

SOME OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THE COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE IN ROMANIAN

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Title: “Some Observations concerning the Communication Competence in Romanian”

Abstract. In the Romanian language, there are differences in the assessment of prepositions based on the linguistic knowledge. For the analyzed structures of the Romanian language, the article uses the competence theory of Coseriu (1980, 1988). In his theory there are three forms of judgment used as criteria to distinguish between the different types of knowledge: the first type refers to the general language competence, the ability of the speaker to speak congruently, the second type refers to the ability to use a single language correctly and the third rated the ability to speak appropriately corresponding to the matter, to the listeners and to the situation. The structures like: *pahar de apă / pahar cu apă* (water glass/ glass (with) water) are for many linguists - including Coseriu – a very confusing example of language use. Since the reasons for that (and the solutions) have not been so clearly presented in the research as in the case of the regional varieties, the aim of the article is to present more precisely - based on Coseriu's competence theory - the nature of the deviations in the use of language and the circumstances under which mistakes are accepted.

Keywords: *language competence; the use of prepositions; linguistic knowledge; the competence theory of Coseriu; Romanian language use;*

1. Introduction

In the Romanian language there are differences in the assessment of prepositions based on the linguistic knowledge. The theory used for the analyzed structures of the Romanian language is the competence theory of Coseriu (1980, 1988)¹.

He distinguished between three different types of knowledge: the first type refers to the general language competence - the ability of the speaker to speak congruently, the second type refers to the ability to use correctly a single language and the third rated the ability to speak appropriately regarding the matter, the listeners and the situation. The error is regarded as a violation of the expectations, "no matter if these expectations might be codified as principles, norms or rules of speaking" (Weber, 1994, 375).

Regarding the structures with prepositions in Romanian such as: *pahar de apă/ pahar cu apă* (‘water glass’ or ‘glass (with) water’) many linguists - including Coseriu - agree that in the Romanian language, these examples belong to a

¹ The article is part of the research at the Eberhard-Karls-University of Tübingen under the supervision of prof. Heinrich Weber concerning some manuscripts and theories of Eugeniu Coseriu.

language register with a high level of confusion in the use of prepositions. The difficulty appears because the opposition: *pahar de apă* / *pahar cu apă* is not the same as 'glass of water' / 'water glass' in English. In Romanian *pahar de apă* can mean both: 'glass of water' and 'water glass' and is therefore with clearer structures such *pahar cu apă* ('glass with water') in competition.

Since the reasons (and the solutions) have not been yet named by the research as clearly as in the case of the regional varieties, the kind of the deviations should be determined more precisely according to Coseriu's competence theory. The question that rises is under which conditions can the errors be removed or accepted?

2. The Research Status

The question which of the structures of the type *pahar de apă* or *pahar cu apă* – 'glass (with) water' – must be regarded as an error, conducted to a heavy debate, looking for the meanings of these forms:

Since the beginning of the XXth century there are articles² that present the use of the preposition *cu* instead of *de* in the language. The specialists noticed the competition between *de* and *cu*, but almost all believe that only the structure of the type *pahar de apă* is correct. While the linguist Gorun (1910) explained that the competition between the two forms is caused by the ambiguity of the preposition *de* and his opinion was that the right construction is indicated by the way the language is being used, Candrea considered (1931) only the construction with *de* to be adequate, because this preposition can also point to the content and therefore there is no reason to replace it by another preposition in order to indicate its content more clearly.

The different opinions though prove that this argument – not even then – was clear enough for all. Either both forms are allowed: *am băut un pahar de/ cu apă* – 'I drank a glass (with) water' (Sever Pop, 1945: 346) or the linguists indicate the reference to the content in the meaning of both prepositions: *cutia cu cremă* – 'the box of/with cream' or *băusem o damigeană de vin* – 'I drank a carboy (with/of) wine' (Rosetti / Byck, 1945: 16).

One of the most important linguists, who often pointed out to these structures, was Alexandru Graur. Although the linguists noted that the preposition *de* has many meanings in Romanian and thus it may be unclear (Graur, 1963: 24 and Graur, 1976: 84), he also considered the construction *pahar cu apă* as inadequate: in his opinion structures like *pahar de apă* – 'glass (with) water' – must not be replaced by *pahar cu apă* (glass with water) because the preposition *de* can also

² In the annotated bibliography of the University Library of Bucharest (*Biblioteca Centrală Universitară* 1973) there are 12 articles on this subject: Speranță, Th. D. (1900): *De sau cu?* Kurth Richard (1904): *Der Gebrauch der Präpositionen im Rumänischen*; Gorun, Ion (1910): *Mărunțisuri* bzw. *Un cuvîntel buclucaș*; Graur, Alexandru (1930): *Un pahar cu apă* bzw. *Cu sau de?* Graur, Alexandru (1931): *De sau cu?* Candrea I., Aurel (1934): *Un pahar cu apă* bzw. *Îndreptarul limbii. Un pahar cu apă*; Pisani, T. (1935): *Numerus valachicus*; Niculescu, Al. (1962): *Cronica limbii. Tendința de înlocuire reciprocă a unor prepoziții*; Drașoveanu, D. D. (1969): *Legături sintactice de la stînga la dreapta*.

indicate the measure, but this meaning would be overlooked often by the speakers. Consequently, he is convinced that the use of structures with *cu* causes an incorrect language development, because this leads to the replacement of the preposition *de* in already solid compounds: and therefore, by the same rule, instead of *un milion de franci* (‘one million Swiss francs’) – it should be *milion cu franci* (‘one million with Swiss francs’), or the name of a well-known Romanian monastery, *Curtea de Argeș* (in English ‘Argeș yard’) would be replaced by *Curtea cu Argeș* (‘courtyard with Argeș’) structure that would be absurd, of course, and is actually meant more ironically by Graur. On the other hand, in his opinion *pahar cu vin* (‘a glass with wine’) shows that both the wine and the glass could be drunk (Graur, 1963: 24-25). Such a deviation would be another type of error after the competence theory of Coseriu.

Only later Graur recognized that the meanings of the prepositions have changed (Graur, 1973: 168). The linguist noted that many speakers are using these structures more and more, despite of the criticism of the linguists (Graur, 1976: 83-84). In this matter Graur went one step further than its predecessors and tried to formulate a statement: structures like *pahar cu apă* appearing instead of the forms like *pahar de apă* are the result of language development. The linguist tries to explain the problem from a diachronic point of view and he notes that the preposition has played an increasing important role already in the development of the Latin language and has continued to gain importance in the Romanic languages. As an example, he mentioned the French language. The number of prepositions was definitely too small compared to their many uses. This could explain the many meanings of the preposition *de* in today's Romanian language (Graur, 1968: 326-328).

Since the 70s, linguists have recognized a trend in today's language, which points to the semantic change of the prepositions. Many of them noted that a change of the meaning of the most used preposition could be observed, especially in the case of the preposition *de* (‘of, by, with, from etc.’). Here the articles written by Nicolae Niculescu and D. D. Drașoveanu, as well as the articles of Iorgu Iordan, Vasile Breban and Mioara Avram (Biblioteca Centrală Universitară 1973) can be mentioned.

Although linguists believe that the mutual substitution of the prepositions *de* and *cu* in those structures leads to incorrect forms according to the grammatical norms (Avram, 1986: 217; Pop, 1948: 323) or to oppositions between structures of the spoken and of the written language (Niculescu, 1962), all agree that this trend can't be denied, and also it isn't a regional variety, as it is the replacement in some areas of Romania of the preposition *de pe* (‘from’) with *după* (‘after’, ‘back’). In this case the formal similarity between *de pe* and *după* misled to semantic confusion: *un vecin după strada mea*³, rather than *un vecin de pe strada mea* – ‘a neighbor of my street’ or *a căzut după casă* – he fell behind the house (rather than *a căzut de pe casă* – he fell from the house (here: roof).

For Breban the new form from the 70s is entitled to be considered correct

³ Literally ‘a neighbor in the back of my street’, regional variety for ‘a neighbor of my street’, actually meaning ‘one of my neighbors’.

(Breban, 1973: 86-89). Since *de* can have multiple meanings (including the purpose and the content), he emphasizes that difficulties occur in the use of the preposition, for example, if you want to indicate only the content in *pahar de vin*. Although the author admits that the replacement of *de* by *cu* in structures such as: *pahar de apă* (‘glass of water’), *cana de lapte* (‘cup of milk’), *sticla de bere* (‘bottle of beer’), *oala de vin* (‘pot of/with wine’) leads to a heavy debate, the replacement is well founded. In his opinion, it’s about the clarity of expression, especially when the forms can be ambiguous, as in the case of *pahar de vin* (‘glass of wine’/‘wine glass’). Since this structure also indicates the purpose (‘wine glass’), the waiter can bring an empty wine glass in a restaurant or a glass with wine, as well. Consequently, he considers the construction with the two prepositions (*de* and *cu*) correct. The linguist formulated a possible explanation, which is also mentioned by Iorgu Iordan: the ambiguity of the preposition *de* can be explained by the influence of the French. The resemblance with *de* from French can be formally understood and semantically reasonable.

To the few linguists who made an attempt to highlight clearly the errors belongs Eugenio Coseriu itself. He points out⁴ that such structures like *pahar de apă*/*pahar cu apă* – ‘water glass’ or ‘glass (with) water’ are examples from the Romanian language, where there is a total confusion in the use of the preposition. He tried to prove a clear opposition using a structural analysis.

Coseriu accepts Graur's point of view who protested against the tendency to use *pahar cu apă* (‘glass with water’) instead of *pahar de apă* (‘glass of water’) or *pahar cu vin* (‘glass with wine’) instead of *pahar de vin* (‘glass of wine’). The linguist tried to identify the cases where only the preposition *de* can appear in Romanian and never *cu* and to distinguish them from the cases in which, however, the preposition *cu* must appear. In his opinion, when it comes to containers containing something, the language provides a clear opposition: whenever the quantity is being meant - when it refers to a measure - then *de* always appears: *un pahar de vin* (‘a glass of wine’), *un butoi de vin* (‘a barrel of wine’), *o strachină de fructe* (‘a bowl of fruits’), *un sac de ...* (‘a bag of...’). But if the content is important, then it is used *cu* (‘with’): *un pahar cu ceva apă* (‘a glass with some water’), *cu 300 g de apă* (‘with 300 g of water’), *un pahar cu câteva picături de apă* (‘a glass with a few drops of water’). It is impossible to say: *de câteva picături de apă* (‘a glass of some drops of water’). Also, when the image is important – as in the case of a painting – it is said *o farfurie cu fructe* (‘a plate with fruits’), because not the measure/the volume of the container as measure is important, but what's in it. Coseriu explains that this can be noted in more details, especially when the container is not full, if it contains only a little: *un pahar cu otravă* (‘a glass with poison’). Coseriu indicated

⁴ Among the manuscripts that Eugenio Coseriu didn't publish during his lifetime and which are now in the University Library of Tübingen, there are also remarks concerning the Romanian language and some recorded conversations about that with Nicolae Saramandru. In one of these conversations Coseriu explains that he even would choose the structure *Plosca cu vin roș* - the Plosca with red wine - as the title of the discussion (*Plosca* is a traditional container, flat and round, usually made of wood, that was used before in Romania instead of bottles, especially when travelling or for pouring).

here a well-known example from the Romanian folklore: *plosca cu vin roș* (‘plosca with red wine’): ‘Toma Alimoș îi dă lui Manea plosca cu vin roș’, (Toma Alimoș gives Manea⁵ the bottle with red wine’). *Plosca de vin roș* (‘the bottle of red wine’) would mean that he gives the bottle as a whole, while *plosca cu vin roș* (‘the bottle with red wine’) means that this bottle contains some red wine and that he offers to the other, so that he drinks a little bit of it.

Coseriu pointed out of situations where it is absolutely impossible to use *de*, since only *cu* makes sense: *o farfurie cu 3 mere*, nu *o farfurie de 3 mere* – ‘a plate with 3 apples’, not ‘a plate of 3 apples’, but *o farfurie de făină* and *o farfurie cu o făină neagră* (‘a plate of flour’ / ‘a plate with dark flour’). In the last example, both prepositions could be used, because it can be meant either the measure or the container with a particular content.

Coseriu admits that there may be confusion here, but in the case of people who know the language well; there would be no confusion, because one uses *de* for measures and the other *cu* for content⁶. The linguist remarks also an additional meaning of *de*: the purpose of the container, what the container is being used for: *pahare de vin și pahare de bere* (‘wine glasses’ and ‘beer glasses’), *pahare de șampanie* (‘champagne glasses’) *pahare de țuică* – ‘astea nu sunt păhăruțe de țuică’ (‘shot glasses’ - “these are not glasses for brandy”). Coseriu emphasizes that in these cases it could be that there is no content at all inside the glasses.

His conclusion is that especially in comparison with the German/English it is quite clear: ‘glass of wine’ is just *pahar de vin*: *Un pahar de vin, vă rog* (‘A glass of wine, please’). ‘Wine glass’ is also *pahar de vin*, if *de* can be here replaced with *pentru* (‘for’). By contrast, ‘glass with wine’ / ‘with red wine’ or ‘with a few drops of wine’, is always *cu* in Romanian. Coseriu admits, however, that it is important to extend this theme to justify it with other examples.

3. The normative position

The Grammar of the Romanian Academy (1963) stipulates that the preposition *de* can have 14 meanings, including those mentioned by Coseriu: measure or purpose. For the last meaning the example cited is: *salonul de așteptare* (‘the waiting room’). However, the content is also mentioned as important, in the examples from the morphological part of the grammar, as well as in those of the syntactic part: *coș de mere* (‘a basket of apples but understood as ‘a basket with apples’). The meaning of the content introduced by the preposition *de* is also presented in similar examples, chosen in the grammar from the Romanian literature: *un pahar de rachiu și de unul rom* – ‘a glass of/with brandy and rum’, *o sticlă de vin* – ‘a bottle (with?) wine’ (Ghica)⁷.

As an explanation for the many meanings that are to be understood in the case of *de* – because *cu* (‘with’) and *pentru* (‘for’) have only one major meaning – can be the status of *de*, as one of the most abstract prepositions. The abstract value is

⁵ Toma Alimoș and Manea are the heroes of the famous Romanian folk ballad Toma Alimoș.

⁶ The same opinion had Coseriu in the interview with the author of this article in June, 2000.

⁷ Coseriu names the examples from Ion Ghica, Romanian writer of the XIXth century

not the same for all prepositions. The more abstract the word is, more meanings can be associated with it (*Gramatica limbii române*, 1963: 329). Other linguists also consider the preposition *de* as being abstract, compared with others, including *cu*, which still enables a concrete idea (Constantinescu-Dobridor, 1974).

The grammar of Iorgu Iordan explains the many meanings of the preposition *de* with the fact that it is one of the oldest prepositions that has been preserved from the Latin in the Romanian language. The same prepositions from Latin remained partly in Romanian, but during the language development they got more meanings. Iordan mentioned only 8 meanings for *de*, including the purpose, the situation in which Coseriu considered that *de* can be replaced with *pentru* (‘for’): *dar de casă nouă* (‘gift for the new house’).

Iordan joins the linguists who remarked in today's use of the preposition the appearance of new constructions, because the speakers strive to create distinct and different linguistic structures. The forms *pahar de apă*, *sticla de bere* (‘glass of water, glass of beer’) or *pahar cu apă*, *sticla cu bere* (‘glass with water, glass with beer’) relate to each other in free variation. The decision to use the one or the other preposition is difficult, but not wrong according to Iordan, as in the case of other examples (Iordan, 1956: 302). The use of the preposition *de*, sometimes even incorrectly, could be explained by the influence of French (Iordan, 1956: 481) due to the formal similarity of this preposition in the two languages and to a certain semantic equivalence. Other linguists share this opinion, but they do not explain it with further details.

4. The Preposition *de* in the French Language

The French-German Dictionary (1992) lists 22 meanings of the preposition *de*, including content and quantity. The examples are similar to those of the Romanian language: content - *une tasse de thé* (‘a cup of tea’) and quantity - *un verre de vin* (‘a glass of wine’). The quantity corresponds here to the meaning of measure mentioned by Coseriu and it is also listed in *Langenscheidts Handwörterbuch Französisch* (1992) as a general presentation of a part (*allgemeine Teilvorstellung*): *un verre de vin* (‘a glass of wine’).

The prepositional structure of the type: *un pahar de vin roșu* - ‘a glass of red wine’ is also common in French with the same preposition *de*: *un verre de vin rouge*, also with two possible translations: ‘a glass of red wine (a wine glass)’ and ‘a glass with red wine’.

Similarities with the Romanian language are also present in the ambiguity of the preposition *de* with both meanings: purpose and measure, where *de* for purpose often competes with the preposition *à*. Forms such as: *a bottle of beer*, *a glass of wine*, *two barrels of beer* can be built only with the preposition *de* (*une bouteille de bière*, *un verre de vin*, *deux tonneaux de bière*), while both prepositions can occur in the construction of composed nouns. Structures like *beer barrel*, *beer bottle*, *beer glass*, *wine bottle*, *wine glass*, *water glass* are usually marked with the preposition *à* (*tonneau à bière*, *bouteille à bière*, *verre à bière*, *bouteille à vin*, *verre à vin*, *verre à eau*). But also structures with *de*: can occur, a table napkin’

is *serviette de table*. For a 'wine barrel' both can be used: *tonneau de vin* (*Großes Handwörterbuch Französisch-Deutsch* 1992) and *tonneau à vin* (*Langenscheidts Handwörterbuch Französisch* 1992). Both options can be confirmed with the Romanian French grammar. In *Grammaire roumaine* the author (Pop, 1948) cites for the meanings of both prepositions *de* and *cu* in Romanian, the French *de*.

On the other hand, just as in the case of the Romanian language, the dictionary of Pierre Grappin (1963), shows that *de* in the French language often replaces other prepositions and has ambiguous nuances, sometimes difficult to indicate with precision.

The proof that the preposition *de* is ambiguous not only in Romanian but also in other Latin languages provides an explanation, but it still doesn't indicate a clear criterion to recognize the differences between cases. Coseriu's competence theory can be used to approach the errors on a standardized level.

5. Coseriu's Competence Theory

The competence theory of Coseriu (1980) combines the ancient division of linguistic disciplines (grammar, rhetoric and dialectic) with thoughts of W. von Humboldt and F. de Saussure (Weber, 1994: 375).

Within the cultural language skills there are three levels of language, which have already been mentioned by Humboldt: a universal level, the level of the specific language and the individual level. Coseriu noted that there are judgments about the language, referring to the presented levels. Related to the first level it is the general language competence, concerning the congruence of the statement, based on certain principles of thought and knowledge of expectation standards that are independent of the judgments relating to the single language or to the text. The judgments on the individual level of a specific language regard the accuracy of language and are autonomous from the general language and from the individual level. At the individual level, the reviews refer to a 'reasonable' or 'unreasonable' talk, that is, if a text respects a certain expectation case. These judgments are autonomous; a text may be inappropriate in certain situations, even if the text is congruent and correct. The judgments that are being made at the three levels of language can be lifted from the bottom to the top, this means that the appropriateness can invalidate any incorrectness and also the incongruence and that the correctness can remove the incongruence. Concerning the types of errors that correspond to these levels of language competence, Coseriu distinguished the incongruence on the general level, the incorrectness on the individual level of language and the inadequacy of the text level.

Based on Coseriu's competence theory it is possible to distinguish between the types of errors in the discussed structures of the type: *pahar de apă* or *pahar cu apă* – 'glass (with) wine' / 'wineglass'. The research conducted in the past did not succeed in finding a possibility to clearly identify the occurring mistakes.

6. Types of Errors

Since 1900 the linguists have been showing that in the use of the prepositions

de and *cu* in the Romanian language mistakes occur often. In the constructions mentioned in the research status with these 2 prepositions, following errors occur:

6.1 Violations of the congruence

There is a class of deviations that refers to the general language competence. A 'congruent' talk meets the expectation standards. In the investigated structures the congruence is not a priority, but it can be present. For Graur constructions with the preposition *cu* are therefore not admissible because in expressions such as: *pahar cu apă* (,glass with water') the speaker would understand that he had to drink both the water and the glass. The competence would apply in this case on the incongruence, because it violates principles of thought. One always expects that you drink only the contents of a glass and not the glass itself.

6.2 Violations of the correctness

This type of errors forms the majority of the variations that may be observed in the use of prepositions and are related to the individual linguistic competence: the constructions like *pahar de apă* are considered by most linguists to be standard. Thus, the errors at the level of the specific language are defined and relate to the incorrectness of the structures with *cu*, which, in the opinion of the linguists, are non-standard.

In the idiomatic knowledge also the error mentioned by Coseriu can be classified: in his analysis, he notes that *de* can only indicate measure and purpose. The ability to use the Romanian language properly would not allow using *de* for the content. That would be for him a deviation from normal usage and after Coseriu's competence theory, violation of the correctness.

6.3 Violations of the adequacy

This error is related to the third level of competence, on the text or discourse competence. Since the Romanian structure *pahar de apă* can mean both ,glass of water' and ,water glass', it doesn't correspond to this variation (*pahar de apă/pahar cu apă*) the opposition ,glass of water'/ ,water glass' from the German or English language. Coseriu explained how this ambiguity is solved on the discourse level, but also Breban mentioned it. However, when a person asks in a restaurant for *un pahar de vin*, the waiter brings usually ,a glass of wine' (a glass with wine in it), since it would be inappropriate to bring an empty wine glass, although it would be grammatically quite correct. An empty wine glass would be a mistake in this case, it would be not adequate to the context and could be seen at the most as a joke. However, depending on the circumstances, there may be situations where somebody asks exactly for the contrary and wants an (empty) wine glass or a beer glass.

7. Results

The initial question was to identify the conditions under which the errors can be cancelled. According to Coseriu's competence theory, an error can be annulled from the bottom up, an adequate expression can cancel the incorrectness and the incongruence, and the correctness of a language structure can remove the incongruence.

In my opinion, from the different types of errors, the violation of the correct-

ness can be cancelled as a first step. The structures with the preposition *cu* may be regarded as appropriate due to their clarity. From the examples mentioned in the research it is clear that the preposition *de* is only being replaced when it is appropriate to express oneself more precisely. The preposition is not being replaced in incorrect expressions, because it would lead to discrepancies noticed by Graur, in expressions like: *Curtea de Argeș* (name of a Romanian city) or *un milion de franci* (a million francs).

At the level of the individual language some linguists accept more than it is written in the grammar books and consider the construction *cu* as innovation (Breban) or as a free variation (Iordan). In this case the error is not only removed but also even elevated to a norm.

In the case of incorrectness presented by Coseriu, it is no need for further discussions because his arguments are related to the Grammar of the Academy. Secondly, also an error on the general language level can be accepted when the construction *cu* is appropriate, even if it is not congruent, as Graur argues.

It is difficult to decide in the case of the ambiguity related to the text level. To use *pahar de vin* for 'wine glass' as well as for 'glass of wine' is perfectly correct in Romanian. Also, a replacement with *cu*, which has been proposed, would only be appropriate related to the content, but less for measure and certainly not for the purpose. It can be said that, on the level of discourse the utterance may be appropriate to the situation and so the ambiguity is being eliminated.

8. Conclusions

The linguistic knowledge enables to detect errors and to correct them. However, it is often difficult to find a suitable scale. The analyzed constructions *pahar de apă* / *pahar cu apă* indicate that in Romanian the preposition *de* has more than one meaning and sometimes it can be ambiguous. The same discussions and ambiguity can also be found in other Romanic languages. The similarity to the formal and the semantic level of the preposition *de* from French emphasizes that in relation to the French language, even if it is not the case of influence, there is a clearly existing analogy. Especially in Romanian there is a deviation from the standard individual language. The explanations offered for the use of forms like *pahar cu apă* instead of *pahar de apă* (clarity, language development, tendency in today's language) that can go up to the adoption of the structure, clearly show that the speakers consider such errors as adequate.

The analysis of these structures indicates that it does not concern regional varieties, but rather language development. The adequacy may be a reason for the cancellation of correctness, a possible explanation of language change and development and supplements previous explanations. Adequacy is being determined by the speakers on the text level and leads to the adoption of the new structures. The generalization becomes then the rule. The language change is the transition from the abolition of a deviation in the text / *parole* and the integration into the standard / in the *langue*.

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