the first, but which serves as a mirror to the emitter's speech).

Thus, we conclude that the efficient model to build a valid didactic speech is based on the relationship of paratext with the actants of the didactic speech, the teacher, respectively the student, in order to establish a didactic communication axis tracking the route of stages composing the didactic speech: the stage of speech production, the communication or interactive one and its receiving stage.

Picture 1.
Schema of knowledge objects transformation during teaching process



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