

THE PREFACIAL DISCOURSE OF THE BILINGUAL FRENCH-ROMANIAN/ ROMANIAN-FRENCH 19TH CENTURY DICTIONARIES

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ABSTRACT. *The Prefacial Discourse of the Bilingual French-Romanian/Romanian-French 19th Century Dictionaries.* We systematically return to our 19th century bilingual lexicography, and this time we turn towards textual sequences preceding the respective lexicographic body; these are interesting for those seeking to understand how the practice of dictionary compilation has evolved; these textual sequences, be they the preface or the inscription, show the way the configuration discourse of a lexicographical work comes, little by little, to confirm the presence of the model, to claim the method and to subordinate the undertaking of the interest of one or several categories of addressees³.

Key words: *vocabulary, bilingual dictionary, preface, inscription, bilingual lexicography.*

REZUMAT. *Discursul prefațial al dicționarelor bilingve francezo-române/româno-franceze din secolul al XIX-lea.* Revenim sistematic la lexicografia noastră bilingvă din secolul al XIX-lea și ne îndreptăm de data aceasta spre secvențe textuale ce precedă corpul lexicografic respectiv ; acestea prezintă interes pentru cel ce dorește să înțeleagă cum au evoluat practicile de alcătuire a dicționarelor; aceste secvențe textuale, fie că e vorba de prefață, fie că e vorba de dedicații, arată cum discursul de configurare a unei opere lexicografice ajunge, încetul cu încetul, să confirme prezența modelului, să reclame metoda și să-și subordoneze întreprinderea interesului unui sau unor categorii de destinatari.

Cuvinte cheie: *vocabular, dicționar bilingv, prefață, dedicație, lexicografie bilingvă.*

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0. The multiple possibilities of using a dictionary determine us to turn to the bilingual Romanian-French lexicography of the 19th century and to look there for the motivation of the act of conceiving a bilingual dictionary. Thus we will have in view a prefacial discourse. We bear in mind with regard to the works demanding such a type of discourse that these presuppose an explicitation of the *social context* in which they appear and thus a *socio-historical⁴reading*.

The prefacial discourse connects the author to the society for the benefit of which he/she is investing, uncloses his/her particular relationships with the personalities representing the cultural patronage of the epoch, the freedom the author could enjoy, as well as the servitude he/she had to accept.

From a literary⁵ or lexicographic point of view, when the preface is signed by the author, the prefacial discourse has the role to argument the legitimacy and to evoke the difficulties the author has surmounted in order to fulfil his/her mission.

Together with the details laid out on the title page, the preface legitimates, as well as protects the auctorial instance, since it carves out that part of the general knowledge the dictionary author promises to render comprehensible to his/her reader.

1. We will stop at **the title page** and at **the prefaces** of these types of works which we will outline by diverse terms and we consider them important for the reflections they are announcing already regarding the addressee of a dictionary, at the finality of the compiling of such a work. We will detach these textual sequences, this time, exclusively from « Vocabular purtăreț rumânesc-franțuzesc și franțozesc rumânesc » [Pocket Romanian-French and French-Romanian Vocabulary] and from *Vocabulaire français-valaque / Vocabularu franțezo românesc* [French-Vallachian Vocabulary / French-Romanian Vocabulary]. From these, we will move towards the lexical classes which allow us to fathom the times and the world in which this very dictionary has been created.

2. It is known that « Vocabular purtăreț rumânesc-franțuzesc și franțozesc rumânesc » is published by Jean Alexandre Vaillant in 1839. In 1840, the first edition is followed by a version with its title integrally in French and the order of the languages reversed, that is first of all the French-Romanian equivalents and then the ones with Romanian as the basic language. Giving that work the title *Vocabular*, Vaillant opens with us [Romanians] the

⁴Amrani, M. (2007), « Le discours préfaciel de Kateb Yacine », *Études littéraires*, 38 (2-3), 201–213. <https://doi.org/10.7202/016354ar>

⁵ Bokiba, A. (1991). « Le discours préfaciel : instance de légitimation littéraire ». *Études littéraires*, 24 (2), 77–97. <https://doi.org/10.7202/500969ar>

road of reflections regarding the function and the addressee of such a work. In his modesty, the very first who has published a bilingual lexicographic work in our country, does not claim having made a dictionary, but a **vocabulary**, a kind of Romanian-French and French-Romanian glossary. To that, he adds, to use Vaillant's terms, *un petit vocabulaire d'homonymes*, that also, a first-timer for the Romanian lexicography.

In what concerns the second contribution we are taking into consideration, that is due to P. Poenar, F. Aron and G. Hill and contains two tomes, the first one published in 1840, the second in 1841. Thus we consider contributions which are thought to be *among the most unexpected ones* in the history of the domain. Both Vaillant as well as Poenar Aron and Hill detain the merit of having opened new paths in the history of Romanian lexicography.

It is unexpected in Vaillant's case, the fact that, for such a first work, he is capable of delimitating his beneficiary clearly. The novelty, in the case of the latter ones, lies in the fact that they already substantiate an accurate conception, perhaps, an initiation in the science of compiling dictionaries. Towards the middle of the 19th century they offer a model which takes into consideration prestigious editions from the French lexicography. The compilation of dictionaries, through their contribution becomes a subject for debates and of assumption of responsibilities, according to the targeted audience.

3. Within a different conceptual framework, naturally, the lexicographers of the 20th century will revisit these debates. The reflections regarding the object we generically term under the umbrella term *dictionary* have not privileged the very *dictionary definition* of that term.

The explanation is to be found under the different positions of those who have referred to the dictionary, in the nature of the interrogations regarding its functions and its relationship to the world, which, through its inventory, covers or proposes to cover.

In redoubtable lexicographical works, as J. Spa showed in 1981, the word *dictionary* would refer to a collection of words or phrases from a language or to a category of words, allowing them to be looked up easily.

In the perception of the addresses of such a work, according to Spa's considerations, these were nothing but *books for the use of the world ... keys to a code difficult to decipher*⁶.

For Barthes the dictionaries are real *dream machines*⁷ while for Dubois, their role is reduced to that of a *didactic work*.

⁶ B. Al et J. Spa, *Le dictionnaire. Actes du colloque Franco -Néerlandais 28-29 avril 1981*, Presse Universitaire de Lille, 1981, p. 9.

⁷ Roland Barthes, apud Thierry Fontenelle, « Dictionnaires : nouvelles approches, nouveaux modèles », in *Revue française de linguistique appliquée*, 2005, X-2 (5-10), p. 10.

To the majority of the lexicographers, a dictionary is *a description of the vocabulary produced and perceived by all speakers of a language (...)*⁸ aimed at increasing the lexical knowledge of its user⁹.

As a pedagogical book¹⁰, without being a textbook, the dictionary reflects, at the same time, both a conception of language and the world, and a preoccupation to inform because its purposefulness depends on the targeted audience¹¹.

As a cultural object meant for a knowledgeable audience and, at the same time, as an indispensable instrument for the endeavours of learning, it reflects *our conception of discourse*¹².

Be it unilingual or bilingual, any lexicographic work is *a presentation of the lexicon detached into units, as well as a semantic exploitation of these units*. In a general acceptance which allows us to approach Vaillant, *a dictionary is a specific, textual, metalinguistic, and cultural object*¹³, a semiotically structured text for a practical purpose. It is at the same time *a witness of the past of the language and its variations* to the extent to which it attempts to incorporate *the totality of the units employed by the selected speakers*¹⁴. We may, consequently, consider the dictionary a reflex, a mirror of the society for the benefit of which its architecture has been conceived.

4. Bilingual dictionaries which appeared [in Romania] in the 19th century were conceived with a pragmatic aim which may be found expressed in different ways within inscriptions or prefaces.

During the period we refer to, the majority of the lexicographers account for their act of working out a Romanian-French and/or a French-Romanian dictionary by the fact that their undertaking would situate itself at the beginning of our bilingual lexicography.

In 1839 J. A. Vaillant noted that his vocabulary *possessed no other value than that of...being the unique of its kind* (o. h.) in Romanian; Poenar, Aaron, and Hill, in 1840, considered they had managed to fill in *the first lack* (o. h.) *that was felt for such a book*, without forgetting first of all, that, **before them, several speakers of both languages and especially some Romanian teachers**

⁸ The brackets and the words **in bold** represent excerpts or our intervention.

⁹ Q.I.M. Mok, « Dictionnaire et dérivation », in B.Al et J.Spa, *Op.cit.*, p.69.

¹⁰ Jean Dubois et Claude Dubois, *Introduction à la lexicographie*, Librairie Larousse, 1971 p.7 et Rey, *Le lexique. Images et modèles. Du dictionnaire à la lexicologie*, Librairie Armand Colin, 1977, p.11.

¹¹ Danielle Corbin, « Le monde étrange des dictionnaires (4) : La créativité lexicale, le lexicographe et le linguiste », in B.Al et J.Spa, *Op.cit.*, p. 57.

¹² Thierry Fontenelle, « Dictionnaires : nouvelles approches, nouveaux modèles », in *Revue française de linguistique appliquée*, 2005, X-2 (5-10), p. 6.

¹³ Alain Rey, *Le lexique. Images et modèles. Du dictionnaire à la lexicologie*, Librairie Armand Colin, 1977, p.6 et 11.

¹⁴ Alain Rey, « La lexicographie française : rétrospective et perspective », in B.Al et J.Spa, *Op.Cit.*, p. 16.

had undertaken such a weary work, then, that *different circumstances had cut their endeavours short and forced them to surcease as early as their first weaving of the work plans*.

The necessity in the name of which they are compiling their dictionaries is presented by the first authors of such works both as a justification for their limitations, for the imperfections of their endeavours, as well as a *duty* towards an addressee already well delineated.

A dubitative rhetoric structure like *if you consider it still useful, allow me to fulfil an obligation* bears witness to Vaillant's preoccupation to achieve a work of immediate utility.

Poenar, Aaron, and Hill value their dictionary according to the stage of our language in 1840, positing that *the state in which Romanian is while associated to French has not given us the means to present the ideas comprised by the different meanings of each utterance of French in all their interpretation*. For the first half of the 19th century that is the most important reference to the relationship between French and Romanian, the most important one, and at the same time it is the expression of the awareness of the stage of the language expressed up to that point by any speaker of Romanian.

Vaillant identifies a single type of audience for his vocabulary, an addressee he designates by *the Romanian youth*. His successors, one year later, have in view three distinct categories of audience: first of all *the youth*, similarly to Vaillant, then *the public*, and finally: *the foreigners*.

To the first class of addressees, namely the youth, Poenar, Aaron, and Hill's vocabulary *brings about an easiness to its painstaking diligence to learn French*.

The second class of addressees is designated either neologistically for the respective epoch, by *the public*, or archaically for the present state of our lexis, by *townsfolk*; to it it is recognised, beyond its linguistic competence in the source language, its capacity *to criticize*, to show discontent with regard to the availability of *traducing* by resorting to the *vocabulary*; the *public*, or *townsfolk*, to whom he addresses, is, in Poenar, Aaron, and Hill's perception a user of dictionaries capable to react to the deficiencies of lexicographic works; having registered the critical reaction of such utiliziers by self-inclusion into that class of addressees, Vaillant's successors confess: *we know, and even from our experience, what we do and what we say when we flump the dictionary of whatever language after not having found a phrase, or a saying we were looking for, or when we do not find them translated or illumined as we might need*.

The user Poenar, Aaron, and Hill foresee, has the perception of what the bilingual dictionaries offer similarly to the contemporary user who ascertains that *a certain number of possible translations are offered without stipulating the circumstances for their usage*¹⁵.

¹⁵ Al, Bernard, «Principes d'organisation d'un dictionnaire bilingue», in B.Al et J.Spa, *Op. cit.*, p. 159.

A third category of beneficiaries, that is *the foreigners*, have to find within their vocabulary, as Poenar, Aaron, and Hill consider, *the facilitation to be introduced to some extent to Romanian*. For the first time in the history of our lexicography, here, there is expressed the awareness of the fact that, through those for the benefit of whom are created, the bilingual dictionaries are paths for linguistic contact, but first and foremost: openings towards Romanian.

The author of dictionaries, assuming a thankless position, somewhere among writers, knowing that *those who compile dictionaries are subject to the most severe critique of all the levels of readers*, attempt to respond to the *immediate needs* of each addressee or type of addressee; arguments which will come into prominence due to the establishment of traductology as a science justify already the compiling of dictionaries.

In the acceptance of the same authors of 1840, *traduction* as an undertaking of transposing the contents from one language into another, in the present case from French into Romanian, is the most important *necessity* for which they compile their vocabularies or dictionaries.

The history of Romanian lexicography has noticed the extent to which such enterprises respond to the *needs* of the users, through the act of registering the extension of the lexicographic works and the number of entries these contain.

At the same time they plead for the difference between *vocabulary* and *dictionary*, as it is established in the preface of 1840: *Our wish was on the one hand to grant this work as much extension as possible,..., but being afraid of too large expenses, we stuck to a frame which, **although does not comprise the entire matter of a dictionary, has passed over the frontiers of a vocabulary**; and by that we would like to set in front of the public this book with a modest title, leaving it to the work to recommend itself rather than to its name.*

The difference between a vocabulary¹⁶ and a dictionary is of a quantitative and not of a functional nature. *The vocabulary*, in Vaillant's acceptance, similarly to that of Poenar, Aaron, and Hill does not differ from a dictionary because it would include *vocables*²⁰; thus the distinction of the 19th century does not refer to the discourse component, but rather to the fact that the lexical inventory is reduced in comparison to what should enter a dictionary.

A *vocabulary* is a thing, to paraphrase the above definition, the *being* of which would obtain its *name* according to the number of entries and which does not *comprise the entire matter of a dictionary*. It is a distinction which proves an ambitious project and speaks about the fact that the authors of

¹⁶ See the definition in J.Lyons, *Introducere în lingvistica teoretică*, [Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics], Editura Științifică, București, 1995.

lexicographical works are aware of the limitations of the knowledge for the Romanian 19th century. The future lexicography, within an accurate conceptual framework will sustain the distinction and will impose the typologies.

5. Instead of a conclusion, we would like to underline an aspect regarding the importance of these discourses for the future of bilingual lexicography with respect to the achievement registered as early as the Romanian 19th century. The prefacial texts and the inscriptions of the two lexicographical works we have considered herald a most difficult pathway; we are, first, the instance in which the enterprise of dictionary compilation is regarded as an exciting duty for the satisfaction of an immediate necessity; then we are the instance in which that same enterprise demands interrogations regarding the place of the lexicographer among all those arrogating to themselves the author's quality. The two instances offer sufficient bench-marks regarding a professional self-consciousness, that of a lexicographer which finds its first expression in such investments. It is the necessary landmark for positioning the future lexicographers, foreshadowed by Vaillant, detailed by Poenar, Aaron and Hill, accomplished, naturally, through enterprises of the latter stage undertakings of our bilingual lexicography.

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