THEORETICAL ASPECTS OF THE COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MENTALITIES – THE PRAGMATIC AND DISCURSIVE APPROACH[1]

Abstract: *The present article aims to offer a theoretical, yet partial, insight into the linguistic analysis of mentalities (the pragmatic and discursive approach), when the given corpus is the literary text and, even more, when we compare literary works of different authors from different cultures and/or ages.*

Key words*: mentalities, pragmatics, discourse analysis, literary text, comparative analysis.*

Résumé*: L'objectif de cet article est de mettre en evidence d'une manière non exhaustive une série d'aspects théoriques concernant l'analyse linguistique des mentalités dans une approche pragmatique et discursive, le corpus étant le texte littéraire et, de plus, les textes littéraires de grands auteurs différents, appartenant à des cultures et/ou époques différentes.*

Mots-clés*: mentalités, pragmatique, analyse du discours, texte littéraire, analyse comparative.*

In the general contemporary context, dominated by cultural pluralism, the study of mentalities, together with that of the imaginary, with imagology and cultural studies, has started to gain ground. In the attempt to provide starting points for investigations aiming at finding relations (differences or similarities in thinking and expression) between different cultures and/or during different periods of time, one cannot neglect the importance of those works which jointly make use of the study of mentalities, literary texts and language. Within current tendencies, focusing on inter- and transdisciplinarity, comparatism and a globalising vision, this type of research could provide coherent and unitary explanations about the past and about man's evolution in time, or it could provide answers with a higher degree of applicability for people's daily life, now that they interact more and more frequently with individuals belonging to different cultures.

The representation of the world is essential both for the study of mentalities, and for literature. Literary texts reflect the *Weltanschauung* of an exceptional individual – the author, as well as elements which belong to collective mentalities, to the history of daily life. Literary works are a valuable source for the researcher who seeks to identify lifestyles, types of behaviour, ideologies, clichés of thought and expression, etc. A literary work is, first of all, reasoning transposed in language, the result of an author's *intentionality* and of a certain type of *enunciation* (with the intention to produce verisimilitude, the author resorts to a possible world, fictionally declares that…, and urges his readers to imagine that…, – cf. Genette 1982). Consequently, a literary text cannot be dissociated from the author's vision on the world, from the representation he has as regards the enunciated and the act of enunciation.

The literary text represents, at the same time, an interdiscourse, a space in which cultural memory manifests itself, a place of accumulations, debates and negociations to which, through *enunciative polyphony*, other discourse fragments bearing values, beliefs

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and mentalities take part. We understand culture in the broadest acception of the term in such a way as to include both the sum of the works of creation and the totality of the ways of thinking, expressing and (inter)acting.

A communication activity, therefore characterized by *addressability*, a literary text does not only describe a world. While activating attitudes towards it, the literary text aims at operating transformations on readers, at the level of their collective beliefs and mentalities.

Starting from these premises, the interdisciplinary analyses will have to follow three lines of research:

1. The authors' conception as regards the function and the means of literature.

The research, made from an enunciative-pragmatic perspective, aims at identifying and comparing the way in which the narrative strategies (the author's voice, the narrator's position, the communication with the reader – a partner in the process of constructing meaning) function in the literary texts of the authors. We can therefore start from the premise that the narrative strategies in a literary text reflect both the author's conception as regards the function of literature, and discourse literary rituals, at a certain moment, in a particular cultural space. On the other hand, the pragmatic analysis of a literary text cannot neglect the basic discourse relation, author-reader, textually manifested through the relation narrator-narratee. For our purposes, the most important aspect is that the pragmatic approach (at the enunciative level and at the macro-speech act level) of the narrative strategies in a literary text reveals the way in which the author, (re)constructing a world, including lifestyles and mentalities, understands to position himself towards it, and the readers he wants to influence.

Bearing in mind that, as most studies in the field of narratology demonstrate, in the narrative technique, heterogeneity prevails, one must emphasize certain features of each literary text in focus, as well as similitudes and differences at the level of the narrative strategies.

2. The expression of the authors' attitude towards the world constructed in the text

It is fairly obvious that a research which aims at identifying the author's attitude with regard to the world in general, to the world projected in the literary text or to the enunciated must take into account the characteristics of the literary discourse and the specific of each narrative. It should also attempt to rigorously separate the enunciative instances (author, narrator, characters, other voices) and to identify the linguistic means for distancing and taking enunciative responsibility. Given that, apart from the grammatical or syntactic specific characteristics, *dictum* and *modus* are two categories present in all languages, we should start from the premise that in each narrator's discourse (the abstract projection of the author) we shall encounter modalisers (epistemic, deontic, evaluative), markers of evidentiality, statements with evaluative predication, different speech acts which, on the one hand, separate the narrator's point of view from the point of view of other Enunciators and, on the other hand, reveal his attitude of acceptance or rejection with regard to the lifestyles, the beliefs and the mentalities projected in the text. As far as the enunciative-pragmatic approach is concerned, the concept of point of view, strongly connected with the persuasive dimension of communication, is synonymous with expressing an opinion, an attitude, or an evaluation, often placed in opposition with another real or possible opinion (attitude or evaluation) (cf. Nølke 2001; Zafiu 2003; Rabatel 2007). Consequently, we can classify and compare the most frequent linguistic means, present in the narrators' discourse, which function as triggers of certain points of view.

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3. Lifestyles/mentalities/language relation

According to most specialists in pragmatics and conversation analysis, the dialogues in literary texts represent an important source for the analysis of genuine interactions, especially for those studies which, because aim at reconstructing conversational mechanisms, communication rituals, idiolectal and sociolectal characteristics from past ages, are not given the alternative of an inductive approach of investigating verbal interactions in their natural environment. On the other hand, an analysis of literary dialogues, carefully made, so as to take into account the contract of fiction every literary discourse entails, is important for the study of mentalities, part in an assembly of complex relations and interconnections in which the systems of reasoning, feeling and perceiving, the social and cultural systems, language and the forms of communication actively participate.

Therefore, analyses of the verbal interactions between the characters in the literary texts of the authors are meant to identify and compare, in synchrony and diachrony, both historically, socially or culturally inducted variables and invariants or universalia.

The conversations among characters, the interlocutors' strategies and discourse choices (the topics they approach, the issues they debate or the information they exchange, the terms of address and greeting forms they use, the speech acts, the assumptions, the implicatures, the pre-constructions, etc), the dysfunctions at the level of the language and the effects or reactions they produce highlight specific features of the lifestyles and mentalities which define the universe projected in the text. The dialogues among characters are obviously a result of the author's intentionality, of the attitude he wants to transmit and impose through the communication process and they comply with the contract of fiction established by any literary discourse. But the conversations in the literary texts are, at the same time, a concentration of the idiolects and sociolects, of the discourse strategies and rituals which are dominant in the epoch and the space to which the text belongs, a collective construction carrying values, beliefs, attitudes and mentalities. In other words, the verbal interactions in a literary text are a form of "repeated discourse", a concept which, according to E. Coşeriu (2000: 258), indicates "everything that is repeated in a community's language under a more or less identical form, under the form of an already existing discourse or under the form of a more or less fixed combination, as a long or short fragment, of what «has already been said»".

In the transcultural analysis of mentalities and communication styles we can rely, as a reference point, on the basic idea of cultural relativism, according to which the different cultures influence the understanding of the world in a different manner and codify its representation in different linguistic forms.

The pragmatic approach to the narrative strategies in the literary texts could be completed by rhetorical-argumentative research, the interactional perspective focusing on the analysis of the conversations among characters can be completed by in-depth lexical-semantic studies, and it would also be possible to carry out precise quantitative analyses.

Taking into account what has been stated above, it is obvious that social history, mentalities, literature and language are not characterised by oppositions and need not follow parallel directions. On the contrary, they may complete one another and may, at the same time, gain depth by comparing representations which vary in time or are culturally determined. All these fully justify interdisciplinary and comparative approaches. Besides, most current research admits that it is only by establishing relations among the various fields of knowledge that we can build systems which could answer, as comprehensively and

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coherently as possible, to the questions about the world, the particular and the universal, about man's evolution in time and his relations with the Other.

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