

## THE IMAGINARY OF THE LINGUISTIC IMAGINARY. FOREWORD

The concept of *linguistic imaginary* is still in the process of being accepted and taken seriously in the Romanian academic world. Although it was coined a few decades ago by Anne-Marie Houdebine-Gravaud (2002), many Romanian linguists regard it with suspicion and are somewhat intrigued by it, considering it a *speculative invention* (Ardeleanu 2013, 5). It seems that the main reason behind the scepticism is the fact that linguistic imaginary is perceived as not truly belonging to a consecrated line of research in Romanian linguistics.

The attitude can also be explained by the fact the concept of *imaginary* in general has been surrounded by prejudice, as it has been associated with chaos, lack of coherence and consistency, a “space” in which various products of human fantasy float about freely. In fact, we encountered a similar reaction five years ago, when Babeş-Bolyai University launched an extremely ambitious project<sup>1</sup>: an *Encyclopedia of the Romanian Imaginaries*, which included a volume dedicated to the *Romanian Linguistic Patrimony and Linguistic Imaginary* (Platon *et alii* 2020), together with four other volumes on literary, religious, historical and artistic imaginary.

At first, it felt as if we were swimming in the moving waters of the linguistic imaginary, struggling to reach a shore where we could finally feel safe. This was the beginning of our attempt to give scientific substance to a concept which, on the one hand, inspired mistrust and, on the other hand, we found fascinating for all the possibilities it seemed to offer. In the process of searching for the right approach, we identified three main theoretical models which, one way or another, could provide a solid scientific basis for the linguistic imaginary. All three models seemed compelling, however, they regarded the imaginary as being “linguistic” for very different reasons. We were therefore unsure whether we would be able to reconcile and integrate these perspectives or not, so that we could finally offer a comprehensive definition for the concept of linguistic imaginary.

Thus, the authors of the studies included in the *Encyclopaedia* approached the concept of linguistic imaginary from three different perspectives: a metalinguistic, an ethno-linguistic and a cognitive perspective. We will offer here only a brief overview, since all three approaches have been described in detail in a separate study

---

<sup>1</sup> The project’s title is *Enciclopedia imaginariilor din România*. It was coordinated by Corin Braga and financed by the Ministry of Research and Innovation, CCCDI – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.2-PCCDI-2017-0326 /49 PCCDI, in keeping with PNCDI III.

dedicated to the theoretical analysis of the concept of linguistic imaginary (Platon 2019), as well as in the introduction of the *Encyclopaedia* (Platon 2020, 11-28). We believe that thanks to these three theoretical models, the linguistic imaginary will no longer be perceived as an ambiguous term, but it will be regarded as a complex and dynamic concept, whose coherence can be revealed through the careful analysis of linguistic data.

The first and, in fact, the only officially recognised theoretical model for the linguistic imaginary places language as the object of the imaginative act in the centre. More specifically, it is what we call the metalinguistic perspective, theorised by Houdebine-Gravaud (2002). According to this particular model, the concept of linguistic imaginary refers to the speakers' representations of their own language or the language of the community they belong to or wish to belong to. This theory was born out of the Saussurian dichotomy *langue* and *parole*, as well as Lacan's ideas about discourse, Labov's studies on sociolinguistic variations and, finally, Martinet's research on the dynamic synchrony in language. Thus, according to more recent tendencies in linguistics, the emphasis moves from describing language phenomena to the speaker's representations of the language itself and their relationship with it. But as the promoter of the concept of linguistic imaginary notes, we cannot justify certain concepts just by referring to linguistic criteria. There are other elements to be considered, such as historical, ideological or sociological factors. Therefore, we cannot clearly separate the linguistic imaginary from a cultural imaginary, and it is not easy to analyse the relationship between the two, especially because language itself is a "cultural object", which would entail that the linguistic imaginary could be integrated into the broader cultural imaginary. A real help in clarifying this relationship came from ethnolinguistics (a term preferred especially by Slavic-speaking countries such as Poland, Ukraine, Belarus and the Czech Republic) or linguistic anthropology (a term used mainly on the American Continent). This represents the second theoretical approach.

In ethno-linguistics, linguistic imaginary is no longer limited to representations about the language, but refers to a variety of representations about the world, as they are reflected in language. Language here is not the object of the imaginary, but rather the means to express it, a conveyer of a collective imaginary. By assimilating the linguistic imaginary with the representations about the world of certain cultural communities, ethnolinguistics regards the imaginary as being "linguistic" because these representations are set in linguistic data (Bartmiński 2009), and not in images or music, for example. Therefore, according to the ethnolinguistic view, language is a way of manifestation and, implicitly, of investigation and restoration of the cultural imaginary, as well as a way of shaping it.

Still, the ethnolinguistic view offers a static view of the linguistic imaginary, as it emphasises *the product as it is set in linguistic data*. Finally, cognitive linguistics, the third model, less interested in the cultural mark, investigates language in order to identify the internal mechanisms of linguistic creativity associated with the concept of linguistic imaginary. Cognitive linguists emphasise *the process of producing language* and speak of a collective imagination encoded in linguistic facts and organised according to conceptual frameworks, often metaphorical in nature, with a high degree of universality, that are not only specific to language, but also to human reason in general and thus are trans-linguistic and fairly indifferent to cultural differences. While ethnolinguistics is more concerned with linguistic particularism, with how a specific language reflects the worldview of a community, cognitive linguistics is more of a universalist theory. As we were reflecting on these theories in order to find the best way to circumscribe and define the object of our investigation, we began producing, in turn, an imaginary of the concept of linguistic imaginary. Since its essence seemed to escape us, we managed, in the end, to imagine a working definition for linguistic imaginary, one that is sufficiently broad and flexible and, more importantly, open: a collective imaginary that is set in linguistic data and shaped by culture, which includes all the representations about the objects or phenomena in the world (both real and imagined), including representations about language itself (seen as a cultural object) (Platon 2020, 25).

This integrated perspective also guided the way the studies included in this special issue dedicated to linguistic imaginary were conceived. Each article helped enrich the various facets of the imaginary, as they are revealed by the linguistic data analysed. This collection of articles is proof that the theory of linguistic imaginary is an “open theory” (Ardeleanu 2013, 8), which allows us to discover new angles from which we can approach language, while avoiding traditional linguistic descriptions that study language forms for their own sake.

Andreea-Nora Puşcaş, the author of the first study, offers a well-structured analysis of the metaphors of God in Orthodox prayers. The article looks at how the religious imaginary is configured and does so with the help of Lakoff’s and Johnson’s theory of conceptual metaphor. The author identifies a number of primary and non-primary metaphors systematically ordered by mental schemes: *God is a creator, God is a ruler, God is a provider*.

The second article, *The Clown – a metaphor for the artist identity in the circus of history and existence*, looks at the similarities and differences in the way Norman Manea and Matei Vişniec, two prominent writers of the Romanian exile, present the existential failure, by building a cultural and linguistic imaginary related to the representation of individual and collective identity.

In *The Representation of Ritual (Im)Purity Through Meteorological Metaphors in Folkloric Language*, Elena Platon talks about ritualistic purity in the mythical-

magical thinking of Romanian archaic and traditional communities. She identifies several linguistic expressions she calls *meteorological metaphors*, organised around elements such as the morning dew, mist or the rainbow, representing either purity, cleanliness or uncleanness, thus offering a glimpse into the world view of the archaic communities and the way they understood and explained the architecture of the universe.

Zoica Balaban's article – *Space and Time Expressions in the Romanian Linguistic Imaginary* – offers an overview of the conceptualisation of space and time in Romanian with the help of metaphors. The Romanian linguistic imaginary, she notes, is characterised by a *vertical spatiality*, specific to a pastoral world, and by *eternal temporality*.

Anna Oczko's *Linguistic conceptualization of spatial prepositions: Romanian "în" and Polish "w"* represents a comparative approach to the way spatial relationships are expressed by the two prepositions in both languages and explains how the cognitive approach allows the delineation of some image schemes behind the core meaning of the linguistic expressions investigated.

Joanna Porawska analyses a number of set phrases with the lexeme *Thursday* in Polish and Romanian (*czwartek* and *joi*) and discusses the implications of adopting one of the two seven-day week systems that characterize the Indo-European languages: the planetary week and the church week. The author offers a thorough inventory of linguistic expressions with the word *Thursday* and identifies not only the similarities and differences between the two languages, but also suggests several possible causes for them.

In *Metafore del cibo – una forma di eredità culturale e innovazione linguistica. Un paragone tra metafore del cibo in romeno, inglese e italiano*, Cristina Gogâța compares food metaphors in Romanian, Italian, and English and identifies cognitive frameworks that reveal common representations of various features that Italian, English and Romanian speakers associate with food metaphors.

The next two articles focus on ideology and discourse. Anca Ursa proposes an analysis of the Romanian communist anthems and the *mythemes* of the age, the unconscious representations of the community, identifiable in the patriotic verses, while Ioana Sonea explores the public discourse of the Iron Guard, the "exotic" Romanian fascist movement, and its complex relationship with the Romanian Orthodox Church, through the lens of Gilles Fauconnier's and Mark Turner's conceptual integration theory.

The next article, Maria Ștefănescu's and Ștefan Minică's – *On "the Fabrick of the Tongue". Language metaphors used to advocate descriptivism /prescriptivism in English and Romanian dictionaries* – examines the perceived interdependence between 'mother tongue' and 'fatherland' and by offering a survey of some lexicographical work undertaken in Great Britain and Romania between the

middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to compare decisions on prescriptivism or descriptivism in dictionaries, and the reasons behind them.

Diana Burlacu's article, on the other hand, highlights some key-concepts in translation – *abusive fidelity*, *domestication* and *foreignization* (covert and overt translation), *culturemes* – and then focuses on the ludic aspect of translation, by relying on several illustrations from translating jokes from German to Romanian and the challenges that come with this endeavour.

Anamaria Radu and Alexandra Cotoc look at what they call the collective imaginary of Romglish in cyberspace and face-to-face interactions, more specifically to the way in which Romanians perceive their use of Romglish online and in face-to-face interactions: the use of the code, the mechanisms of linguistic choices and linguistic creativity, frequency of code-switching and code-mixing, etc.

The final three articles included in this volume are dedicated to the relationship between the linguistic imaginary and teaching. In *Building translation competence through diary studies: at the crossroads of students' reflection and imagination*, Valentina Mureşan and Andreea Şerban tackle translation competence acquisition (TCA) by focusing on a group of first-year students of the Applied Modern Languages Programme and the use of diaries as a research instrument to investigate the strategies and tools employed by students as they were learning to develop good practices for their future career as translators. Nicoleta Neşu, on the other hand, analyses a series of answers to a questionnaire applied to students of Romanian origin who live and study in Italy, as well as a corpus consisting of compositions written by students and entitled *An Open Letter to Romania*. In her analysis, she focuses on key concepts such as *migration*, the *ethnic language/heritage language* and the *new identity typologies*. Finally, Ivica Kolečáni Lenčová and Zuzana Tomčániová investigate the role played by visual mental representations and associative relations (as part of the speaker's individual lexicon) in foreign language education. On a practical level, the article presents new approaches to teaching German as a foreign language through works of fine art.

Although seemingly heterogeneous in terms of topics and theoretical approaches, the articles included in this collection are united by the concept of linguistic imaginary, as defined by the three main theoretical models: the metalinguistic perspective, ethnolinguistics and cognitive linguistics. The language data analysed here, the methods of investigations, as well as the areas in which the results can be applied – discourse analysis, traductology, comparative studies, language teaching –, are diverse and point to the fact that the concept of linguistic imaginary may indeed prove to be extremely prolific.

## WORKS CITED

- Ardeleanu, Sanda-Maria. 2013. "Imaginarul lingvistic – o teorie deschisă," in Ioana-Irina Coroi, *Normele imaginarului lingvistic în presa literară*. Introductory Study by Sanda-Maria Ardeleanu. Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință.
- Bartmiński, Jerzy. 2009. *Aspects of Cognitive Ethnolinguistics*. London: Equinox.
- Houdebine-Gravaud, Anne-Marie (ed.). 2002. *L'imaginaire linguistique*. Paris: l' Harmattan.
- Lakoff, George, and Johnson, Mark. 2003 (First published in 1980). *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Platon, Elena. 2019. "Reflections on the Concept of Linguistic Imaginary/Reflexii despre conceptul de imaginar lingvistic," in *Studia UBB Philologia*. LXIV/3: 109-122.
- Platon, Elena. 2020. "Patrimoniu și imaginar lingvistic," in *Enciclopedia imaginariilor din România*, vol. II. *Patrimoniu și imaginar lingvistic*, edited by Corin Braga and Elena Platon, 11–28. Iași: Polirom.

**Elena PLATON**

Email: elena.platon@ubbcluj.ro

**Ioana SONEA**

Email: ioana.sonea@ubbcluj.ro