

Alexandru Philippide – Sextil Pușcariu: polemic

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Abstract

Subjecting to analysis the public and cultural life of the time, Philippide identifies at every turn traces of Romanian specialism. Determined to dismantle the imposture and superficiality of the people of culture, Philippide found it appropriate to fight against them through a scientific polemic. This article follows the animosity created between the professor from Iași and the linguist from Cluj Sextil Pușcariu, animosity which gave rise to a very stylistically delightful polemical dialogue.

1. Introduction

Romanian Linguistics from the first half of the twentieth century was dominated by the flourishing activity of two linguists, scientists and professors: Alexandru Philippide at the University of Iasi and Sextil Pușcariu at the University of Cluj.

The fact that cultural and scientific development are not always based on the concentric efforts of scholars of the time, leads to the controversy, which remains the center of any scientific endeavor, being the one that manages to shed light on the erroneous theories exploited by various scientists, because in the end, after the removal of possible errors, to endure only what is truly valuable.

2. Controversial hypostases

Alexandru Philippide conceives and conducts his scientific activity in a rigorous manner. The linguist believes that science “must be subject to the truth, must be moral because it is the optimal means by which the human being becomes, freeing itself from the burden of matter and approaching reason and spirit” (Gafton, 2009, p. 51). And so, a new stage in Romanian culture starts, a stage in which the linguist from Iasi, aware of his intellectual strength, tries to impose in the public and cultural life of the country the model of an accomplished scholar.

In a tireless search for the scientific truth and endowed with a polemical and original personality, Philippide despised any form of deception and illiteracy. Characterized by an impeccable correctness, erudition, passion for science and truth, his entire work is riddled with elements of controversy, all accompanied by an acid tone and a critical attitude. Impetuosity, idealism, reckless and crude reactions, the declared effort to change “fundamentally the Romanian society” (Oprișan, 1986, p. 5), qualifies Philippide as a “personality with a temperamental-psychological structure of romantic nature” (Florescu, 2009, p. 44), facts traced to either a native fact, or of a critical negativism caused by isolation among his contemporaries.

“The Romanian scientist mirrors the Romanian society. Such master such man. How is the country and the scientist” (Philippide, 1907, p. 68), Philippide stated bitterly, observing the pathetic invention that characterized the Romanian society. Thus, his critique is mainly focused on the condition of the intellectual in the universal and in Romanian culture, responsible for the situation of the nation to which

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he belongs. Philippide will reproach him, starting from known examples, the narrow specialism and the narrowness of the horizon.

The prototype of this pedantic intellectual, whose portrait Philippide will sketch in his polemical articles and whose scientific activity is seen as a means and not as a goal, is the so-called “Romanian specialist”, a flourishing category after 1866. Interested in imposing to a healthy scientific climate, favorable to the country’s development, Philippide’s crude, impetuous and examining critical attitude outlines the figure of the “Romanian specialist”, with whom he trained in a confrontation, to which he dedicated his entire polemical approach. In the opinion of the professor from Iasi, the work of this specialist can only be “a hasty job, like that of a man in the cold, a job driven by the desire to get fast and at any cost” (Philippide, 1891, p. 1022) ture, which, in the opinion of all people, is worse than stupidity” (Philippide, 1891, p. 1022). Its core activity is excluded from the scientific field, becoming a “pseudoscience” similar to that exemplified by Philippide in the article *Pseudoștiință contemporană*, with reference to the work signed by Elise Richter, *Der innere Zusammenhang in der Entwicklung der romanischen Sprachen* (Philippide, 1911, p. 57–78).

The critical eye of the scientist from Iasi also stops on the young Sextil Pușcariu, with whom, Philippide will have a fiery polemical dialogue in the pages of the magazines of the time. The dialogue between the two will include elements of irony, humor and satire from the scientist from Iasi.

The Philippide-Pușcariu controversy brings together two great leaders of language school, who, despite the divergences and oppositions created, remain, in posterity, akin to the many common points: both were exemplary theorists of language, both founded profile institutions, and linked their names, in one way or another, to the *Thesaurus Dictionary of the Romanian Language*, they repudiated the lyrical effusions of their youth and sporadically embraced philology, criticism and literary history (Pavel, 2013, p. 41).

A first hypostasis of the Philippide-Pușcariu controversy is considered to be the taking over of a series of etymologies without mentioning the source. The attack is launched by Philippide in the article *Specialistul român*, in “Viața românească”. Pușcariu responded promptly to the accusation in an article in the pages of the magazine “Convorbiri literare”. The way in which Pușcariu decides to take a stand against Philippide is by returning the accusation of plagiarism, with reference to the work of Philippide, *Principii de istoria limbii*. Thus, the statement of Sextil Pușcariu in the article *Adevărurile D-lui Philippide*: “It is known that this work is an unsuccessful work of H. Paul, in which there are so many wrong views, etymologies and linguistic explanations so childish, such a complete lack of the most elementary notions of Romance philology, so that I do not think there is a man in the world who, respecting time, has read it in its entirety” (Pușcariu, 1907, p. 205), proves to be not at all objective. There were other criticisms of this work by the professor from Iasi. Such a malicious critique of Philippide’s work is also offered by O. Densusianu, who, after the critical references to Philippide’s book in *Histoire de la langue roumaine*, first volume and in *Pagini din cultura noastră universitară* (see Ivănescu, 1984, p. XIV), publishes the article *Cum se falsifică la noi titlurile științifice*, in which he speaks of it as “a simple location and nothing more” (Densusianu, 1901, p. 423) as H. Paul. Moreover, Densusianu finds the work confusing and devoid of serious information, but worthy of its author, a skilful tailor in transformations and patches, who in his operation as a compiler, always slipped on the principles of Hermann Paul and where he was no longer useful to him, he turned to Miklosich. The arguments brought by him are opposed by G. Ivănescu, who considers the entire plea of the linguist from Bucharest a slander, because Philippide borrowed from H. Paul only the general title and the titles of several chapters of the book, as well as the way to conceive and name some changes of language, and the vehement criticism that Densusianu addressed to Philippide, in his attempt to discredit the linguist from Iasi has no solid basis, the engine of his indignation being, it seems, of a different nature (Ivănescu, 1984, p. XIV).

The reactions against Pușcariu’s article did not delay to appear. Thus, in the second issue of the magazine „Viața românească”, the article „Adevărurile d-lui Pușcariu” is published, in which Pușcariu’s arguments are denounced, as well as the contradictions in his position. With an ironic, mocking tone, the author, Grammaticus (identified in the person of G. Pascu) concludes his article, referring to the final expression

in Pușcariu's article "Mr. Philippide's article will follow – but not for me", with the appreciation: "Mr. Pușcariu, this *gesture* does not fit, but it even has the sin of being an arch-banal" (*Grammaticus*, 1907, p. 368–372).

The animosity between Philippide and Pușcariu has another foundation, constituted by the episode referring to the creation of the *Romanian Language Dictionary* of the Academy. In 1897, Philippide took over the task of writing, from the beginning, the academic dictionary; thus begins an important chapter in the scientific activity of the linguist from Iasi. Initially made together with a series of collaborators (I. Botez, C. Botez, and G. Ibrăileanu), later continued alone, the work of writing the dictionary required more time than Philippide had foreseen, fact which generated the subsequent conflict with the Academy. Despite his "huge work" (*Grammaticus*, 1906, p. 426), in the course of six years Philippide published about a quarter of his impressive lexicographical work (the manuscript written by Philippide, containing the letters A, B, C, and D to the preposition *de*, remained unpublished; only two models appeared, one of 12 pages, containing the beginning of the letters A and C, and the second of 32 pages, containing the words from letter A to *acord*). In 1905, based on the created conflict, Philippide decided to continue the work on their own, outside the official institution. The publishing in 1907 of the first facsimile of the new academic dictionary taken over by Sextil Pușcariu, determined Philippide to give up his project, a work that promised to be a remarkable lexicographical work.

A polemical spirit par excellence, Philippide published in December 1908, under the pseudonym Philologus, an article entitled *Dicționarul Academiei sau basmul cucușului roș*. He condemns the fact that although the new dictionary has been much shortened and crushed, the duration of its elaboration is just as long, if not even longer: "it is better to leave by will the order of the descendants to buy the work, when it will appear in its entirety" (*Philologus*, 1908, p. 260). Another dissatisfaction of Philippide refers to the taking of the material from the analogous works made by Hasdeu¹ or Tiktin: "if this dictionary of the Academy wears the garmond coat with lines and spaces, it will be just the dictionary of poor Hasdeu the poor, and rightly so, for there is blood of his blood and bone of his bone." (*Philologus*, 1908, p. 259–260), "if somehow from D onwards, when you have no more to *borrow* from Hasdeu or Tiktin, you get confused, God forbid" (*Philologus*, 1908, p. 260). Addressing the Romanian Academy, which consists of Romanian specialists, Philippide says impetuously: "You did not like Mr. Philippide's dictionary, because it was too rich and could be finished in 15 years, and you like this one because it's poor in content, swollen with words and will not be finished even in hundred years; for thus it is your nature to like the empty, but swollen form" (*Philologus*, 1908, p. 260). The assertive utterances are doubled by rhetorical interrogations and exclamations, in order to impose on the reader his own point of view: "Now – do you see these spoiled children? They'll end up slapping you on the nose and then punching you, and you'll still kneel before them, because they are your beloved children, because they look like you and you look like them. May they live! May you have them and may they have you too!" (*Philologus*, 1908, p. 260). At the end of the article, Philippide laments the current state of the library in Iasi, which would fully deserve state funding, similar to that given to the dictionary, "a work that will appear cows come home" (*Philologus*, 1908, p. 261).

The lack of precision in structuring the attitudes they adopt and the contradictions in the ways of combating the accusations received, are other grievances that Philippide reproaches to Pușcariu, dissatisfactions that are the subject of the article *Cum se apără specialistul român*. Starting from the particular example of Pușcariu manifested in the article from "Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie", XXXI, Philippide identifies three ways, characteristic of the Romanian specialist, to "make you fight an accusation, which is rightly brought to you, and get rid of danger mumbling things and dizzying the one who listens to you or the one who reads you" (Philippide, 1908, 16). In Philippide's opinion, these are: „1. You pretend to be fighting, but you are talking about something else, you say green horses on the walls, as they say”; „2.

¹The same imputation is brought by Botez (1906, p. 586–589), considering Pușcariu's dictionary "a «revised», but uncorrected edition of Mr. Hasdeu's *Etymological*".

As proof that you are innocent, you show that the one who accuses you is your enemy”; „3. The defendant defends himself by pointing out that the accuser spoke ill of the judges on one occasion” (Philippide, 1908, p. 16), all of which were used by Pușcariu in his attempt to combat the following three accusations made by Philippide: „1. He changes the meaning of a word for the purpose of an etymology: it translates the word *mezin* in *mijlociu* so that it can be derived from *medianus* 2. He changes the form of a word for the purpose of an etymology: changes the word *pănaț* from the psaltirea șcheiană., ps. 136, 6, in *păraț* in order to derive it from the *palatium*. 3. He borrows the etymologies of others and give them as his own, especially from me borrowed 22” (Philippide, 1908, p. 17).

Regarding the first way of fighting, Philippide ironically confesses that: “he hits with the wood in the fence, as they say, Mr. Pușcariu, but I can’t deny him some finesse in using the first false mode of defense”, but where “he is completely uncarved” are the other two ways (Philippide, 1908, p. 20). Thus, in order to prove the hostile intention behind Philippide’s accusations, Pușcariu uses the episode regarding the Academy’s dictionary insinuating that the linguist from Iasi launched the accusations against him “out of spite, because the Romanian Academy took his dictionary work and entrusted it to me” (Philippide, 1908, p. 21). Philippide uses personal attack to prevent the spread of such erroneous information: “And then things are not so, but completely different. Mr. Pușcariu writes today the Academy’s dictionary, because none other wished to write it, and that other one is me” (Philippide, 1908, p. 21), and regarding the envy that Pușcariu claims he has it towards him: “I am not angry with Mr. Pușcariu, no, but he is angry with me” (Philippide, 1908, p. 22), recalling the letter that the young Pușcariu sent it to Philippide in 1897, in which he asked him to take him as a collaborator in the elaboration of the dictionary, a letter to which Philippide did not reply.

A true Romanian specialist, Pușcariu also uses the last mode of defense, stating the following: “«Even foreign scholars are gifted by Philippide with particular attributes. Meyer-Lübke and Sandfeld-Jensen have no idea of phonetics, Schuchardt is an unscrupulous censor. So is Herzog. Gaston Paris and Tobler are given unscrupulous types of censors»” (Philippide, 1908, p. 23). Assumed and always based on solid scientific arguments, Philippide does not disown his statements, although interpreted by the Pușcariu: “No fear can stop me from saying a true thing, even if that true thing would be annoying to Meyer-Lübke, Schuchardt, Tobler”, “I am not afraid of anyone’s lightning, for I am not in vain a Thracian” (Philippide, 1908, p. 23).

3. Conclusions

In time, Pușcariu overcame the possible resentments created by the polemical dialogue with Philippide, and, proving the objectivity of a true scientist, above their hostility, at the publication of the first volume of *Originea românilor*, he said appreciatively: “a fundamental work, which denotes a workforce that must inspire anyone the deepest respect” (Pușcariu, 1927, p. 1333), while promising a comprehensive review after the publication of the second volume, a review that has never been published.

The attacks launched by Philippide on Pușcariu and on the “improvised specialists”, in general, are born out of respect, both for people and for science, because at the base of any of his polemical approaches there is no cause for gain, no opponent to be removed, but their purpose is to watch over the good evolution of science.

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