

# The communist propaganda: manipulation or reeducation?

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Livia Feidaros's book, *Manipulation through words: features of the politicized discourse during the communist regime*, is dedicated to a wide range of public, from the mere aficionados of the Eastern communism to the scientists that are interested in the analysis of the communist phenomenon as a research topic. The approach of the book is mainly circumscribed to philology; nevertheless, we could not – and should not – deny its consistent contribution to the fields of psychology of education, psycholinguistics, sociology, cognitive psychology, communication, etc. This is an easily read and understood book thanks to the clarity of expression, the natural logics of the judgement, the relevant examples excerpted from the corpus. The linguistic approach of the totalitarian phenomena is not to be deemed as unilateral and limited, since any individual or mass cognitive approach is based on articulate language and linguistic discourse. Therefore, this book is also useful to specialists in related fields of research.

The book is structured in three main sections that follow a logical development: from the theoretical approach of the concepts to the analysis of the linguistic phenomena and the delimitation of the forms of politicized discourse, in an attempt to draw an interdisciplinary panorama of the matter.

In a preliminary chapter (p. 7-26), Feidaros states the premises of the research, by questioning whether the *langue de bois* was created as a strategy of manipulation of the masses or it is the result of a natural evolution, of the adaptation of the individual to the peculiarities of the communist regime. The following chapters aim to find arguments in favor of either hypothesis or of a combination of both.

The first section of the book, entitled *Persuasion and manipulation versus constraint, education and reeducation in the Romanian communist regime* (p. 27-55), offers a conceptual analysis of the notions that define the political-ideological strategies implemented by the communist power at a social level. The conceptual definitions and delimitations, as well as the investigation of the functional and operational relationships that exist between them,

have the role of adapting the notional sphere to the particularities of the social group it targets. The semantic aspect, as revealed by the various definitions of the concepts, establishes their correct use, while the intersections at the level of the conceptual extension help establish the relative position of such notions as: *manipulation, strategy, influence, persuasion, mobilization, education, reeducation, censorship and self-censorship* within their common semantic field. Feidaros relates and contrasts the psychological mechanisms and the distinct types of communist propaganda, according to the target group and the extension of the phenomena. In this context, she investigates the social, political and linguistic aspects related to the cult of personality, a frequent trend among the communist leaders, albeit in total contradiction with Marxist ideology.

In the second section of the book, entitled *Linguistic features of the communist politicized discourse* (p. 56-169), she equates ideology to a form of social evolutionism, as it is the result of the processes of appropriation and adaptation of ideatic representations to the changes in the social environment, and she shows that the main argument that supports this hypothesis is to be found in the language itself. To this purpose, Feidaros proposes a scheme for the analysis of the stylistic characteristics of the communist discourse, as formulated by the French Sovietologist Françoise Thom (clarity, adequacy, invention, euphemism), and applies it on a corpus of fragments of politicized discourse from the Romanian communist epoch. In the chapter *Linguistic features* (p. 83-131) she analyzes the corpus and emphasizes the linguistic particularities at each level: phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, semantic, and notices that, surprisingly, the discourse lacks dynamism, as it focuses more on ideology than on action.

The chapter entitled *De-semanticization and re-semanticization in the totalitarian discourse* (p. 132-169) reveals the relationship between linguistic and mental stereotypes, which cause the meaning of the linguistic elements to be assigned conventionally within the social group. The linguistic stereotypes are a form of identification of the speaker as a member of a certain community, since in the process of decoding it is necessary for the speaker to be in the possession of the code. Therefore, the genesis of the super-code of the *langue de bois* is based – operationally and functionally – in the repeated discourse, which manifests a transitive intention that generates psychological automatism. Both the linguistic features and the functional aspects of the discourse create a set of rules, the norm of the *langue de bois*, with prescriptive and consensual components that are managed by the mechanisms of censorship.

The third part of the book, *Forms and species of the politicized discourse* (p. 170-260), is dedicated to a functional analysis of the totalitarian discourse from the perspective of the functions of language, as described by Roman Jakobson, then to the identification and classification of the forms and species of the communist politicized discourse. Feidaros notices that the main functions that rule the propaganda discourse, referential and conative, are related, respectively, to coherence and persuasion/manipulation. In the chapter entitled *Criteria and nomenclature in the identification and classification of the types of politicized discourse* (p. 202-260), she enounces a set of criteria and then classifies the forms of politicized discourse accordingly; she identifies several types, such as: public speech, propaganda, slogans, scientific and educational discourse, literature of ideological affiliation, etc. She concludes that the stereotypes of the *langue de bois* can be identified in a variety of forms in all the species of the politicized discourse, including literature; moreover, it is possible that some authors are unaware of the way they are influenced by such stereotypes.

The final *Conclusions* (p. 261-270) focus on the relationship between the two poles of communication, the communist power, as the sender, and the masses, as the receiver, and shows that the sender imposes a super-code that will be assumed by the receiver when

becoming a sender. Feidaros states that the politicized discourse of the communist Golden Age is associated with education, formation in the spirit of ideology, with censorship, control and constraint, but not necessarily with manipulation, since manipulation is possible only in the presence of an alternative, while communist propaganda was an instrument of coercion and constraint. For the masses, the use of linguistic stereotypes became a necessity, as the clichés of the *langue de bois* are both a safe way to communicate and a password that proves their allegiance to the system.

Feidaros includes, at the end of the book, some representative excerpts of the corpus she analyzes in the book (p. 289-316), as well as a relevant bibliography (p. 271-288) for those who are interested in the further research of the communist discourse, as the author herself considers that the mechanisms of the communist totalitarian regime cannot be understood outside their linguistic manifestation.

The investigation of the communist discourse, opened by outstanding researchers such as Rodica Zafiu, Tatiana Slama-Cazacu or Lavinia Betea, receives a major contribution from Livia Feidaros's book, which represents an interdisciplinary approach to a linguistic phenomenon. Unlike other researchers, Feidaros is interested not only in the discourse of the representatives of the communist power, but also in the feedback of the masses and their affiliation through discourse. She also identifies a double mechanism of codification in communication, so she proposes the concept of the super-code in order to explain the reaction of the masses to the keywords that trigger a specific response. The double perspective, psychological and philological, is the key to the correct interpretation of the half century of Romanian communism, and Livia Feidaros's book constitutes a valuable contribution to this field of research.

Livia Feidaros, 2019, *Manipularea prin cuvânt: trăsăturile discursului politizat în perioada regimului comunist*, Suceava, Editura Universității „Ștefan cel Mare”, 316 p.