# THE CONCEPT OF *NORM* FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF INTEGRAL LINGUISTICS

**Nadia OBROCEA**
West University of Timișoara, Romania

**Abstract:** The concept of norm, developed by Eugeniu Coșeriu in 1952 as part of the trichotomy *system, norm, speech,* and later related to the notion of *language type,* was defined as a system of obligatory, common, normal actualizations and traditions of the language, which are not necessarily functional, and which vary from one community of speakers to another. In the view of the Tübingen linguist, within the same linguistic community and the same functional system more types of norms can be identified: the norm of the literary language, the norm of the vernacular, the norm of familiar language, the norm of formal language, the norm of vulgar language, etc. In what concerns norm, the Romanian linguist also makes another important distinction, namely that between social norm and individual norm. The present paper deals with linguistic norm, as it was theorized by Eugeniu Coșeriu, and then focuses on the norm of the Romanian language in particular. Considering the "architecture" of historical language, i.e. the internal differences of the language: diatopic, diastratic and diaphasic – also described and analysed by Eugeniu Coșeriu – it will illustrate the division of the norm within the Romanian language.

**Keywords:** Eugeniu Coșeriu, language, integral linguistics, norm, system, type, speech

## 1. Introduction

Eugeniu Coșeriu's famous study, *Sistema, norma y habla*, published at Montevideo in 1952, represents for linguists, whether they are followers of Coșeriu or not, a fundamental theoretical milestone in the definition of the concept of linguistic *norm*. Eugeniu Coșeriu's approach is characterized by a genuine depth of vision, which focuses on relating the notion of *norm* to other linguistic concepts, and by methodological complexity. Significant for the uniqueness of his perspective in linguistics is also the comparative and integrative way in which he makes use of multiple perspectives upon articulate human language, in its essence as well as in its reality.

The present paper will first outline the most significant aspects of Eugeniu Coșeriu's conception of linguistic norm. This approach will be complemented by a brief discussion of the norm of the Romanian language from the perspective the "architecture" of the historical language also theorized by Eugeniu Coșeriu, which will illustrate the diversity of the language norm.

This topic regarding Coșeriu's view of norm has been of great interest to linguists, and was approached in various ways over time: purely theoretically, by the descriptive and/or critical presentation of Coșeriu's perspective upon norm (Lara 1983; Constantinescu 2006; Dupuy-Engelhardt 2009); in an interdisciplinary manner, by the presentation of the impact the concept of *norm* has had upon other fields of linguistics, such as cognitivism, the neuropsychology and the pathology of language (Jacquet-Andrieu 2003, 2007, 2011), language teaching (Montes Giraldo 1976; Jacquet-Andrieu 2003, 2007) or interpretive semantics (Rastier 1987; Missire 2004); at the level of

practical applications, by the use of Coșeriu's theory of norm in researching the units of historical language (Milică 2009, 2012), etc.

## 2. The concept of *norm* in integral linguistics

As already known, Eugeniu Coșeriu's starting point in developing the concept of *norm* is one of Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic oppositions, namely that of *langue* and *parole*, an opposition upon which, as Eugeniu Coșeriu himself emphasizes, there is no general agreement among linguists. Integrating the notion of *norm* within the above-mentioned Saussurean opposition, Eugeniu Coșeriu proposes a monistic theory, grounded in the concrete reality of articulate human language, more precisely in speech acts, in place of Ferdinand de Saussure's dualistic conception. Moreover, instead of the distinction between *langue* and *parole,* Eugeniu Coșeriu advances a far broader theory, based on concepts such as *language*, understood by Eugeniu Coșeriu in a specific sense, as a historical notion, *system* and *norm*, seen as structural concepts, and *speech*. In other studies of great explanatory force, Eugeniu Coșeriu also includes in this relationship the concept of *linguistic type*, which "contains the functional principles and technical categories of a language: the types of processes and functions, the categories of distinctions, oppositions and structures which characterize it" (Coșeriu 2000, 284).

Analysing previous approaches of the concepts of *langue* and *parole*, taken individually, such as those of Alan Gardiner, Otto Jespersen or W. von Wartburg, Eugeniu Coșeriu highlights the various "inner contradictions" within them. Comparing the way in which various linguists define the Saussurean notions of *langue* and *parole*, Eugeniu Coșeriu concludes that these definitions display "a series of discrepancies regarding their nature and extent," discrepancies resulting from the variety of the criteria adopted and from the levels at which the respective oppositions operate: "the level of the external determination of language," "the morphological level of language," the level of the "essence of the language" (Coșeriu 1993, 53-54). In his view, the "theoretical" divergence between these two notions stems from the fact that the researchers in question do not understand the same thing by *langue* and *parole.*

In his analysis of Saussure's approach in the delineation of the notions of *langue* and *parole*, Eugeniu Coșeriu underlines that the opposition between *langue* and *parole* appears to be established by Ferdinand de Saussure, in his work *Course in General Linguistics*, exclusively based on the opposition society/individual, since he frequently insists upon the social character of *langue*. By comparing the formulas of *parole* and *langue* advanced by Ferdinand de Saussure, Eugeniu Coșeriu concludes that *langue* should not be differentiated from *parole* based on its social character, but due to the fact that *langue* is where everything that is invariable in linguistic acts is preserved (Coșeriu 1993, 55).

A significant point in Eugeniu Coșeriu's interpretative approach is the comparison of Ferdinand de Saussure's above-mentioned opposition (*langue*/*parole*) with Wilhelm von Humboldt's earlier one between *Tätigkeit* and *Werk*, based on Aristotle's view of the concepts of *enérgeia* and *ergon,* as well as with Karl Bühler's distinction among *Sprechhandlung* (speech action), *Sprachwerk* (language work), *Sprechakt* (speech act) and *Sprachgebilde* (linguistic structure) (Coșeriu 1993, 55-56). This comparison is undertaken by Eugeniu Coșeriu by operating the distinctions that lie at its core, namely

those between concrete/abstract or material/formal, individual/social or subjective/objective and individual/interindividual.

In the Romanian linguist's view, within the opposition *langue/parole,* difficulties arise with the notion of *langue*, since Ferdinand de Saussure advances in his *Course in General Linguistics* three definitions for this notion: "The language – mental reality, *Sprachbesitz,* that is the linguistic structures that exist in the consciousness of the individuals who speak the language; the language – social institution, that is the common system which can act as a reference point for the infinitely variable speech of the individuals within a community; language as a functional system, that is a system of significant differences and oppositions" (Coșeriu 1993, 57). In Eugeniu Coșeriu's view, the first definition of the language is equivalent to the second, as the concepts of *mental reality* and *social institution* converge, but the concepts of *social institution* and *functional system* cannot be coextensive, since in any language there are systematic and interindividual aspects, normal in that particular society, that is to say institutional, which are not functional, and do not belong to the ideal system of differences and oppositions of the language (Coșeriu 1993, 57).

A revealing aspect of Coșeriu's theory regarding the concept of *norm* is that it belongs to the area of *langue*, which can be seen both as a normal system and as a functional system. Thus, if the system of the language is reduced to the abstract system of functional invariants, an equally abstract system of normal invariants is interposed between them and speech. The speaker performs speech acts according to previous models "which they include and exceed" (Coșeriu 1993, 59).

Eugeniu Coșeriu also makes three fundamental observations regarding the concept of *norm,* regarding its relation with the system on the one hand, and its typology on the other: a) the norm, that is the normal, constant phenomena that exist in a language, and not only in the actual speech of a particular individual, cannot be attributed to concrete speech, since these variants, due to the very fact that they are obligatory, must in fact be considered invariants, representing already a certain level of abstraction as compared to individual speech (Coșeriu 1993, 60); b) more than one norm may correspond to one system (Coșeriu 1993, 64); c) between speech and social norm, individual norm can be introduced as an intermediate degree, distinguished by eliminating only the completely new and occasional elements of speech, and preserving what constitutes a consistent model, or repetition, in the speech acts of the individual in question (Coșeriu 1993, 64).

In Eugeniu Coșeriu's perspective (1993, 64), the system appears as a system of possibilities, of freedoms, requiring only conformity with the functional conditions of the linguistic instrument, while the norm represents a system of constraints, of obligatory and traditional actualizations, limiting the speakers' freedom of expression:

> „Si se nos permite una analogía, diriamos que el sistema no se impone al hablante más de lo que la tela y los colores se imponen al pintor: el pintor no puede salirse de la tela y no puede emplear colores que no tiene, pero, dentro de los límites de la tela y en el empleo de los colores que poseo, su libertad expresiva es absoluta. Podríamos decir, pues, que, más bien que imponerse al individuo, el sistema se le ofrece proporcionándole los medios para su expresión inédita, pero al mismo tiempo comprensible para los que utilizan el mismo sistema. Lo que, en cambio, se impone al individuo, limitando su libertad expresiva y comprimiendo las posibilidades ofrecidas por el sistema dentro del marco fijado por las realizaciones tradicionales, es la *norma*. La norma es, en efecto, un sistema de realizaciones obligadas, de

imposiciones sociales y culturales, y varía según la comunidad. Dentro de la misma comunidad lingüística nacional y dentro del mismo sistema funcional, pueden comprobarse varias normas (lenguaje familiar, lenguaje popular, lengua literaria, lenguaje elevado lenguaje vulgar, etc.), distintas sobre todo por lo que concierne al vocabulario, pero a menudo también en las formas gramaticales y en la prononciación: así el sueco tiene una prononciación literaria y elevada y una pronunciación usual y corriente" (Coșeriu 1952, 169).

The opposition between system and norm solves, according to Eugeniu Coșeriu, the difficulties of Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, as follows: If the opposition is established between system and actualization, *langue* comprises only the system, and *parole* contains the norm and the speech. If the opposition considered is that between concrete and abstract (material/formal), *langue* contains the system and the norm, while *parole* contains actual speech. If one takes into account the opposition between social/individual, then *langue* contains the system and the social norm, and *parole* contains the individual norm and speech. If we consider the opposition expressive originality/repetition, then *langue* contains the system and the norm and partially speech, and *parole,* speech (Coșeriu 1993, 64-65).

Expanding the field of investigation even further by introducing the notion of *language*, as he understood it himself, Eugeniu Coșeriu states that language is a historical concept, while system and norm are structural, and therefore synchronic, concepts. In what concerns the relation between *language, system, norm* and their limits, Eugeniu Coșeriu believes that: a) in a certain state of the language, one can distinguish a system and one or more norms (Coșeriu 1993, 65); b) the limits of the system may not coincide with the limits of the language (Coșeriu 1993, 64-65); c) in a certain sense, the system is more extensive than the norm, and in another sense the norm is more extensive than the system (Coșeriu 2000, 280-281).

According to Eugeniu Coșeriu, the distinction system/norm solves the difficulty and the problems of the opposition language/speech, contributing to the clarification of the functionality of language and justifying the basis of disciplines such as structural grammar as science of the system, descriptive grammar as science of the norm, phonology as science of the system and phonetics as science of actual speech, even contributing to the clarification of the phenomenon of linguistic change, which can be defined as rebellion against norm, allowed by the system (Coșeriu 1993, 66).

## 3. The norm of the Romanian language

In Eugeniu Coșeriu's development of the concept of linguistic *norm,* the Romanian language represented, alongside other languages, a basis, and a support of great explanatory force. In this context, the following references are made to the Romanian language:

„Fenómenos análogos pueden observarse en su devenir en el rumano actual. En efecto, en rumano los nombres de dos géneros (masculines en el singular y femeninos en el plural) que no terminen en -e o -iu pueden tener el plural en -e (*scaun*, silla, pl. *scaune*) o en -uri (*cer*, cielo, pl. *ceruri*). Generalmente tienen -e los polisílabos y -uri los monosílabos; sin embargo, muchos nombres admiten las dos desinencias (*chibrit*, fósforo, pl. *chibrite* o *chibrituri*) pero la norma nunca es indiferente, prefiriendo siempre una de las dos formas (y parece desplazarse cada vez más en favor de la desinencia -uri). Una serie de diminutivos rumanos presentan

en el singular los sufijos intercambiables *-ică* o *-ea* (*rândunică*, *rândunea*– golondrina; *floricică*, *floricea* – florcita) y hacen el plural, respectivamente, en *-ici* o en *-ele* (*rândunici*, *rândunele*); las dos oposiciones son permutables en el sistema, pero la norma prefiere *-ică* en el singular y *-ele* en el plural (*rândunică – rândunele*, *floricică – floricele*), por lo cual está surgiendo en el sistema una nueva oposición *-ică/ -ele*, por cruce de las dos precedentes. Pero el caso más interesante es el de los femeninos en *-ă*. Pueden éstos tener el plural en *-e*, sin metafonía (*casă – case*) o el plural en *-i*, con metafonía (* țară*, país, *țări*). En el sistema, los plurales son equivalentes, tanto que prácticamente todos los nombres indicados podrían tener ambas formas; sin embargo, en cada caso, la norma prefiere netamente una u otra de ellas, con tendencia general a preferir, según parece, las formas en *-i* con metafonía (el plural normal de *școală* – escuela, es actualmente *școli*, pero la norma anterior, *școale*, se conserva en el nombre de una institución creada en el siglo pasado: *Casa Școalelor*" (Coșeriu 1952, 155-156).

In order to study the norm of the Romanian language in its diversity, it is necessary to introduce the concept of architecture of the historical language, reached by Eugeniu Coșeriu by operating several fundamental oppositions: 1) the distinction between knowledge of the language and knowledge of "things"; 2) within the knowledge of language, he differentiates language from metalanguage; 3) at the level of primary language, the opposition between synchrony and diachrony; 4) the difference, at the level of "synchronic" language, between the free technique of discourse and repeated discourse; 5) the opposition between the "architecture" and the structure of the language (Coșeriu 2000, 250).

A historical language, as Eugeniu Coșeriu underlines, is not perfectly homogeneous; it always displays internal variety, namely within it there are: a) diatopic differences, i.e. differences in geographical space; b) diastratic differences, i.e. differences that depend on the social and cultural levels of the linguistic community; c) diaphasic differences, among different types of modes of expression (Coșeriu 2000, 263).

These types of differences are related, in the sense of the relative homogeneity of linguistic traditions, to three types of units, of more or less unitary systems, within historical language: 1) syntopic units or dialects (units considered at a single point in space or which do not present spatial diversity); 2) synstratic units, or language levels (the so-called "sociolects"), that is units considered within one socio-cultural stratum only, or which (practically) display no diversity in this respect; 3) units of expressive mode, with no diaphasic differences, i.e. synphasic units or language styles (for example: familiar style, epic literary style) (Coșeriu 2000, 265-266).

In Eugeniu Coșeriu's view, a historical language is never a single linguistic system, but a "diasystem," an aggregate of "dialects," of "levels" and "language styles" (Coșeriu 2004, 266).

It is important to note the fact that historical languages do not have a unique norm, but contain, in accordance with their configuration: diatopic, diastratic and diaphasic, several norms. The specificity of syntopic, synstratic and synphasic units derives from certain characteristics, which have become norms for those particular units, that is obligatory and traditional actualizations, obviously manifested at all levels: phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, etc.

The diversity of the norm of the Romanian language can be illustrated by a series of normal phenomena specific to the syntopic, synstratic or synphasic units of the

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language. From the category of dialectal norms, intensely studied in Romanian dialectology, we can mention: a) at the phonetic level, the palatalization of the labial represents a norm for the Moldavian subdialect – thus, we have *ghini* instead of *bine*; the palatalization of *ti*, *te* to *č* and of *de, di* to *ǧ* is specific to the Banat subdialect, and thus we have *ghince* for *dinte*: b) morphologically speaking, the simple perfect tense constitutes a norm for the Oltenian subdialect, denoting a past action performed on the day of speaking; in the Banat subdialect, the verb *a fi* has the form *(eu)mi-s* for *(eu)sunt*; the noun *casă* has the plural *căsi*, instead of *case*, in Transylvanian language varieties; c) from a lexical point of view, *harbuz*, for *melon*, represents a norm within the Moldavian subdialect; the use of *cocon* instead of *copil* is specific to the Maramureș variety, etc.

In what concerns the Romanian vernacular, as a synstratic unit of the Romanian language (see Coșeriu 2000, 264), we must note that it has not represented a subject of great interest in Romanian sociolinguistics. Romanian lexicographic research has approached this language unit tangentially, by recording and marking the lexical elements used in the vernacular language, as in the following example: „búrtă s.f. 1. (Pop.) Abdomen" (MDA).

Regarding the diaphasic differences of the language, Eugeniu Coșeriu states:

"Diaphasic differences can – depending on communities – be significant, for example, between spoken language and written language, between 'ordinary' language (germ. *Umgangssprache*) and literary language, between the familiar way of speaking and the 'public' (or maybe ceremonial) one, between ordinary language and administrative language, etc." (Coşeriu 2000, 265)[– my translation].

In what concerns the styles of the Romanian language and the norms pertaining to them, they have been frequently and thoroughly researched by Romanian stylistics. Among the normal phenomena pertaining to these units, we can mention: the vocative form *Doamne*, instead of *Domnule*, of the noun *Domn,* representing a characteristic of the Romanian religious style; the lexical element "*Pârât, -ă* 1-2 n. fem. (Legal) (Person) against whom a plaintiff directs his complaint or request in a civil suit" (MDA), a lexical element characteristic of Romanian legal language; „Epistáxis sn (Med) Hemoragie nazală [nasal haemorrhage]" (MDA), an element of Romanian medical terminology and norm of the Romanian medical language, etc.

## 4. Conclusions

In Romanian linguistics, Coșeriu's theory was not widely embraced, but its adoption, at a theoretical and practical level, has intensified lately, particularly due to the constant efforts of the *Centre for Integralist Studies* in Cluj, coordinated by Professor Mircea Borcilă. Similarly, diatopic, diastratic and diaphasic differences of the Romanian language have not generally been approached in the light of Coșeriu's concept of linguistic *norm.* Ioan Milică's recent research (2012) regarding the Romanian argot – a phenomenon understood not as vocabulary, but as norm –, undertaken in the spirit of Coșeriu's linguistics, represents a singular and revealing contribution in this respect.

In Romanian linguistics, there is a constant tendency to refer back to standard language – the "exemplary language," in Coșeriu's terms – and to resort to it repeatedly, thus ignoring an important part of the concrete phenomenon of language. Admittedly,

diachronically speaking, standard Romanian is rooted in dialect and has intersected extensively with other variants of the Romanian language, but at the synchronic level this type of relations do not persist as such. For instance, the so-called literary style of the Romanian language can no longer be related to the standard language, since it represents the full functional richness of the language, while the standard language represents a variety with numerous and strict norms (cf. Coșeriu 1994, 153).

It should be noted that, paradoxically, linguists accept that certain norms of the vernacular language or other units of the Romanian language, norms which are not characterized by a high degree of generalization, become norms of standard Romanian, in the context in which they (linguists) are the only institution which has the power to intervene by its decisions between the (commendable and in fact inevitable) creativity of the speaker, and a variant of the language which should be less open to change, more rigid than other variants of the language, and more autarchic.

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