

BOOK REVIEW

LAURA CARMEN CUȚITARU, *Elements of Psychology and Pathology of Language*, Iași, Editura Universitas XXI, 187 p.

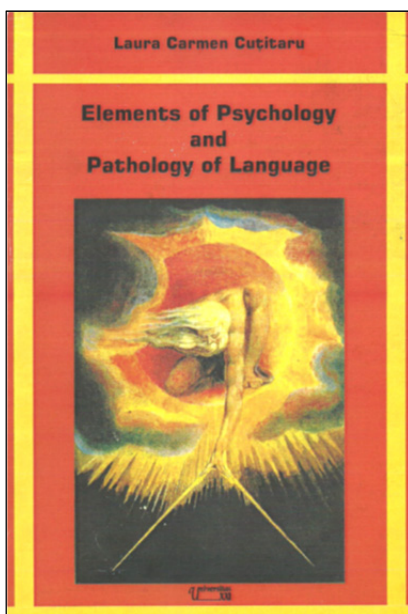
In 2007 Laura Carmen Cuțitaru published a very interesting study on psycholinguistics which harmoniously combines international and Romanian bibliography with the author's own considerations and questions. The study is written in a very clear style which shows that Cuțitaru has been pondering on these issues for years. The book can be a challenging and pleasant reading both for specialists as well as the general public interested in such issues as "What is language?" "Why do we speak?" "How do you speak?" "When did language appear?" "What is the connection between language and thinking?" Cuțitaru is very careful to give the reader balanced answers to all the questions that she raises. The beautiful cover of the book which reproduces William Blake's *Ancient of Days (God as an Architect)* discreetly warns us that the author supports or at least does not openly contradict the answers given by religion to several of the questions that she raises.

The study is divided into five chapters followed by an Addenda and a biblio-

graphical list. In Chapter I, the author analyzes the essence of the linguistic phenomenon starting from the "languages" used by animals (bees, primates, whales, birds) and ending up with "mentalese" (the silent language that exists in our mind, according to the famous linguist Steven Pinker). Even for a non-specialist, the discussion of the Saussurian paradox, for instance, is very challenging. Although languages change in time, we can still understand them.

Chapter II deals with the first language acquisition. Cuțitaru talks extensively about the pre-linguistic stage and the linguistic stage in the child's development. Although not a linguistic, Julia Kristeva's theory about the semiotic and the symbolic stages as developed in her seminal work *Revolution in Poetic Language* could have been helpful because they correspond exactly to what the author calls "pre-linguistic" and "linguistic."

Chapter III, "Mastering Another Language," is very topical for all the teachers of foreign languages. The author



comments on the work of well-known specialists, such as Stephen Krashen, Timothy Jay, Ellen Broselow, Tatiana Slama-Cazacu. She discusses the distinction (very well explained) between the acquisition and the learning of a foreign language and justifies her indistinct use of both. Of great interest nowadays, when people live much more mobile lives than in the past, often moving from one country to another, is the discussion of bilingualism and its stages. Cuțitaru considers that bilingualism can manifest differently: from an equal, alternative use of the two languages to the speaker's ability to think in both languages. Following Wallace Lambert, the author considers that bilingualism is the presence of two languages in one mind. A lot depends on how these languages are organized in the mind. Consequently, we may have additive bilingualism (which is perceived as an enrichment of one's personality) and subtractive bilingualism (where the two languages may be at war). Of high relevance for the actual practice of teaching English is the differentiation Cuțitaru makes between second language acquisition and foreign language acquisition. A subchapter on "Code switching and Contamination" and one on "Bilingualism and Emotions" end up a very consistent segment of the book.

Chapter IV is one of the very few approaches to a problem of crucial importance, not only to the specialists but to, practically, everybody. It is entitled "Language and the Brain" and it gives answers and raises questions about the connection between language and thought. How do we think? Does language influence our way of thinking? Is there an organ of language in our brain? The author discusses at length the importance of

neurolinguistics for the construction of a language model that can support a theory of language. Different language disorders as well as different psycholinguistic models of speech production are analyzed in order to provide answers to extremely complex problems which actually define us as humans. Laura Carmen Cuțitaru is extremely cautious when making statements. Her conclusion is that the right hemisphere of our brain "appears to connote" (102), whereas the left one "appears to denote" (102). With the precision and the delicacy of a neurosurgeon, the author unfolds a map of our brain and points to the different areas that have to do with speech production and reception. The author discusses at length how the brain influences/affects our use of the language. I think it would have been interesting to add the theories of Vygotsky and especially Sapir and Whorf who consider that the use of a certain language can influence the way our brain functions, the language acting as a sort of epistemic grid through which we see and classify reality.

A subchapter of Chapter IV is dedicated to the connection between gender, language, and brain. Laura Carmen Cuțitaru is not a feminist, she is a balanced researcher who is not afraid to say when science has reached its limits. On the other hand, it is interesting that sometimes her conclusions hover on feminism.

True to her knowledge and not to preconceptions, Cuțitaru debunks the myth that women talk more than men. Quoting very serious researchers she points out that it is men who talk more than women (107). When men break into a conversation, they are thought to have something important to say. When women break into a conversation, they

are considered to be nuisances. Women pay attention to what men say, most of what women say passes unnoticed by men. Women ask more questions than men. In this way they try to draw attention to the problems that concern them. Men interrupt women and this is accepted in the dynamics of conversations, but not the other way round (108). The investigation of language in courts led to the conclusion that men are more believable than women. These are not impressionistic considerations, they are the result of serious research undertaken by such specialists as Elaine Chaika, Pamela Fishman, Donald H. Zimmerman, or William M. O'Barr. Although the author prudently refuses to go further with her considerations, feminism is inevitable at this point. Another topic of great importance and consequence in this study is the comparison between the male and the female brain. Although the female brain is smaller, according to the latest research quoted by Cuțitaru "women have more grey matter than men" (110) and the bundle of nervous tissue that connects the two hemispheres of the brain is thicker and contains over 30 % more connections in women's brain. On the other hand, the area in the hypothalamus which is responsible for mating is much bigger in men than in women (110). Language processing is different with men and women. Men are better at solving spatial tasks, women are better at language and communicative tasks. The conclusion of Laura Carmen Cuțitaru is extremely balanced and shows that she has all the qualities of a researcher who refuses prejudice. The makeup of our brain does not tell us everything. Of course, it influences our performance

but the latter is also the result of the social environment we live in.

The next subchapter criticizes phrenology and supports the idea that probably there is no such thing as the "mind" but mental functions organized in packages resembling the quanta. Descartes and a whole trend in European culture are wrong when they separate the mind and the body. Mind and body are one. Both spirituality and scientific interests have a place on the map of the brain. The final chapter of the book brings us close to on philosophy. It is about the origin of language. So after seeing how we speak, Laura Carmen Cuțitaru sets herself the very ambitious task of finding out why we talk and what is the connection between thinking and talking. She presents the Darwinian hypothesis and although Cuțitaru is careful not to show any bias, one can feel between the lines that she is a creationist. In the end, she comes to the conclusion that both evolutionism and creationism "are equally a matter of faith" (139). This fierce debate reminds me of the scientific battle regarding the nature of light. Some scholars would swear light is a wave, other would only admit that light is made of particles. In the end, both camps proved to be right. Light is a wave of particles. Why not consider also the idea that both creationists and evolutionists are right. Life and language (as a characteristic of living beings) was created at some time and then evolved. The book ends with an Addenda where the author sums up some of the most important books from her bibliography.

The study *Elements of Psychopathology and Pathology of Language* is a very interesting book worth reading

both by specialists and the general public, a valuable Romanian contribution to the discussion of very difficult and challenging issues. Some disputable statements or some repetitions in the Addenda do not diminish in anyway the value of this study.¹ Laura Carmen Cuțitaru is,

undoubtedly, a well-read intellectual who knows her field and who is able to capture the attention of both the knowledgeable reader and the curious reader. I am convinced that her future books will reconfirm her intellectual and professional qualities.

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¹ At p. 9 the author says "English has a total of 46 discrete sounds" (9). Or it is only American English that has a total of 46 phonemes, British English, for instance, has 44 phonemes. Talking about human groups or tribes living in underdeveloped area (120) and speaking languages initially considered to be "primitive," Cuțitaru gives some examples: the American Indians (120) or the Negro Africans (121). In the former case, the recommended term is Native Americans and this minority group live in the United States, not in the Third World, although their poverty reminds one of the Third World. The latter term is also problematic because of its racist connotations. At p. 139 the author declares that the Earth is hardly 10,000 years old. Unfortunately, Cuțitaru does not give the source of this information. The problem of the Earth's age is still under serious debate. And at p.140, the author says that "Darwinism is not so appreciated in Europe as it is in America." I think it is difficult to make such a comparison. In most EU countries it is mandatory to teach evolutionism, but, on the other hand, Europe never had anything such as the famous Monkeys' Trial (1925).