Elements of Philosophy of Language in Constantin Noica's Texts

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Abstract

Various notions of philosophy of language are present constantly in the whole work of Constantin Noica. His concerns are directed towards the language as a pivotal human ability and as a fundamental form of culture, towards the philosophy and the hermeneutics of the poetic language (especially of Eminescu's language), as well as towards some linguistic and philosophical concepts related to the Romanian language as a historical language.

Keywords: *philosophy of language, philosophy of speech, philosophy of the text, hermeneutics of meaning, poetic language.*

A fundamental component of Constantin Noica's thinking is represented by the elements of philosophy of language, a constant presence in his texts. The main aspects are those relating to the philosophy of language (as a pivotal human ability and fundamental form of human culture), to the philosophy of speech (especially the philosophy of the word, the nuclear element of the historical language) and those relating to the philosophy of the text (especially of the poetic text). On many occasions, the elements of philosophy of language interfere with those of general linguistics, but also with elements of history of the language, etymology, grammar, etc.

If the theory of language and the general linguistics try to answer the question *how* does the language function in general but especially the language under the historical and social form of the language (of the languages) or under the individual form of the text/discourse, whereas the philosophy of language asks *what* is the exact notion of language, *what* is the meaning of the language in itself or of the language as a discourse and as a text.

Certain exegetes believe that Noica's philosophy represents the Romanian answer to the classical Greek tradition and that it has the capacity to perpetuate the

drama of the modern reason, that has lost its original unity. As examples of the concern for the reason's drama, are mentioned "the idea of One and Multiple; the idea of initial holomer, in which the General and the Individual, as terms of the Being, are in ontological indistinction; the idea of a final holomer, in which the Individual and the General find each other, through a reciprocal fulfilment; the difference between the cultures of the spirit and those of the soul; the radiograph of spiritual diseases – as an expression of the reason's drama, but also of the non-fulfilled being, who always searches for a term."[1] This is the origin of the permanent aspiration towards the identification of the original unity of the logos, probably the most important feature of Constantin Noica's philosophy.

By inverting the gradual scale *concept – thinking – reasoning* and, implicitly, the linguistic equivalent *word – clause – sentence*, Noica believes that "in the usual logical speech, we should not say: *concept – thinking – reasoning*, but the other way around: *reasoning – thinking – concept*, as if truly (as Hegel suggested) the concept were the last one, as an extreme deepening of the logical field, with the three terms overlapping, «interpenetrating»."[2] In other words, the word concentrates the speech, such as the acorn that Eminescu was talking about was carrying within itself an oak wood. The priority of the lexical level over the grammatical one is been also stated on some other occasions: "the philosophy of language, where the word represents anyway the existence of the speech or its core, compared to which the grammatical forms and its structures are only the flesh of that particular fruit."[3]

Many pages constitute veritable odes dedicated to the Romanian language as a mother tongue:

> *It is only through words in your mother tongue that you can remember things you have never learned. Since every word is an oblivion and almost in each and every word there are meanings that you do not remember anymore. Otherwise we could not give a real meaning to words. But if within every word there is a part of oblivion, that is however our oblivion and it becomes our own memory. And this is an act of culture: learning new things as if they were stemming from your own being.[4]*

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[1] Ion Hirghidu , "Filosofia lui Constantin Noica între suflet i spirit," in *The Annals of the University of Craiova*, Series: Philosophy 24 (2/2009), 81-82.

[2] Constantin Noica, " ase tipuri fundamentale de rostire," in *Scrisori despre logica lui Hermes* (Bucharest: Cartea Româneasc , 1986), 76.

[3] Constantin Noica, "Interpretare la *Cratylos*" (Interpretation at *Cratylos*), in Platon, *Opere III*, edition supervised by Petru Cre ia, *The interpretation of dialogues of Constantin Noica*, translation, preliminary details and notes for *Euthydemos*, Gabriel Liiceanu; *Cratylos*, Simina Noica (Bucharest: tiin ific   i Enciclopedic , 1978), 148.

[4] Constantin Noica, *Rostirea filozofic româneasc* (Bucharest: tiin ific , 1970), 5.

Just like Aristotel, Humboldt or Co eriu, Noica perceives the language as *enérgeia*, as a perpetual dynamics. The historical language keeps within itself hundreds and thousands of years of life experience, of ways to consider the outer and inner world, to regard ourselves and the others. The phenomenon of linguistic change also manifests through the fact that in the course of time, a lot of semantic meanings and nuances are buried within the meanings of the word. But the forgotten meanings can be actualized, the oblivion can turn into memory. Pairs of words such as *sinele* and *sinea*, *rost* and *rostire*, *infinit* and *infinire*, or words such as *întru*, *fire* and *fiin* are considered to be real emblems of the Romanian language.[*]

Talking about the neologism *natur* , but also about the maintaining of its synonym *fire*, much more ancient, Noica questions himself concerning the utility of maintaining an "incontrollable" semantic area present in the oldest word. This happens because, as stated by Eminescu, we are not the masters of the language, but the language is our master, and the Romanian language simply "did not want to get rid of these words and continues to do so". The remarks of philosophical nature constantly overlap with those related to the ethno-, socio- and psycho-linguistics: "When you're wandering through nature – claims Noica paraphrasing Heidegger – you're wandering through the word *natur* . But could it not be the other way around? When you're wandering through the word *fire*, you're not wandering anymore through devastated nature, you're really getting ready to be wandering through the character."[5] The technical revolution in the second half of the twentieth century did not destroy the *Romanian nature*:

> *some stranger comes to tell us that he is amazed at the way in which we have managed to conciliate the new with the old, in which we have managed to keep the folk traditions or simply the traditions, while becoming up-to-date; we would say: the way in which we have managed to stay authentic while surrounded by the great novelties of the current era.*[6]

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[*] It is very difficult (or impossible) to have an accurate translation in other languages for some of them. For example, "Sinea" is the feminine principle related with the nocturnal and germinative regime of the philosophical imaginary, while "Sinele" (the Self) belongs to the masculine principle, to the diurnal regime which "as an expression of the deepened human consciousness, comes to project light in the darkness of the first (sinea)" ("Sinele i sinea" in Noica, *Idem*, 19). "Infinire" is a term created by Eminescu, in addition to the common pair infinite-infinity, and would mean, according to Noica, "the finite without the end as an endless perpetation" ("Infinit i infinire la Eminescu," in *Ibidem*, 83)

[5] Constantin Noica, "Despre natur în graiul românesc" (On Nature in Romanian parlance), in Constantin Noica, *Introducere la miracolul eminescian*, eds. Marin Diaconu and Gabriel Liiceanu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992), 177.

[6] *Ibidem*, 178.

To name things means, beyond the materialization and freedom of the thought, to introduce an order in the universe, in the material dimension, but also in the spiritual one: "Beyond the alleviation brought by speech, as an emancipation of the thought or as a confession and a projection of one's own suffering on the screen of literary art, there is a direct and immediate comfort, through simple and pure words. To name the thing, to call the passion «passion» and the ugly «ugly» means, from the beginning, to tame and to master, somehow, the unbearable. The ugly acquires a shape, becomes *formosus*, almost «frumos» in our language."[7] Another great Romanian philosopher of language, Eugeniu Co eriu, is at the origin of the same theories as Noica: "The language is the one that confers *existence* to things: it is not a nomenclature for types of things recognized as such beforehand. Of course, the language does not create *the entities*, but it creates their *existence*: it makes them to be *in some way or another*, it makes them to be *this* or *that*. Thus, the language does not create trees, but it creates *being a tree* (and not, for example, plants in general or representing another species). This is the way in which the language leads us towards a methodical world of things. By delimitating modalities of the *existence*, it allows us to observe or to recognize in the world *entities* corresponding to these modalities, offering us, in this way, the possibility to research things within themselves."[8] Noica was getting across the superficial dichotomy *arbitrary – motivated*, observing that

> We need to be searching for a deeper rightfulness of the word than the simple motivation, be it exterior or interior. There are words that generate things. If we did not talk that much about love, as stated by Pascal (that is if we did not name this concept), we would not have so much of it in the world. There are definitely determined *realities, tree, star or being,* for which the name can only be something exterior, if not their code, their intimate law is regarded as a name. There are, however, undetermined *realities (the elements of the character, or the thought processes)* to which only the word gives a real form, just as clouds named by the man. But there are also words that determine the realities, *such as gods, states, certain works and, definitely, the technical objects.*[9]

Taking into account the untranslatable words, the words specific to a language, Noica adopts the positions of a poetic, philosophic and linguistic naturalism:

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[7] Constantin Noica, "[Urîtul sufletului i frumuse ea cuvintelor]" (The Ugliness of the Soul and the Beauty of the Words), in *Introducere la miracolul eminescian*, 217.

[8] Eugeniu Co eriu, "Zece teze despre esen a limbajului i a semnifica iei" (Ten theses about the essence of language and meaning), in Eugeniu Co eriu, Dorel Fînaru, Dumitru Irimia, *Mic tratat de teorie a limbii i lingvistic general* (Ia i: Demiurg, 2016), 532.

[9] Noica, "Interpretare la *Cratylos*," 148-149.

What is wonderful concerning the natural languages is that, in the end, everything is translatable in no matter what language: we can translate books, we can translate poems, thoughts, we can even translate typical expressions. But we cannot translate only one word.

A word is a tree. Whether it saw the daylight on your land or whether it fell like a seed from another world, a word is, in the end, a specific being. It came to stay in the land of your country, it was nourished by its rains, it grew and developed under a sun that is never the same in different places, and the way in which we can see it cannot be removed, tranferred or translated.[10]

The problem of polysemantism and of the semantic nuances is not only specific to the poetic language, but to the language as a whole. The man has to remain the being who approaches, entangles and disentangles the nuances. The loss of this capacity would mean a downfall, an intellectual involution:

Nuances are essential to the man. If one day we only saw the seven fundamental colours, and not the infinity of colours and mixtures that do not have a name (what colour does a rock have? What colour does the human face have?), we would have died from an artistic point of view. If, one day, as Romanian speakers, we did not make the difference anymore between c tre *and* spre*, we would betray the spirit of the language. Nuances of meaning are essential to the man. Words are essential to him. […]*

If the man is a being of nuances, we need this richness of word meanings. It is not only about knowing ourselves, it is not only a philosophic issue; it is also one that regards the following day. *To immerse in the past of an expressive language, like ours, means to be thinking about the future of the human word. Because how will future generations talk, if they do not understand to defeat the breach of the logos in natural languages? Will they bring into play a simplified and mechanized logos?[11]*

Eminescu, for example, is a being of nuances, of the most subtle semantic nuances:

"It is a man who presents things, a sem d u*, according to his own expression. He presents the language.*

If there are boundaries in the language, somewhere there are also absences of boundaries:

A pus în tine Domnul nemargini de gîndire… (The God put within you limitless of thinking...)

writes the poet in Feciorul de împ rat f r stea (The Emperor's son without star). *Such limitless thoughts exist in his language and in any other language. They* have *to be limitless, as long as any language is the speech in itself, which has to be able to express anything. But what is weird is that the limits come from outside, whereas the absence of limits comes from inside. If you know a language from the exterior, you can only see its limits. You can get familiar to its limitless possibilities from inside. You are a* sem d u

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[10] Constantin Noica, "Despre a doua comoar a limbilor" (About the Second Treasure of the Languages), in Constantin Noica, *Cuvînt împreun despre rostirea româneasc* (Bucharest: Eminescu, 1987), 201.

[11] Noica, *Cuvînt împreun despre rostirea româneasc*, 202 and 204.

of the language only from the inside. This is what Eminescu was trying to be, making inventories of all the meanings of one word, even those of the word sam .*"[12]*

Explaining etymologies and meanings that seemed lost, the poet can also use semantic virtualities that the system of the language allows, even if in this way he sometimes does not observe the rules. The boundary between the *said* and the *unsaid*, between *the impossible to say* and *the possible to say* is a flexible boundary, that only can be overcame by an *addict* of language: "This human language represents as well *an unusual world*. It is a *disunion* that it brings in nature, and, through poetic culture and creation, the disunion sometimes becomes a plentiful *disunion* with his own self of the man. *The disunion from my soul*, says Eminescu."[13] The passing over to the absence of limits is made not only to a lexical level, but also to a grammatical one, for example through the use of inverse forms of compound verb tenses.

In the end, what do you need in order to be able to give a name to the unutterable? – asks Noica, while creating the new word unutterable. *A simple freedom, almost a game of the thought and of the word with themselves. But the ones who play are those who are addicted to language, until they become its master, instead of being its slaves. One has to test numerous wanderings through the world of thinking and of the word, in order to know what are their limits and their absence of limits. It is only then that one can make out of them a sort of bridges that can be thrown upon the nothingness in front of you, like that bridge over the Danube of the king*, a rock thought wandering from bow to bow. *And it is only then, after having learnt it all, with its bitterness, that you can say, through a simple unusual inversion for the topics of your own language, that only knwos* days that are long *and* long days:
Ai mil   i stinge lungi zilele mele (Have mercy and extinguish my days long).[14]

The solace through the appeal to the language as such does not equal the intensity of the poetic language, but it comprises this latter:

The spider spins as well, but we cannot make clothes out of its cloth, *says a Romanian proverb. We talk as well, but we do not really array our thoughts, as long as we employ words deprived of their deepest and most moving meanings. Maybe we often do not even really think our thoughts. We are lucky that our soul is not haunted by the same passions and either by a feeling of ugliness as strong as those experimented by Eminescu. But even within ourselves, the passions of the ugliness lie in ambush with the aim to destroy us. Our language, one of those which did not take words for granted, but which gave birth to them and changed them all by itself, helps us to give shape to the*

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[12] Constantin Noica, "Margini i nemargini ale limbii" (Margins and non-margins of the Language), in *Introducere la miracolul eminescian*, 140.

[13] *Ibidem*, 142.

[14] *Ibidem*.

shapeless. It is beautiful. If this could cheer up Eminescu for a second, let us turn our faces confidently to the Romanian language.[15]

The writer has to grub up the precious deposits deposited in the language. Just like Co eriu, Noica believes too that the poetic language and its values are comprised in the language as such and the writers and the poets, just like miners, have to bring them out to light:

Each and every writer punished to be using the Romanian language, as Cantemir was still stating (but in the sense to educate*, in order* to punish*), has to ask himself every time, in every field of creation in which he might work, and especially in the literary or philosophic creation: do I hold in my hand sand mixed up with gold? Or do I only have sand? I can also extract the gold from there, just like those goldsmiths from the Apuseni mountains […]?[16]*

In Noica's opinion, the so-called *fundamental speeches* have the capacity of leading to a trans-stylistics, *another* stylistics than the formal one, the one which is exterior to things. In order to give some examples, Noica makes appeal to a Romanian example from literature which, in his opinion, highlights upon the stylistic features of the fundamental speeches. It is about the poem *Eminescu* by Marin Sorescu:

What does the poem express that could be anthological? It expresses the "application" of some determinations – all the aspects of the Romanian reality that we cherish – on an individual reality: Eminescu. No need to remind the poem; it is enough to give it its structure back. One can make a poem *even using the fundamental speech meant to lead to simple aspects of civilization. Since the poem passes through all the speeches of the man and related to things, just as the logics has to be* formally *interpreted.[17]*

Co eriu will sustain also from the perspective of the philosophy of language the essential identity between the language as such and the poetry (literature):

This essential identity can be sustained by very good arguments in the area of the philosophy of language. Actually, as unity of intuition and expression, as pure significant creation (that corresponds to the "way of being of things") – if we will consider the creative subject as absolute (that is only in its relationship with what is created) – the language is the equivalent of the poem, given the fact that the poem also corresponds to the intuitive understanding of the human being. Just like the language, the poem ignores the distinction between the true and the false, between existence and non-existence: both the language and the poem are "anterior" (preliminary) to these distinctions. On the other hand, the poem, just like the language, is an apprehension of

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[15] Constantin Noica, "Despre natur în graiul românesc," in *Introducere la miracolul eminescian*, 219.

[16] Noica, "La ce bun limba român ?" sau "Caietele lui Eminescu," in *Introducere la miracolul eminescian*, 225.

[17] Noica, " ase tipuri fundamentale de rostire," 80.

the universal in the individual, an objectivation of the intuitive contents of the consciousness.[18]

All that Eminescu creates in the language is already, as a virtuality, in the Romanian language. Noica asks himself, after having reminded a series of lexical and grammatical creations of Eminescu, among which unusual inversions and very beautiful rhymes: „What taste of mastery and of the language can incite him to all these exercises? Eminescu feels that the inversions bring something new in the thought and in the heart, not to say in grammar."[19] Analyzing a series of verbal expressions and inverted verbal forms, the philosopher senses semantic modalities while expressing temporality:

All these would deserve being researched and assembled by a grammarian with philosophic attributes,[20] like some who exist in our culture. Because our language in itself make you philosophize, when you refuse to be only a structuralist. Within these forms of speech and of modulation of the speech we should not only see one of the roots of our artistic sense and of a bend – that sometimes we enjoyed exaggerating – for the poetry. We could talk not only about a bend for the reflection of wisdom – which is also too much praised in our country –, but about a bend for a more technical reflection, the logical one, for example.

In general, our thought seems to have made investigations in the semi-darkness of the thought and, more specifically, in the areas that prepare *a clear thought. To the level of lucidity the current culture has reached, in our country and abroad, we can dare to join to the logic area some more subtle areas and to search for its roots.*[21]

Talking about the great poetry, Noica gives a beautiful poetic and philosophical definition: "Do you want to know what is the great poetry? It is the sadness that the coming into being is not always the lot of the world. That everything falls apart, in the hours of becoming of the devouring time, as in the *Sonnet 19*[22] and in almost all the sonnets of Shakespeare, as in Hölderlin's work,

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[18] Eugeniu Co eriu, "Teze despre tema *limbaj i poezie*," in *Omul i limbajul s u*, Studii de filozofie a limbajului, teorie a limbii i lingvistic general , Anthology, argument, notes, bibliography and indices by Dorel Fînaru (Ia i: "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, 2009), 164-165.

[19] "Despre iscusitele r sturn ri i Eminescu", in *vol. cit.*, 313.

[20] This is how Dumitru Irimia states in the vol. *Limbajul poetic eminescian*. We also need, nevertheless, a philosopher with a grammatical sense of the language, a real philosopher of the language, like Noica.

[21] Noica, *Introducere la miracolul eminescian*, 314.

[22] *Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,/ And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;/ Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,/ And burn the long-liv'd phoenix, in her blood;/ Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleet'st,/ And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,/ To the wide world and all her fading sweets;/ But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:/ O! carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,/ Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen;/ Him in thy course untainted do allow/ For beauty's pattern to succeeding men./ Yet, do thy worst old Time: despite thy wrong,/ My love shall in my verse ever live young.* (William Shakespeare, *Sonnets. Sonete,*

as in Eminescu's work."[23] In the quarrel between the time that devours the beauty of the world and the time of the poetic work defeats, through its duration, the latter.

The tutelary figure of a literature, the trainer, the architect from the dawn of culture, is embodies in an archetype:

> *Every culture has in its hour a complete man, an archetype: Homer – Dante – Shakespeare – maybe Cervantes – Goethe. In our country, there is Eminescu.*
> *It is the sole hour in which the language is not fully formed, the history of the community is open, the spirit of the culture is not yet defined. That particular hour will not come again. We will not have another Eminescu, just like the other cultures did not have another Dante, another Shakespeare, or another Goethe.[24]*

Talking about Eminescu's manuscripts, especially about the *manuscript 2287*, Noica says: "Just like the words in our language, Eminescu says more than he expresses. He keeps a rest. This rest is to be found in his manuscripts, among which some of them would be regarded as a real Archaeus of our culture."[25] Are further quoted excerpts in which the great poet meditates upon the creative fantasy, upon the talent and the genius, on "the moonshiny moments of the poetry, in which the man sees the bright shadow of things, without them exciting his will", upon "the circle of shapes" of the world.

The poet is really poet through fantasy, language, thought and speech, as Eminescu was stating, that is through imagination, substance and shape. As regards the language, Noica was stating:

> *The poetry corresponds to the word. The philosophy corresponds to the word. The whole world has become, nowadays, a word, from the genetic code to the electromagnetic signals. The poet has to bring into play a word that, on its level and in its own way, has to animate the heart and the soul, just as the words belonging to scientific languages have ended up putting in an organized process the still life.[26]*

Because the young poet, according to Eminescu, is not a complete master of the language and does not know how to graduate "the part of nature, that is of transmission and happening in the process of getting to know the word, and the part of culture,"[27] Noica states:

Parallel texts, trans. Radu   tef nescu, Contemporary Literature Press, The University of Bucharest, Bucharest, 2015, 33).

[23] Constantin Noica, *Jurnal de idei* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990), 102.

[24] V. Martin Heidegger, *Originea operei de art* , trans. Thomas Kleininger and Gabriel Liiceanu, Introductive study by Constantin Noica (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1995), 234.

[25] *Introducere la miracolul eminescian*, 361.

[26] Constantin Noica, "Poesia junilor," in *Introducere la miracolul eminescian*, 138.

[27] *Ibidem*.

There is in the language, as in the things of the concrete universal, a material of nuances and subtleties, *without which people do not talk, but rather peep like birds. But where the real word starts and what is the function of the word, beyond the transmission of meanings, here is an issue that could be first attached to the one who dares being a poet.*[28]

The young Romanian poets have to re-establish the whole experience of Eminescu, "an experience that was both one of the *word* in all the major languages, as well as one of the word in our language; one of the *thought* in almost all types of philosophies; one of the *fantasy* in almost all the terrestrial and celestial worlds."[29]

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[28] *Ibidem.*

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