

SOME "OBSERVATIONS OR NOTES" ON A DISLOCATED CHRONOTOPE: BASIC UPBRINGING³⁴

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Abstract

This article aims at exploring contemporary linguistic polite behaviour, starting from what the phrase "basic upbringing" means to current locutors, in relation to some of the precepts promoted by the Christian religion. In my markedly theoretical endeavour, I turn to methodology pertaining to psycholinguistics, pragmatics, conversation theory and theology.

Keywords: *basic upbringing, education, linguistic politeness, divine Commandment, neighbourly love*

Rezumat

În articol, îmi propun să explorez comportamentul politicos glotic contemporan, pornind de la ceea ce înseamnă sintagma „educație de bază” pentru locutorii actuali, în raport cu unele dintre preceptele promovate de religia creștină. În acest demers cu un contur preponderent teoretic, mă sprijin pe metodologii legate de psiholingvistică, pragmatică, teoria conversației și teologie.

Cuvinte-cheie: *educație, educație de bază, politețe lingvistică, poruncă divină, dragoste față de aproapele*

Motto

I refer to what we (still) call a "gentleman" or a "lady". I was lucky to make personal acquaintance with some of the participants in the gatherings at Antim Monastery: Father Benedict Ghiuș, Father Marcel Avramescu, Father Andrei Scrima, Alexandru (Codin) Mironescu and his son, Șerban. I think of them whenever I invoke the portrait of the "human type" that is nowadays outdated: the typology of the "gentleman". "Gentlemen" were also Constantin Noica, Nicolae Steinhardt, Alexandru Paleologu, Doctor Eusebiu Munteanu, my uncle Vladimir Nicolescu, most of my high-school teachers and many other representatives of their generation. In the current context, the word "gentleman" sounds a little passé: it has a fairly musty, pompous and inadequate air. What does "to be a gentleman" actually (still) mean? In order to answer this question, the easiest thing for me is to remember the face and character of the aforementioned people. They were very different from one another, they were strong, well-defined personalities, difficult to subsume under a single "stylistic category". However, there was something that united them: they were all gentlemen! They dressed ap-

³⁴ *Basic upbringing* is henceforth used for the Romanian phrase *cei șapte ani de acasă*, whose rough literal translation is 'the seven years of home' and which refers to the education a child receives in its early life usually within the family and before undergoing formal education.

propriately, were refined without being flashy, spoke elegantly and expressively, paid attention to their interlocutors, knew how to listen, were well bred and well educated, had "l'usage du monde" but also comprehended the higher orders, knew at least two foreign languages, were avid readers, knew how to behave in the society, at dinners and church, as well as among friends. Their presence propagated an air of amenity, their politeness was natural and graceful; they were funny and genuine, displaying an innate distinction. Their solemnity was never homiletic or stiff, their humour was never trivial, not even when it could have legitimately been like that. In a nutshell, they were an excellent, agreeable, wholesome company. There was something to learn from every word they spoke, in each gesture and attitude. You felt privileged to be around them, to be "situated" in the vicinity of these accomplished figures of culture and civilisation, models that prompted one to emulate them. You had the chance to sit face to face with a gallery of true gentlemen. "Gentlemen" in the sense of Shakespeare's text, in which "King John" is presented as the "Lord of his Presence", master of himself, complete regardless of titles and circumstances.

I do not claim that this species is entirely extinct. At any rate, the world is filled with varied figures that do not hesitate to state in all seriousness: "I am a gentleman!" or "I am a lady!". However, based on my memories, I find it increasingly difficult to identify cases of genuine "lordship" and "ladyship". I look at politicians: most of them are unrefined, poor speakers, displaying vulgar sufficiency and lacking in any authority outside the one provided by their position. They are greedy, slick, coarse and inefficient. I look at certain teachers and professors: barely trained, uneducated, definite victims of the commonplace, of a "wooden" pedagogical thinking, of a significant vocational deficit. I look at certain representatives of the clergy: they are captive in standardised religiousness and sleep-inducing homiletic commodities, dormant in their ideas and camouflaging their triteness in an arrogant discourse about humility, angry at the Occident, culture, intellectuals, Catholics, Buddhists and everything unorthodox on Earth, wanting in spiritual subtleness and trapped in hierarchic docility, under the pretence of "being obedient" [...].

Perhaps I am depressive. Perhaps I am undergoing a crisis of loving my "neighbour". The truth is that there is no one to whom I can really talk. Not because I aim at a "boreal" level of conversation. But because I cannot manage to find "people with whom I can grope in the same dark" (Andrei Scrima) and who would join me, in my groping, as a bunch of gentlemen. I rather come across individuals locked in their own certainties, aloof autistics, aggressive "doctrinaires", impenitent quarrellers, predictable mumblers, troublemakers and insolents. I was born in the wrong generation... (A. Pleșu).

1. Brief Plea for the Keeping of Old Practices

I chose as the title for my records a part of another title, a famous one, *Observații sau băgări de seamă asupra regulilor și orândueleur gramaticii rumânești* [Observations or notes on the rules and practices of Romanian grammar] (1787), a book by Ienăchiță Văcărescu – the first printed Romanian grammar, written in Romanian. My option is accounted for the fact that politeness³⁵, the object of the present study, is more and more evocative of a

³⁵ According to C. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2012, p. 73, orig. French, my translation), politeness is a "means to reconcile the mutual desire to preserve faces, given the fact that most of the speech acts produced during an interaction are potentially threatening to one or another of the faces in question". Pragmatically, po-

“golden age” of Romanian culture and civilisation, as is the famous fragment in the hypertext. In that bygone age, *being polite* was fashionable, it was a norm that resulted from the moral duty of being a good (kind, agreeable, well-bred, duteous, civilised, courteous, decent, gallant, gentile, well-mannered, respectful and reverential) citizen (Greek *polites*) of the Citadel (Greek *polis*).

The prevalence of the moral-affective character of my endeavour is deliberate. It derives from the observational analysis of the increasingly marked replacement process in the Romanian society of polite behaviour with impoliteness. The substitution occurs regardless of the specificity of the parameters of the communication context.

In agreement with “old practices”, *being polite* means first and foremost proving to have basic upbringing, but not in the sense of being able to certify – by means of documents – one’s home discipline. Basic upbringing is the (symbolic) primary cycle of an/any initiation; it is the “mimetic” period, in which the uninitiated imitates the “shadows” projected on the (still non-prismatic) mental and spiritual retina. It is the time when a decisive role in the development of the future adult is played by one’s guide on the initiation journey. This knowledgeable figure has the mission to share the (encyclopaedic) knowledge about the world (*disco*, *-ēre*) with the novice and see that the latter assumes it (*doceo*, *-ēre*) in a manner that is qualitatively feasible.

The experiencer of basic upbringing will “dance” to the rhythm instilled by his/her teacher, who is responsible for the virtuosity, gracefulness and future accomplishments of the disciple or, on the contrary, for the negative effects of failure in education.

Just as primary school enables one to decode the letter-based alphabet, the years of basic upbringing teach the alphabet of good manners. It marks the boundary between *it is proper/it is improper*, *it is allowed/it is not allowed* and *it is good/it is bad* and even establishes clear outlines of aesthetic categories.

The years of basic upbringing are spent *together with...* and *along with* (only in this way can one account for the locative adverbial *at home* in the original Romanian phrase). It is a time of *convivium*, of sitting together at the table (see the scene of the supper in *Moromeții*, a novel by M. Preda), of sacredly observing little (scheduled) rituals: it is the time of evening/morning collective prayers, conversation moments, distribution of household and charitable activities, walks, announced visits, preservation of customs, cultivation of the gusto for reading, acceptance of social and ethnic status together with respectful tolerance of the Other, learning to ensure bodily hygiene and health, and constant preoccupation for spiritual nutrition.

liteness “refers to the system of communication strategies that govern individuals’ interactional behaviour, the system of communication options that speakers can employ in order to maintain harmonious relationships in the society” (Șerbănescu, 2007, p. 517, orig. Romanian, my translation).

As a recruit in the discovery of the surrounding environment, a child will take the first steps in the world relying on the behavioural patterns borrowed from its early-age contacts. And since at one point this little creature will be torn away from home and sent to develop as a social being, the care of the child's initial mentor for the way it expresses itself is of the essence. It is likely that, on this level, one can best notice the degree of availability of the educator, who is responsible for taking the child out of an arhythmic stage and guiding it towards his/her own rhythm. I daresay that once the child, on the one hand, learns to utter the basic appellatives (*mother* and *father*) and some of the utilitarian words and, on the other hand, becomes able to saturate them referentially, it is necessary for the fundamental lexical dose to start including simple yet elementary words, such as *Bună ziua* ('good afternoon'), *Sărut mâna* ('how do you do'), *Te/Vă rog frumos* ('please'), (*Da/Nu*) ('yes'/'no'), *Mulțumesc* ('thank you'), *Pot să vă/te ajut?* ('could I help you?'), *Cu plăcere* ('you are welcome')³⁶ and others, from the inventory of words that make up the uninterrupted "Eucharist" of the body and blood of common sense, a possession that readily ensures our place in the Citadel. In its absence, the city walls are threatened: they shake and eventually crumble.

Nowadays, we witness assumed implosions of this kind more and more frequently. They are brought about by the ignorance or indifference of certain people – increasingly more numerous former residents of basic upbringing – as regards the preservation of laws enforced by the previous practice of good manners.

Disregarding greetings for reasons that refer to a new "conscience" of the uselessness/optionality of these relational spoken prefaces, the beneficiaries' voluntary omission to give thanks for any activity undergone for their good, undoubtedly generated by a mixture of unknowledgeability and stupidity, and failing to accompany a wishful intention with the explicit phrase used to invite an interlocutor to fulfil the wish ("please") – as if, at any rate, one was obliged by the nature of the situation to conform (!) to what pleases us – are current, overexploited practices (employed by overwhelmingly more locutors in the last decades), to the detriment of the clichéd, outdated tactics. However, without these tactics our inner peace (the tranquillity of our conscience) and outer balance are under the long-term threat of the insurrection of chaos.

³⁶ "In discourse, politeness is reflected in the lexical and grammatical selections made by speakers (personal or politeness pronouns, verb forms, appellations, interjections, syntactic structures); the use of specific fixed or ritual phrases (greetings, wishes); the means of negotiating access to speech; the means of negotiating information and control over thematic progress; the system of rights and obligations in the performance of speech acts; the interlocutors' communicative attitudes; and the paraverbal and nonverbal markers associated with the discourse" (Șerbănescu, 2007, p. 520, orig. Romanian, my translation).

The care that those who are in the right manifest or should manifest towards the one who undergoes the seven years of initiation place the latter under the sign of a solidarity from which one is estranged once the taste for the performance of simple things is lost. Not greeting the people you know (especially at the end of an existential journey undertaken together or, even worse, after having been socially, financially or professionally conditioned by them for a certain period of time), not replying with a verbal recompense to an action performed for your good, not being respectful, free of charge, to everyone with whom you interact, are all blatant breaches of the convention that accounts for our being born *to be together with...* To repudiate the code of good social practices means to banish oneself from solidarity and condemn oneself to solitude³⁷. The solidarity experienced during the years of basic upbringing must be continued throughout one's life, first as its patient and then as the agent of its dissemination. It is a kind of solidarity that we must fight to keep valid, because it is the only one that guarantees the perpetuation of the social being. Solitariness sentences one to non-speech, in the sense of the flagellation of redeeming words. The solitary being yells, but its shout echoes only in its inner void, inside the cement case where no one can hear it. The portals for salvation can only be directed towards the world and the others. The reply to "Please, save me" will not be – unless one is a beast – anything but to offer one's hand as an anchor and one's articulate speech as available: "My pleasure". It is said that the harm brought about to someone is forgiven, whereas the good that could have been done but was not realised is never pardoned. We have been able to see in the dehumanisation that surrounds us stupefying episodes of turning the gaze from those in need, of passing by people who are left behind with their hands reaching out, of outspoken pleasure at deliberately and gratuitously hurting others. At the same time, we have also witnessed continuous and painful misfortunes of people who practise evil as their profession and cannot even notice a microscopic improvement in their life-sentence to failure.

2. *Et in Arcadia Ego: The Ten Commandments* – a Primordial Rhetoric Model of Polite Behaviour

By means of an approach of three of the Ten Commandments (not from a rigorously theological viewpoint, but rather from the perspective of language structure), I aim at proving that the latter do not speak truths that are referentially restrictive, univocal (applicable exclusively within congregations and religious communities of various confessions). On the contrary, the referentiality is universal, as these truths can underlie any kind of polite behaviour, which militates for the institution and preservation of a state of

³⁷ "To refuse politeness means to plea for solitude" (Pleșu, 2024, orig. Romanian, my translation).

harmony with oneself and with the others. To this end, I chose one of the “greatest” Commandments and two from the Decalogue (the eighth and tenth) regarding our Neighbours.

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself” is the second of the two “greatest” Commandments (greater than the Decalogue), an injunctive utterance, which continues/completes the Commandment regarding the love of God. The original locutor is the divine Lawmaker. The object to be loved, situated in the immediate succession of the Supreme Instance, is the *Neighbour*, the one that God created to exist in His vicinity and in yours implicitly, undifferentiated from Him and you, since it is fit for you to love him “as yourself”.

Neighbour functions as a proper name (a noun that in Romanian is obtained by means of conversion from adverb, *aproape* – *aproapele*), a generic anthroponym identifiable on the level of the humanity, not designating locative proximity (anymore) but a fellow human being conceived from God. The referent that the sign points out goes beyond vicinal space: the *Neighbour* also circumscribes spatially distant acquaintances – he is the one that *resembles* you, is the *same as you*. The second part of the utterance (“as yourself”) invites us to understand loving oneself in the sense of accepting oneself as an individual (there are people that do not love themselves): when you love yourself, you admit that you love the good (diurnal, heavenly) part of yourself (the godliness in you). You become valuable in your eyes by acknowledging this divine facet. Loving oneself means admitting one’s heavenly side, which is of divine extraction. By loving your Neighbour, you recognise (in him as well) the divine component (as God means love, all you can do is love). In other words, you see God in your neighbours (in the ones that are close to you). By loving yourself, this love will also reach out to your Neighbour, it will continue in him.

Thus, the basic action that must concatenate human beings is love (the Romanian verb *să iubești*, in the conjunctive mood with an imperative, desiderative value), namely the opposite of hate. The act of love is predictable, as Christian religion is grounded in love. To love your neighbours as you love yourself means that you acknowledge God’s presence in you and in them. Not loving your spiritual self or your neighbour implicitly equals with forsaking God.

Observing and accepting one’s Neighbour as a multiplicity of oneself preserves the state of love, born, as previously mentioned, out of equality, undifferentiation (a part of God) and resemblance to the point of identity and identification with God. The attempt to find distinctive elements is the first step towards disorder, the annulment of identification and institution of dismemberment, estrangement and removal from God and one’s fellows

implicitly. Considering *the Other*³⁸ as different tallies with the “Cain-isation” (obstruction) of judgment (*ratio, animus*) through impulse and primitivism (*anima*).

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour” – a commandment that warns against false witnesses. I used the verb *to warn* as, according to the Christian ethics, violating the commandment leads to the punishment of the guilty and the serving of one’s sentence (in agreement with the Old Testament, the wrath of God is stirred). The first part of the utterance is rendered as a directive³⁹, prohibitive speech act⁴⁰, forbidding false witnesses, which is more serious (a cumulate crime with drastic consequences in secular law) when committed against one’s Neighbour.

In conversation theory, there is a maxim (the *maxim of quality*)⁴¹, which I believe complements this commandment: “the information provided by a locutor must be true (a speaker should not say things that s/he considers untrue or that s/he cannot prove)” (Guțu Romalo, 2008, p. 845, orig. Romanian, my translation).

“You shall not covet anything that is your neighbour’s”: everything you build as wealth of any kind should be the exclusive result of your efforts. Craving for/coveting what does not belong to oneself implies direct uninvolvement in the making of one’s fate and it translates as an aspiration for something that is not rightfully yours. The greediness to own another’s possession is woken and maintained by envy (*in-videre*, ‘to look against’), by looking against one’s Neighbour. *To covet* means to indulge in something

³⁸ *The Other* must not be construed as alterity, but as one’s multiple. The elements that bring the two entities together matter more than those that distinguish them.

³⁹ In the process of communication, the following classes of speech acts were identified (see Austin, 2005, and Searle, 1972): *representative* (the locutor assumes the propositional content of the speech act considered true; through an assertive speech act, the locutor describes, on the level of discourse, an aspect of reality that s/he believes is true); *directive* (by means of orders, instructions, suggestions and requests, the locutor wants to determine the interlocutor to alter an aspect of the surrounding reality in the sense intended by the former); *questions* (the locutor asks the interlocutor to complete the “areas of [real or simulated cognitive] incompleteness”); *promising* (*commissive*) (the locutor commits to the allocutor to act in agreement with the propositional content of the speech act performed: a promise, offer, invitation, oath, engagement and so on); *expressive* (the locutor uses appreciations, congratulations, apologies, condolences and the like to express an affective attitude towards the allocutor); *declarative* (for the success of declarative speech acts – name-giving, baptism, war statements and marriages – the locutor must be sure that a series of extralinguistic (institutional) conditions are met) (see Guțu Romalo, 2008, p. 25, p. 840; Moeschler & Auchlin, 2005, p. 193).

⁴⁰ See Endnote 1.

⁴¹ See endnote 2.

that is not yours and illegitimate craving bears hate: by hating one's Neighbour, one is trapped in the material, ephemeral dimension of oneself. By coveting what belongs to another, one acknowledges and loves one's earthly dimension more than the immaterial side.

3. Conclusions

Basic upbringing is the chronotope (the spatial-temporal metaphor fulfilling a developmental function for the individual) in which the behavioural profile of the future adult takes shape. The model adopted by each individual is directly proportional to the personal beliefs and attitudes that are established (and subsequently completed with others acquired in social interaction) in the preliminary existential stage (i.e. basic upbringing), based on the cultural specificity of the community in which the individual evolves.

As regards polite behaviour in Romanian culture, which is deeply marked by the traditional, "hierarchically authoritarian" model (see Șerbănescu, 2007, p. 521, orig. Romanian, my translation), the system of politeness functions in agreement with the following variables: the marking of power relations by preserving social distance, the care for protecting "social face" by negotiating the relationship with the interlocutor, and the use of strategies that are specific to positive/negative politeness, depending on the parameters of the communication situation (social proximity/distance).

Endnotes

¹ The theory of speech acts has developed starting from the following hypothesis: the function of language is not to describe the world, but rather to fulfil various actions. J. L. Austin (2005) and subsequently J. R. Searle (1972) developed this theory in a decisive direction for what was to become linguistic pragmatics. "In the process of communication, people act upon each other by means of language, causing changes in the environment. The minimal unit of communication is the *speech act*. A speech act is the act performed as a result of the employment of language in concrete communication situations: the sequence produced by a speaker with a specific communicative intention, in a certain context". "The speech act, as a unit of communication, may consist of one or several sentences, elliptic sentences or segments of sentences". "In a given situation of communication, a speaker produces a linguistic sequence (the *locutionary component* of a speech act) with a specific intention (the *illocutionary component* of a speech act), aiming to obtain certain effects on the allocutor (the *perlocutionary component* of a speech act). [...] The locutionary component is the result of the issue of linguistic sequences that are in agreement with the phonetic, grammatical and semantic rules of a given language [...]. The speaker produces an utterance with a certain intention, in view of acting upon his/her allocutor, providing the utterance a conventional force called illocutionary force. [...] If the locutor manages to produce the speech act so that the allocutor can correctly infer the speaker's intention, the speech act is successful, it is performed successfully; if the locutor does not manage to convey a message so that the allocutor could infer the former's intention, then the speech act is unsuccessful, failed. Illocution has various effects on the allocutor: it leaves the allocutor unaffected, fills

a cognitive void, determines the allocutor to make certain kinetic activities and induces fear among others. The effects of illocution make up the perlocutionary component of a speech act. From this viewpoint, a speech act may be effective (when it affects the allocutor in the way intended by the locutor) or ineffective (when the perlocutionary aim is not achieved)" (Guțu Romalo, 2008, pp. 838-839, orig. Romanian, my translation).

- ² As regards communication, H. P. Grice (1975) put forward the principle of cooperation, tacitly accepted by interlocutors in conversational exchanges. According to H. P. Grice, to cooperate in a conversation means to participate in a verbal interaction in agreement with the objectives and direction towards which the conversation is headed. H. P. Grice explains the idea of cooperation by resorting to four main categories based on the way in which the verbal exchange is structured: the quantity of information provided, its truthfulness, its relevance and the manner in which it is phrased. These categories have been called conversational maxims: (1) the *Maxim of Quantity* ("Your contribution should contain as much information as required" vs "Your contribution should not contain more information than required"), (2) the *Maxims of Quality*: "Your contribution should be true" ("Do not state what you consider to be false"; "Do not issue statements that you cannot prove"), (3) the *Maxim of Relevance* ("Speak to the point" - "Be relevant"), (4) the *Maxim of Manner* ("Be clear": "Avoid vague, confusing phrasing", "Avoid ambiguity", "Be brief (avoid useless verbosity)", "Be organised").

Thus, providing too much or too little information, stating something that is known or considered to be false or which cannot be proven as true, saying something that is not related to the object of a conversation, speaking unclearly, ambiguously, verbosely or disorderly, are all uncooperative behaviours" (Moeschler & Reboul, 1999, pp. 188-189, orig. Romanian, my translation).

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