

Monica Heintz

Redefining the notion of a ‘work ethic’

(chapter 8 from Heintz, M. 2006. “Be European, recycle yourself!” The Changing Work Ethic in Romania, Muenster: LIT Verlag, 212 p).

1. *An ethic of work or an ethic of human relations?*

After 1989 in Romania, the concept of a ‘work ethic’ was one of the first to be discarded, ‘compromised’ by its association with the old regime. For most people the concept contained the socialist meaning they were used to (see Chapter five), thus as they rejected socialist practices, they rejected the concept as well. As a result, there was a lack of conceptualisation of what one would normally call a ‘work ethic’ and a lack of framework for discussions of an appropriate work ethic, which affected the homogeneity and the control of attitudes towards work at every workplace. In order to fill this gap, opinion leaders recently began to propose an imported ideology of work corresponding to the Protestant work ethic – if such a unified set of moralities exists and if the information they had about it was accurate. The new rhetoric used frequently by politicians¹ plays on a comparison between the positive capitalist work ethic and negative Romanian work practices. This is why, in 1999-2000, most of my interviewees wondered whether ‘there is such a thing as a work ethic among Romanians’, the inference being that because of the negative Romanian mentality, there was no work ethic at all. Though denying the logical value of this inference, a careful analysis would indeed lead us to question the existence of a specific ethic that has work as its object. The debate then becomes similar to that between formalists and substantivists in economic anthropology: we could identify for the purposes of clarity and comparison, for the use of Western readers, a set of values corresponding to a ‘work ethic’, but we might then overlook the specificity of the notions of ‘ethic’ and ‘work’ among Romanians. Inquiring into work ethics would then correspond to one of the ideological concerns frequent among scholars of socialism and postsocialism. I shall remind the reader that, surprised by Romanians’ frequent reference to work values when referring to this mentality (see Chapter one), I chose the term

¹ ‘We come to work, not to power’ was the Liberal party candidate’s slogan for the November 2000 elections. Or, more than a hundred years ago, another liberal politician observed: *‘Industria romanească e admirabilă, e sublimă, putem zice, dar lipsește cu desăvârșire. Societatea noastră, dar noi, ce aclamăm? Noi aclamăm munca, travaliul, care nu se face deloc în țara noastră!’* (Caragiale, 1982:161). (‘The Romanian industry is admirable, sublime we could say, but it is lacking completely. It is our society, but we, what do we acclaim? We acclaim work, labour, which nobody performs in our country’! (my translation)).

‘work ethic’ as a conceptual tool of inquiry into practices and values that led to these mentalist explanations.. For the sake of convenience, I began my analysis of work values and practices with a formalist approach. On the basis of this analysis, I can now try to reformulate the notions of work and ethic within an ‘indigenous’ framework. This is not an easy task today, as Bucharest service sector employees live in a globalised world and have adopted the language of capitalism for themselves in order to compete on the same economic grounds. Both formalists and substantivists would be pressed to clarify the empirical evidence upon which their theories are based. What is an indigenous concept in this case: a concept used by the natives or a concept that, in the anthropologist’s view, best describes an indigenous reality? Answering this question is essential, because my ethnographic material shows that the two meanings of the term ‘indigenous concepts’ are different.

1.1. The Romanian work ethic – a heterogeneous set of values

I began in Chapter three by considering the minimal definition of the term ‘work ethic’ as ‘rules of conduct in work’ (Oxford Concise Dictionary). Consequently I reviewed the rules given by managers in the workplace. Though the definition is restrictive, the term ‘rules’ remains convenient because it allows a gradual move from practical norms of behaviour at work to the values underpinning them. These values are ultimately what I define as a work ethic. I inquired into the practice (‘how?’), only to arrive at the reason behind the practice (‘why?’).

My analysis showed that the three enterprises I studied were very heterogeneous with respect to rules and their enforcement, varying from a strict imposition of rules in the marketing department at Beta, to an absolute freedom of movement and thought in the NGO Alpha, where only some principles were presented to the employees; from sets of rules (principles) with their own internal coherence in Alpha to incoherent measures in the Gamma Music School; from Fordist totalitarian rules in Beta to democratic idealism in Alpha. In contrast to the uniformity of the socialist period (see Chapter five), today the ideology of work differs across enterprises, depending on the position of enterprises in the labour market or on individual circumstances.

Even inside each enterprise, managers appeared unable to provide a coherent, realistic image of the desired work ethic, themselves living under the influence of different ‘ideoscapes’ (Appadurai, 1991): echoes of the ideal-type of the Protestant work ethic pierce through the typical ‘new rich’ discourse (Sampson, 1996) of Beta’s manager; echoes of

Christian moral values are felt in the discourses of the director of Gamma, who is a practising Christian; echoes of the ideal-type of the socialist work ethic unconsciously penetrate the discourses of the intermediary manager of Alpha. To this we can add their concrete life experiences of the capitalist work ethic (for the Beta manager and the interim manager of Alpha, who had worked abroad), and that of the 'actually existing socialism' (for the Alpha intermediary manager and the Gamma director). A third layer of influences comes from their knowledge of ways to turn values around in daily practice, in good conscience. I have described in the previous chapters how this knowledge was forged under socialism and how it is still shared after 1989. The mixture of these often-incompatible ideologies and practices did not provide an efficient code of behaviour or motivating discourses for the employees. For instance in Alpha, where hard work was highly valued and employees strictly selected, managers did not fire those found to be useless or lazy, because 'they needed money too'. Thus, the driver, rendered useless by the fact that everybody in the NGO used her/his own car for business travel, was fired only after he had committed several thefts from the NGO's premises.

With no coherent or convincing set of values offered, employees were left on their own to establish the way they would behave at work, towards colleagues, managers or customers. The rules provided were insufficient or impractical. Employees relied on their own values in the same manner in which they relied on their own understanding of time. There were some apparent exceptions worth mentioning, because their analysis reinforces the above statement. One such exception was the pre-established terms of the dialogue between employees and clients in the marketing department, where the desired image they had to project was clearly described, the exact means for realising this were given (employees were obliged to repeat word-for-word a speech written by the manager) and the manager's control was tight. Only the Image, the appearance benefited from such attention. Pretending had an important role under socialism: it used to hide a different reality. At Beta, no coherent set of values was promoted, but there was a coherent technique of projecting some imaginary values that the manager considered important for enticing clients. However, there were many breaches in this projection too, as we will see in some ethnographic examples from Beta that follow.

1.2. Redefining work ethics through practice

From the ethnography of my three main field sites, it appears that dysfunction can arise even when rules are internally coherent, the structure of power allows them to be enforced,

and when the rules of conduct fit (theoretically) the needs of the organisation. This is because employees also interpret the rules in light of their understanding of work derived from the larger social context, and they fill the existing gaps with their own rules/interpretations (not to mention that managers' practices are also sometimes inconsistent with their stated values). Opinion leaders, politicians and managers may try to change values by imposing them from above (this attempt was described in Chapter one, and criticisms of theory before practice are expressed in Chapters five and six), but people would still influence them from below through their practices. Work practices influence work ethics, and the attempted creation of or change in a work ethic that remains a purely theoretical, ideal endeavour has few chances to survive. The socialist state, which played deaf to the voice from below and tried to educate people 'in the spirit of work', finally collapsed. Current sociologists and social historians (Bauman, 1998) overlook the importance of ordinary people's practices, which forced leaders to change their discourses and mobilised values over time. Leaders are motivated to adapt their discourses by attempts to maintain social order. A work ethic may change through an encounter with other sets of values (such as the Protestant work ethic), but also under the pressure of employees' interpretations of rules as revealed through their practice.

Practices that do not conform to values are not necessarily perceived as deviant, because justification – as Wedel (1992) showed for Poles under socialism – or interpretation, which is often the result of negotiation, can make them compatible. Some examples below illustrate this point. In a public children's hospital, nurses skipped their regular check-ups on Saturdays, when the doctors were not around. This happened in full agreement with the children's mothers, and appeared even as a favour to them, as the check-ups were tiring – the children would start crying and it was difficult to calm them down afterwards. The nurses felt that if mothers did not notice that their children had a fever, it was safe to skip checking the children's temperature with a thermometer. Luckily, there were no obvious consequences of this interpretation of the rules; none of the children suffering a worsening of their health because of this Saturday looseness. However, a similarly loose respect for rules in an industrial setting, where one of my acquaintances worked, generated huge losses. This particular state enterprise had no stable contracts with clients and its production suffered greatly from the discontinuity of demand (at the time, for more than half the working time, employees were in 'technical unemployment', as there was no work for them). The enterprise had to develop marketing strategies to gain contracts with foreign firms (being ultra-specialised, the enterprise had to look for clients abroad), which were sometimes successful. When they would bid for a contract by sending a sample of the product, they would often

manage to get the contract, as the sample met the high quality standards required. But the mass production afterwards never reached the same quality as the sample, and partner firms would never renew their contracts. As my acquaintance, an engineer, explained, this was not because employees neglected their work, but because they did not take quality controls seriously. For reasons of convenience, some control tests were skipped or their result was not taken into account. A product was slightly bent? It was not removed from the production line, because workers could not imagine this being an obstacle to its use. For the German companies they sometimes worked with, the product had to be perfect. One young informant summarised the rationale behind malpractice or corruption among older employees: 'if it also works this way...[why not do it]'. The problem encountered by Romanian enterprises today is that they are increasingly confronted with European standards of quality and this approach does not 'work' any more.

These practices seem to correspond to the assertions about the Romanian mentality at work debated in Chapter one. What appear different are the reasons behind the practice. Analysis of the negotiation and interpretation of rules throws light on this point. Taken individually, in her/his own economic and social context, each employee has reasons for behaving in a certain way. Rather than being directed by her/his own character and work values, s/he undergoes internal moral conflicts when s/he deviates from these rules. Managers respond with their rules, which distance employees from adherence to their original values, until a relative state of equilibrium is reached. These new values and rules are at a certain distance from the ideal. The negotiation is double: both between different categories of staff (typically subordinates versus their managers) and between values (ideal) and practices (real).

1.3. An ethic of interpersonal relations

As a work ethic is linked to money and survival, other spheres of ethics constantly feed it. One example is cheating at work, discussed in Chapter four. In most service enterprises this comprises cheating another person, which bears on the ethic governing interpersonal relations. Furthermore, it is even questionable whether the values encountered in the workplace are linked to work and not to personal commitments – towards the employer, other employees, or clients. Several ethnographic observations have led me to question the existence of a particular ethic linked to work.

Lack of pride in one's work is frequent, and relegates work to the level of a means of subsistence and not of a provider of identity. Work practice is not necessarily the reflection of

certain work values, but may be only the result of life constraints. There is no need for work values if there are enough whips. Lengthy discussions about work commitments with my informants suggest however that only (temporary) historical vicissitudes have caused them to lose pride in their work, or to be more precise, in the status conferred by employment. Thus, the Music School teachers complained that the number of hours of teaching they had to do in order to secure their subsistence obliged them to do their work unconvincingly and without pleasure. Instrument teachers, however, are a particular category of employees among service employees, a vocational group, with a distinct professional ethic (a set of values pertaining to the profession of artist) even before having a certain work ethic. Most women employees under socialism used to take pride in the status conferred by work as superior to that of a housewife. Now they prefer to get early retirement by paying for false medical certificates in order to have both a pension and a reward from their work in the informal economy. Horia Bernea warned that ‘Romanians do not work for the sake of work, but for the result’ (Antena 1, 2000b). The conclusion I draw in my discussion of the task-oriented management of time in Chapter seven supports his statement. If the ‘results’ of work are not concrete, visible, satisfying, the employee feels no commitment to her/his work.

Given the loose control exercised on some categories of employees, notably state employees, and the difficulty of evaluating work in service enterprises, we could wonder what values motivate the employees to perform their work at all. We should remember at this point that work contracts have almost no value if not endorsed by a personal commitment – trust – between employer and employees (which generally precedes the signing of a contract), as the state cannot enforce contracts satisfactorily. Also, work commitments tend to be more respected between people belonging to the same social circle or network. Work requirements are often manipulated to satisfy a (recommended) client. The employee who does this often has ‘a good and understanding’ nature. In the marketing department of Beta, sales representatives happened to forget their own financial interest and their work commitments when obeying an inner obligation to be sincere toward a client. Personal contacts in service enterprises make work practices linked more to an ethic of human relations than to an ethic of work. Impersonal relations facilitate trickery or poor work performance; as I noted earlier, cheating the abstract state carries no moral responsibility. Therefore, an employee is motivated to work not by a sense of responsibility toward an abstract work requirement, but rather by responsibility toward the employer, the client or fellow workers. It is interesting to note that in Western organisations today, there is an increasing focus on personal relations, corporate behaviour, and forging a family spirit (Grint, 1998[1991]). This would suggest that

the capitalist work ethic has lost some of its power to motivate employees (as the state of abundance renders sustained work over the course of one's life less necessary) and needs to be replaced by an ethic inspired by the ethic of personal relations. This is also a re-establishment of a pre-industrial form of work, as Grint's history helix shows (1998[1991]:321).

Therefore, values intrinsic to human relations, not work values, can be found behind work practices in Romania. Work values are socially embedded values, not impersonal values imposed by the economic organisation. Criticisms of the current work ethic (motivated by Romanians' perception of the capitalist work ethic) in the debates over the Romanian mentality might find a more appropriate target if redirected towards criticising human relations.

2. *Work ethics – the impact of an ideology*

Though the previous observations would lead to discarding the concept of a 'Romanian work ethic' in favour of an ethic of human relations, the notion of a work ethic allows us to understand how people explain the economic crisis in terms of human relations ('the Romanian mentality'). Even if the concept of a work ethic does not fit the Romanian understanding of 'work' and 'ethic', the concept is present as an outside European standard and it is in this capacity that it influences values. Romanians' general dissatisfaction with their current work performance is a sign of concern with work values and even a sign of a change in work ethic for those understanding mentality as a cultural, changeable product. Whether those who complain about the existing work ethic attempt to distance themselves from it or not in their work performance, they are still undergoing a transformation of values. I will show how values are negotiated under the pressure of this comparison and how the result bears more on human relations than on work.

2.1. What a lack of money means

Phrases such as 'they treat me as if I were the last man' (*mă tratează ca pe ultimul om*), 'am I not human like all the others?' (*nu sunt și eu om ca toți oamenii?*), or the revulsion expressed when saying 'we are treated like animals' (*ne tratează ca pe vite*) show that some forms of disrespect are considered to affect human nature deeply. Hobbes thought that two desires characterised human nature: the desire to survive and the desire for others' recognition

(1996[1651]). The desire for social recognition is strong in traditional Romanian society, as the aim of one's life is expressed as 'being like everybody else' (*să fiu în rand cu lumea*) and many actions are performed out of shame before others (*de rușinea lumii*) or out of fear for what they might say (*de gura satului*). For Romanians, respect is the basis of social recognition and one of the most sought-after ingredients in interpersonal relations.

Each time I discussed dysfunction and aberrant behaviour in the workplace with older informants, although the behaviour was resented and disapproved, my informants felt the need to excuse the protagonists: '[it is normal considering...] how much they are paid'. The bitterness with which these words were always uttered questions the apparent materialistic thinking behind this judgement: you pay me only so much, I put only so much effort in my work. The inability to calculate the value of work in money, as I noted in the discussion of time use in Chapter seven, and the limited choice one has between different jobs (and incomes), as mentioned in Chapter four, lead me to think that this materialistic reasoning is only a linguistic frame borrowed from capitalist discourses. Given that a good wage in Romania, one that is worth working for, is called a 'decent' wage, 'how much they are paid' means 'how much respect they are shown through their pay'. An employer (including the state) who does not provide employees with enough means to live, when they have worked for it, earned it, is said not to respect them. Retired people feel their small pensions are a rejection by society, a way of telling them to 'go and die, you are useless' (as one 70-year-old retired woman put it). A 40-year old state employee talked about how she was coping with life: 'it's just that they [the government, the state] do not let us die completely'. When people's incomes are not sufficient to meet their needs, it means that their work is not respected (is it then worth performing well?), but also that they themselves are not respected, given their dependency on money for survival. In his study of food riots in eighteenth-century England, E.P. Thompson asserted that 'it is of course true that riots were triggered off by soaring prices, by malpractice among dealers and by hunger. But these grievances operated within a popular consensus as to what were legitimate and what were illegitimate practices in marketing, milling, baking, etc. [...] An outrage to these moral assumptions quite as much as actual deprivation, was the usual occasion for direct action' (1971:78-79).

The director of the Music School, shocked by the impoliteness of a (private) shopkeeper (which she felt showed a lack of respect), asked her bluntly why she had been so well-served by another employee the previous day in the same shop. The employee replied straightforwardly, 'Yesterday, you talked to the boss. Do you know how much I am paid?' The Music School Director immediately became compassionate – but not because she

accepted an 'eye for an eye' attitude: you don't respect me (you pay me badly), I don't respect you (I do my job poorly), a conflict that would catch the client in between. She knew from her own experience that enduring others' disrespect results in uncertainty about one's own worth. She was sympathetic not simply because the boss was disrespectful of the employee (this she could have imagined to be the case for a whole lot of underpaid employees), but because this had made the employee feel miserable to the point of being indiscriminately rude towards others.

2.2 Discrepancies between work values and work practices: personal moral dilemmas

For any individual, values and practice should conform. If they do not, there are logically two ways to change this: either try to change the behaviour to match the values or to negotiate the values to make them fit the practices. The first attempt is morally recognised, the second attempt, which contributes to changes in a work ethic, is not necessarily condemned, as I have shown for the interpretation of rules in the enterprises I observed.

For the employees I worked with, both transformations from the ideal to reality and from reality to the ideal were taking place. Yet their values and their practices were so divorced from each other that employees remained divided, knowing the good and doing the bad in order to survive.

The socialist period was characterised by this complex relationship between ideals and reality (Chapter five), and most people grew up with this duplicity in their lives. The individual was comforted by the fact that s/he shared these moral ambiguities with everybody else (individual justifications often alluded to others' behaviour), and this diminished her/his responsibility in behaving one way and thinking in another. The individual solved moral dilemmas more easily by hiding in the collective, a move encouraged by socialist ideology.² At the end of the 1990s, the perceived abnormality of Romanian society was an excuse for the individual (Chapter six), but there was no excuse for the collective; the unfavourable comparison with the West condemned the whole country, as the terms of the discussion on the Romanian mentality show. Moral dilemmas become personal when the individual tries to single her/himself out from the crowd or, today, by comparison with the growing heterogeneity of behaviour and values within society. For instance, in the NGO Alpha, one employee whose commitment to work would have been considered high had he been an

² Those who stood out from the crowd were considered abnormal; Yurchak observes that this was the case with dissidents in Russia (Yurchak, 1997; 2006)

employee in a state enterprise was considered to be lazy and not interested enough in his work, and he sometimes saw himself in these terms as well. Differing codes of ethics (resulting from negotiations between managers and the most influential employees) in different enterprises, together with discussions of the capitalist work ethic in the media, act as a reminder of the 'ought-to-be' standards that one does not meet. This is something that did not happen during the last years of the socialist period. There were motivational speeches, but their wooden language meant that these were ignored by employees.

Justifications then multiply – they are proof that there is a certain ethic (of work, or of human relations, etc.), even if it is not followed. Like complaining, a common phenomenon among Romanians, justifications lead to two conclusions. First, there is an undesirable discrepancy between one's expectations and reality. Second, when people feel that they cannot do anything about this discrepancy, complaining or retroactive justifications remain the only solution. Surrender to the impossibility of respecting one's own declared values is manifest in self-victimisation.

The discordance between values and practice does not resonate equally in everybody's conscience; age introduces differences in this respect, as different age groups have distinct life experiences, social memories and life perspectives. I have already mentioned in the last chapter the age groups most affected by the lack of future prospects and a feeling of guilt for the past. These age groups are more aware of the moral dilemmas they experience in their daily lives. As for the younger generation, as Lass has noticed in the postsocialist Czech Republic, 'in this 'life as usual', everyone accepts that companies should be concerned with profits, bureaucracies with following the rules, and almost everybody, in their daily lives, with trying to work their way around both' (1999:273).

The existence of an ethic makes the discrepancy between values and practices painful and degrading. The standard of a work ethic cannot be rejected simply on the grounds that it is alien to Romanians' values, because Romanians wish to align themselves to European standards, no matter how high the cost.

The role of the concept of a 'work ethic' for understanding the economic crisis ends here, as it appears to be an ethnocentric concept that should be set aside in favour of an ethic of human relations.

My analysis of work values and practices has led me to conclude that a work ethic is not a theoretical, ideal product, at the level of moralities or political discourses. The existing work ethic does not coincide either with an ideology of work or with work practices; it is the

result of people negotiating between them. Romanian work practices show that despite a growing preoccupation with work values in discussions about the Romanian mentality, 'work ethic' remains an alien term in discussions about duties and responsibilities, generated only by comparison with the capitalist work ethic. Values linked to human relations are more important, forming the basis upon which the understanding of work is in fact built. This does not discard the importance of the rhetoric concerning work ethics, which influences employees and plays a role in the economic and moral crisis.

Changing the focus from an ethic of work to an ethic of human relations is not an easy task, as the latter intersects with all aspects of human life, and in some cases coincides with morality (defined in general terms). The topic of morality in social anthropology has seldom been addressed directly (Howell, 1997:6); only recently have anthropologists developed an explicit interest in moralities specific to different spheres of life. I can do no more here than to outline some directions of inquiry into the ethic of human relations centred on behaviour in the workplace in urban Romania. My aim is to illustrate my assertion that there is no special ethic of work motivating employees' behaviour in the workplace, i.e., that this ethic is not different from their ethic of human relations. This will be illustrated through a microanalysis of case studies. My second concern is to indicate the concrete facts that inspired people to explain the Romanian crisis in terms of mentality. Dysfunctions in work performance are related to broader dysfunctions in human relations, as I have attempted to describe in my account of city aggressiveness and in my conclusion on trust and social cohesion. Leaving the macro-societal level, I will focus here on face-to-face interactions, following G.H. Mead's suggestion that society is built continuously through exchanges or interactions between persons (1934).

3. *A case study in social interaction*

The case study that follows comes from my personal experience of renewing my identity card, and comprises several interactions between the client (myself) and employees from different state administrations. I chose this case because of the first-hand knowledge I have of all the interactions involved and because I consider it representative of relations between clients and public administrations, as well as between citizens and the state. While the action was unfolding, I had the occasion to recount it to several of my interviewees, thus triggering a flow of narratives of similar cases, which led to my conviction about its

representativeness. Although the case study directly illustrates only one side of the triangular relationship between client, employer, and employee, namely the relationship between client and employee, it also reflects indirectly on the relationship between employer (the state) and client, and between employee and employer.

When I arrived in Bucharest to conduct my field research, the first thing that I had to do as a Romanian citizen was to renew my identity card, as this is the only piece of identification recognised in daily life in Romania. A banal procedure that all citizens go through every ten years revealed itself extremely ‘complicated’, as police employees hastened to label it, in my case. Instead of ten days, the process lasted ten months. The complications with my renewal stemmed from the facts that: 1) my expired ID showed that I had once lived temporarily at another address during the last ten years; 2) the place which was my permanent address is owned by my father, who is resident abroad and could not testify *in person* that he had granted me permission to live in the flat. The legislation required this testimony *in person*.

Until these two problems were identified, I was sent several times from the police station where I used to be registered five years before, due to my temporary address, to the police station where I was registered due to my permanent address, and vice versa, but no employee felt it was the responsibility of their police station to solve the problem. Each time, employees dismissed me quickly, saying that they could not do anything for me and that I should ask somewhere else. Nobody suggested whom to ask or where. The conversation would not last any longer than this, and the employee would move on to the next client. When you happen to have a complicated case, employees will let you wait until they have dealt with easier cases (the ones that go mechanically, because you are also asked to present the papers in the order convenient to the employees’ work), often under pressure from impatient clients. One day, for instance, there were only four people waiting in line, but they were already exasperated. They had seen other people going through the back door and started raising their voices against privileged clients (with no evidence that such privilege was indeed what was going on). By the end of one week, as nobody wanted to look up the information for me, I had begun to find out by myself, from bits and pieces of information received, some alternative solutions to the problem.

Spending so many hours in queues, I was able to inform myself about many legislative aspects. For instance, in one of the police stations it was displayed that there is a substantial fine for those who do not register with the local police within one month of moving to an area. Though this law is displayed on the police door, when I brought up this rule in front of an employee in order to elicit a response from her, she promptly answered ‘you won’t fool me

with that'. Indeed, it is common knowledge that most students from outside Bucharest live during the whole period of their studies without changing their registered address, because they rent without lease contracts that would allow them to register. Given this occurrence, my argument for speeding up the search for a solution was futile.

On my fourth trip to the police stations, I managed to find, at the police station with which I had no connection besides a five-year-old stamp on my expired ID, an employee who suggested the solution of a temporary card which would indicate that I was '*fără spațiu*' ('homeless', but in socialist terms this meant 'no space allocated'). Two elderly women also queuing there congratulated me for my luck, as it appeared that this employee was especially nice compared to her colleagues. I had no choice but to feel very proud of my success.

However, shortly after the expiration of the temporary ID, which was valid for three months, I found myself in a situation that reminded me that still I had not solved the problem. Before leaving England, I had sent a large parcel of clothing to Romania, in my name, and had to collect it from the post office. I thought logically that my passport would prove my identity, as you do not need to be Romanian resident in order to receive mail. It did not. For this purpose, I needed an ID card, which I did not have, or a temporary ID card, which had just expired. On top of this, the card had no address on it other than the old address, and the mention of '*fără spațiu*'. The female employee got angry at my 'complicated' case and threatened to send the parcel back. She made some cynical comments referring to the fact that I had come from abroad thinking that I was due everything. I desperately tried to convince her that I was also the sender of the parcel, as was clearly written on it, and that there was no use sending it back to England, because I did not live there anymore. Couldn't she give it to me because I was the sender? Neither of us was listening to each other. After this 'exchange' of comments, or rather parallel talk, she sent me off to one of her colleagues, who was supposed to check the contents of the parcel. (She came two minutes afterwards to see herself what the parcel contained). This involved opening the parcel and spreading all of the clothes, including quite a few underclothes, out in the post office. The contents of the parcel disappointed the woman. I had not lied about it and it did not have the glamour expected of a parcel coming from abroad. I was able to gather the torn packaging and its contents and to leave with it. I still do not know whether this check is usual, but from subsequent experiences, I know it is far from compulsory.

This experience was useful because it persuaded me that my ID odyssey had to resume. Now I was prepared to support my claim with a legal declaration given by my father in front of a public notary in the US, stating that he gave me permission to live in his flat. A friend

brought this declaration personally, seven months after my own arrival in Romania and after two other copies had gotten lost in the mail. Unfortunately, the employee (female, around 35-40 years old) who examined it at the police station found that the declaration was not valid, because it was not given through the Romanian consulate in Washington, but through a public notary. My explanations referring to the costs of a three-day trip to Washington for my father proved unconvincing. The employee told me that the police do not trust a declaration given by a public notary, because many notarised documents proved to be illegal. Romanian officials could not know if the declaration was in fact a false declaration that had been merely paid for. My argument that American public notaries could not be judged according to the same criteria as Romanian ones did not work. I could not understand how her reasoning would apply to my concrete case. The papers were just meant to prove that I was telling the truth about my address (in many countries this is done by a simple declaration given by the owner); I did not understand what type of scenario could have been invented. It seemed so improbable that I would go to the United States in order to make up a false declaration stating just that my father had agreed to me living in the flat in which I used to live once (a fact confirmed by the expired ID). The only solution was again a temporary card. The woman who had been nice to me previously was now angry because I had come again, thus abusing her kindness. However, she did agree to reissue a temporary card.³

Two months afterwards, my father was supposed to come to Bucharest and I wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to have him give a declaration in person at the other police station. His trip was unfortunately timed exactly when I was to be out of Romania for a few weeks, so we were not able to be together at the police station to submit the documents. Before leaving Romania, I went to check with the employee if it was possible to keep his declaration on file for one month, until I could come with the other necessary documents, which I also needed to bring in person. The employee recognised me on the spot and literally began to shout when she heard this further ‘complication’, arguing that employees were working in separate shifts, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and they could not pass documents from one to another. She sent me to her superior and introduced me in such a way that I did not have time to open my mouth before her superior (female, about 45 years old, with the grade of captain) also started shouting that I did not understand what they were telling me and I was asking them to disobey the law. She told me that I needed to be at the

³ It is interesting to note some formulas for requesting something in administrative offices as well as in the street: ‘I apologise for disturbing you’ (*mă scuzați că vă deranjez*) or ‘Don’t get upset/angry’ (*nu vă supărați*).

police station with my father at the same time, because they would not keep his declaration waiting for me.

I did not change my travel plans, but left Romania with the feeling that there was no solution to my problem. Strangely enough, during my absence, my father, after counteracting with threats of a scandal, managed to persuade the captain that it was not so difficult to keep the papers on file. He argued that the law might be wrong or outdated and so he asked for an exemption from it. In addition, he argued that both he and his daughter (a professor and a graduate student, respectively) were not abroad for fun, but for work, which implied that we deserved some respect. From his subsequent account, I understood that he also firmly asserted that, as a customer, he was not supposed to be at the disposal of the police employees, but vice versa. When I went back with my documents one month later, I first met with the same employee who, initially polite, exploded when she recognised me and loudly recounted my 'story' in front of some astonished clients who happened to be queuing there. She sent me to the captain where, naturally, I expected something worse, but the captain was unusually kind and polite, and dealt with me personally as with a privileged client and made my identity card. I must confess that this was even more embarrassing and it felt like the calm before the storm. Ten months after my first attempts, I was finally a citizen with the right papers!

I noticed quite quickly that this occasion was not unique, as I encountered the same unwillingness from the city council employees to transcribe my marriage certificate from English to Romanian. In this case the law had changed, and the superior agreed with my 'unusual' application (unusual only because Romanians rarely get married abroad and then return to register their marriage in Romania), but the employee refused to complete the certificate, invoking a personal interpretation of the law, which I apparently contradicted. Something that should have been solved in ten minutes took five days, two phone calls and three visits, of which one involved standing for more than two hours, just because they had forgotten about me. I then consulted with friends and colleagues, searching for answers and for ways to escape such unfortunate encounters. I was reassured that such circumstances were common; I did not have especially 'bad luck'. My friends were unanimous also in pointing to the solution: 'complicated' administrative cases need to be paid for. As I did not comply with this rule from the start, I had to pay more in time and money. Indeed, one year later when I had to renew my passport urgently, it took me half an hour and 200,000 lei (ten euros) to do so, because the policeman at the entrance told me simply '*trebuie sa dam ceva*', which means

literally ‘we [he and I] have to give something’ to the others for their work on the passport, and he stated the amount needed. By then I was able to recognise such a demand.

This case study has different levels of relevance. As a whole, the story illustrates those features related to a Romanian work ethic: a rigid bureaucracy and typical socialist indifference, bribing as a solution to inefficient formal relations, time consuming processes, lack of information, ambiguous legislation, and employees’ refusal to perform more than routine tasks. But if we focus here on the ethic of interpersonal relations, the case study also reveals other perspectives: the power game between client and employee, their reciprocal understanding, the performance of roles, and questions about status and intimacy. I will develop these perspectives further below. If we consider the length of this process, the repetitiveness of the encounters, and its implications for other aspects of daily life, it becomes clear that I am referring here not simply to a single event (renewing a document), but to a way of life. Therefore, its relevance for the individual surpasses that of a singular experience.

4. *Using language*

The idea that language is an autonomous but not an independent system of signs, a system that despite its internal structural coherence acquires meaning only in context, is due to Wittgenstein’s observation that a word is like a piece in a chess game and to the Chomskian revolution. The meaning of any one proposition is given by the content, the persons engaged in the communication, and the general context of the information – which includes the background, past inferences, etc. These distinctions come from the difference between language as a formal system and speech as an actual product of human contact. The ‘ethnography of speaking’ (Hymes, 1989[1974]) developed by sociolinguists is concerned not only with what is said, but also with how, by whom and in what context. The way of speaking a language is linked to social status, wealth, and education and determines a speech community. In his study in New York City, Labov (1972) revealed that the failure of black children to pass certain language tests was not due to their lack of exposure to ‘good’ English speech, but to their perception of the speech event. In other circumstances, black children proved very skilled in their use of language. The speech event is thus as important as the speech community. Austin’s term ‘speech act’, focusing on the power given by words (1962), and the study of the relevance of tropes for cognition led in the 1970s to an interest within British political anthropology in the use of language in the creation and distribution of power (Parkin, 1984). The politics of language are not restricted to the political domain – language is

political in all contexts because it launches a game of power and authority (Grillo, 1989). It is within this framework given by works in sociolinguistics and in political anthropology that I will analyse the identity card case study.

4.1. Language and power

One's level of competence in speaking a language determines the power one has in a conversation, and this is an important variable to be considered in the conflict-like encounter between service provider and customer or between employer and employee. In such encounters, the first party speaks the language of her/his profession and, as the conversation takes place in this field, s/he has the authority of competence over the interlocutor. Similar to what Frake (1972) describes as the oratory art of getting a drink in Subanun is the art of asking for things so that they get done in many service enterprises. The economy of shortage in Romania, in which supply was inferior to demand, and the many informal ways of attaining one's aims, helped create a type of interaction that in most cases new economic circumstances did not change and which does not have material justification. Comparison between the illocutory force (Austin, 1962) of a message in 'normal' conditions and its power in an encounter between employee and customer can reveal the importance of the situation and its perception, as well as the magnitude of its deviance from 'normal' relations.

In the many encounters with police employees for my ID card, I was often told that I did not know what I was asking for. Briggs notices that the lack of communicative competence is an important handicap for any fieldworker and that one of her/his aims is to acquire rhetorical competence (1986). Being Romanian, initially I did not believe that this would also apply to me, and I continued to think that I knew what I was asking for (a new ID), but I just did not know what the solution was given the circumstances – that I lacked the legal competence related to ID papers, not the rhetorical competence when dealing with the administration. In fact, I was ignoring the need to have a special competence in these circumstances. From what the employee at the first police station told me, it seemed that it was my responsibility, not hers, to figure out what I needed and she urged me not to come back until I could present her with a clear demand and the papers in the right order. As for the other police station, when I insisted that I knew nothing about these complicated ID papers, the employee managed to find a solution for me. She also adopted a maternal attitude, explained to me several times what I needed to do, and three months later scolded me because I still had not done it. In both cases, the employees used my incompetence in their profession

as a basis for action. The first scathingly refused to deal with me until I had acquired competence in speaking her language; the second was flattered by the sudden evidence that she was a ‘professional’, mastering a language that I did not know and that kept me in a weak position anyway. She decided to translate this language in ‘lay’ terms for me. While such power games are typical in client-employee encounters, they are not confined to this sphere and are frequent outside the workspace, inside the family or in the neighbourhood. Yet the status of the employee (who represents the state), the client’s dependence and lack of choice in engaging in this power game, in which s/he will necessarily be the loser, colour such administrative encounters differently and suggest outcomes unrelated to linguistic competence. The case below illustrates this.

I had a most striking experience of the power conferred by language during ten days spent in residence in a state children’s hospital. There I could frequently hear medical assistants shout at children’s mothers that they were ‘insane’ or ‘stupid’, just because they failed to understand where exactly to place medical appliances that they had used. In fact, nobody had told them where precisely, but one had to ‘catch’ such knowledge from others’ experience⁴ or to accept the consequences of their ignorance. For important mistakes, the language used was harsher. Only one member of the staff out of ten addressed mothers with the polite form (*dumneavoastră*); all the others used the informal form ‘*tu*’ (regardless of the age of the addressee). They scolded mothers for everything and it was difficult to decide when something that was done was right or wrong. The staff regularly looked down on the mothers as on disobedient pupils, interrogatively or disapprovingly. The superiority of their position (they decided when and whether to provide milk for babies, new sheets, etc.) was further strengthened by the professionalism/knowledge that their white coats presupposed and exhibited. During the ten-day period, I did not hear a single reply from any of the mothers, and I heard only sporadic comments between mothers regarding staff behaviour. Instead, mothers resorted to another means of dialogue, which was flourishing bribery. Even the poorest mother had bribed most nurses with chickens and eggs. While this did not improve the way nurses addressed her, it at least insured she got the medical appliance necessary for her child. The ‘meta-communicative competence’ was thus acquired when the dialogue started to involve money.

⁴ Briggs would refer here to the acquisition of meta-communicative competence (1986).

This example demonstrates how a monopoly falsifies the power balance between employee and client, privileging the former. It opens the way for her/him to abandon the official relationship, entering into an unofficial relationship suited to bribery. The client must develop the 'language competence' to perform in this context, yet maintains the chance to win at the language game through her/his rhetorical competence only. As I mentioned in the case of my ID card, my father had managed to persuade the police captain that the law itself might be wrong or outdated and did not need to use money in the dialogue.⁵ When I accompanied some female work mates on a shopping trip, I was surprised that these otherwise polite and gentle women could be so firm and assertive when asking for a product: 'I want X', and no 'please'. When there were significant delays in a supermarket, although there were plenty of employees around, my friend protested loudly against their slowness, stating the reason for her courage: 'What? Do they think they are the only ones who sell meat?' Ultimately, I do not know whether it was the change in the economic context (the disappearance of a monopoly) or my friend's rhetorical competence that brought the employee quickly to the till.

4.2. The predisposition to understand

It is important to clarify the final point made above, because it raises the question whether (set) structures or (open-ended) interactions shape reality, and whether status or person-related behaviour prevails in an encounter. In order to answer this, it is helpful to look at how face-to-face dialogue actually takes place, and not to restrict the analysis to the power given by social roles, social situation or type of event. An interesting approach to understanding what is beneath encounters comes from ethnomethodology. Based on an analogy between social structure and 'deep structure' (Chomsky's notion of a universal grammar (1968)), ethnomethodologists (Cicourel, 1973; Garfinkel, 1986[1972]) argue that the basis of culture is not shared knowledge, but shared rules of interpretation (Garfinkel, 1986[1972]). Unlike ethnolinguists, who derive individuals' knowledge from their terminology of classifications, ethnomethodologists look for the interpretative processes that underlie people's acts. People understand each other in social contacts because they presuppose some intelligibility in the other's speech, because they make the assumption of a shared common sense. This understanding enables them to discern the 'true' intent through the superficial clouds that the speaker creates. This is not knowledge, but a predisposition to

⁵ Even in this case I am not entirely sure that what had prevailed were not other characteristics of the interaction: the age of the client or his gender.

understanding, which everybody holds, whether a member of a community or an anthropologist, and uses daily as a method of approach to human contact. Here I will retain from the ethnomethodologists' approach only the rule of the 'predisposition to understand' in a dialogue.

In my initial encounters with employees at the first police station, it was obvious that none of the actors wished to understand the other. The employee kept stating what was the standard procedure for obtaining the papers, while I tried to find a reasonable alternative to prove what standard documents would have normally proven. The parallel discourses were however not due to a lack of understanding of the other's argument, but to a faint lack of understanding, compounded by the unwillingness to understand. 'I don't understand' seemed to be a valid excuse for refusing to comply with the other's demand. The unwillingness came however from different interactional goals: I wanted my problem to be solved without the 'declaration in person', the employee wanted the papers to be dealt with easily, without being bothered more than strictly necessary. The employee knew that there was a solution, profitable to both parties, which constitutes in many cases a hidden, common interactional goal: understanding each other and striking a personal bargain in a business-like relation. I, the client, not having acquired the necessary ability, ignored the way to formulate this solution; it was a deadlock. The following example shows the process through which such alternative solutions are reached.

There is intensive traffic in food and petty products between Hungary and Romania. Before Hungary's entry into the European Union, some products were cheaper in Hungary and some Romanians would travel even from Bucharest (twelve hours on the train) to buy products in large quantities in Hungary and then resell them at a higher, but still competitive price, in Romanian towns. For most people who did it, this was a unique solution to supplementing an income coming from state employment or retirement, and they did this on a regular basis. As one of the women (who worked in a hospital in Bucharest) put it: 'And what would we do if we were sitting at home?' Another woman from Brasov told me how she had surprised her husband by her sudden decision to leave the same evening for Hungary, when she had seen that their money would not suffice until their next pay day. The border police, whose job it was to stop this traffic, recognised all its manifestations and even the traffickers. In addition, the most active traffickers knew them individually. The police were supposed to fine the traffickers and/or destroy their merchandise. Traffickers had however never heard about any case of destroyed merchandise at this border, though they had heard this had happened at the Bulgarian border. During the trip I am narrating here, from the Hungarian

border to Bucharest, at the height of the foot-and-mouth disease restrictions (in March 2001), there were a total of five train inspections, some standard and some spontaneous, which traffickers successfully passed, paying highly, but still remaining in profit. None of the policemen, customs or train controllers, Romanian or Hungarian, refused bribes. Some bribes were real extortion, as it was not clear what the policeman or customs employee controlled, yet they bargained for higher bribes. The traffickers were vulnerable – they would sooner pay anything than lose their merchandise, but they could not be exploited indefinitely, as they did not carry significant amounts of cash.

The encounters comprised two phases. In the initial and official phase, the policeman (or customs official, etc.) checked the luggage and announced disapprovingly the existence of hidden meat inside, then disappeared outside the cabin with the passports. In the second phase, the policeman would return to bargain over the amount of the bribe, slipping money discretely from one hand to another, while maintaining a discourse of ‘We are all human, we should understand each other, this is what counts’, ‘Poverty, what can we do?’ or ‘We have to check, what can we do?’. I never saw phase two without phase one, although the train was full of traffickers, so the policemen merely mimicked amazement and disapproval in each compartment. The passage to the second phase of mutual understanding and personal business however always took place. It should be noted that the negotiation of the bribe was whispered, while the justifications for bribing/extorting were asserted loudly, with a feeling of liberation on both sides.

The existence of this unwritten rule, which says that by moving to the field of mutual understanding and personal business, both client and employee will gain, explains why in my encounters with police employees for my ID card, the unwillingness to understand was so persistent on both sides. They did not wish to solve the problem without a reward; I did not want to pay for what was supposed to be a free service. Did they not especially shout at me that I did not understand? By ‘not understanding’, I was failing the basic test and could not properly enter into either power games or purely rhetorical ones. The outcome of my repeated encounters with police employees (I solved the problem officially, and not through bribes) shows that there are ways to overcome the ‘structure’, that interactions preserve some of their open-endedness, and that the winner in the power game over understanding is not pre-determined. The ‘human’ price was however high: degrading encounters that were physically and mentally tiring, uncertainty, unfortunate interference with other projects, loss of time, etc.

My stubbornness in not understanding came from a lack of knowledge⁶ and from scientific curiosity about the limits of their stubbornness. Others might not be able to comply with the implications of ‘understanding’, because of lack of money or connections. For them, encounters maintain their degrading nature and might not even lead to a solution.

4.3. Role-playing

The customs employee in the above example performed consecutively two distinct roles: a ‘professional’ role and a personal role. In his *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1969), Goffman proposed the model of drama performance for the study of interactions. The role is a model of pre-established action to which the individual resorts in different circumstances. The model underlines the construction/adaptation of attitudes in an interaction: actors can perform/interpret their role in a variety of ways. It is often the case that in face-to-face encounters between service providers and customers, the roles (that we detect through language use: verbal and gestures) are intermingled in a less ordered way. A shopkeeper’s attitude could oscillate between a commercial attitude (‘Buy this, it is the best!’) and a ‘sincere’ attitude (‘In fact, in the neighbouring shop it’s cheaper.’), or between deference towards a potential client and sympathy towards those who do not afford to buy, or between the strictness of the role and personal antipathy/sympathy.

The language used (politeness, side comments, interest in the persona of the customer, etc.) is a good barometer of the interest and satisfaction employees find in their work. The case of the monopolistic state administration is peculiar in this respect, as the language used by employees is part of a strategy in a power game. In this case it is the existence of such power games that indicates the dissatisfaction that state employees find in their formal rewards (wages), which draws them to cheat the state and develop a parallel paid enterprise within state organisations. The employee who used to shout at me at the police station repeatedly commented that she had no responsibility; she did not make the laws – she was just an employee there. This epitomises the socialist legacy, but is also accentuated by the present inadequacy of laws, of management, of information, all of which serve to discourage employees from doing their jobs or taking pride in the civil service. This alienation of state employees from their jobs is an excellent example of Goffman’s ‘role-distanciation’ (Goffman, 1972). However, the over-representation of the alternative – corruption – gives

⁶ I knew bribery might be a solution, but I did not know how to bribe. The traffickers in the train told me that I would learn it with time.

another meaning to this role-distanciation. The employee could switch from the status of 'state representative' to that of a self-employed person who can deliver a (state) service. Moving to a personal ground, the employee discusses the situation on a person-to-person level and negotiates her price (the value of the bribe) with the client, as if the service itself were a commodity. Besides the particular understanding of work and ethic of work that influences this cheating of the state, there is also a particular ethic of human relations that obliges the client to play along. The employee's switching between roles should be also judged from this perspective.

In private enterprises, the 'personal' role, if it is not mimicked, but real, is more likely to be a manifestation of protest against the employer's interests and thus a sign of dissatisfaction with her/his job. In Beta, sales representatives moved to the personal role, departing from the imposed 'professional' speech, when they felt particularly tired of the manager's requirements and sided with the client in revenge. Most sales representatives felt that the product they were selling was not worth its price; therefore siding with the client, being sincere about the product, was also due to a moral crisis. Language switches from marketing discourses to personal advice as one's personal ethic takes over one's work ethic.

The language used indicates the role one is willing to adopt in a social interactions, but it also allows one to measure the gap between the role one takes for oneself by adopting a certain language and the actual fulfilment of the obligations/expectations linked to it. There are many cases in which the individual pretends to perform a 'professional' role while acting in her/his personal interest. The case of the janitor at the Music School fits into this framework: the janitor pretended to sweep whenever the director passed, playing the role of a hard-working employee for her, while in fact trying to escape her tasks as much as possible. Within the marketing department, the whole organisation (through its staff and physical setting) relied on its Western appearance and its effect on customers, while its actions did not live up to the role it pretended for itself: the services delivered were far from the quality that had been advertised when the contract was established. Furthermore, the manager's discourses in front of his potential employees presented him as a dynamic, successful businessman, willing to give his employees the opportunity of their lives: money, wonderful work conditions, career. In reality, the wages and the career perspectives were limited, and reflected back on the manager the image of an individualistic exploiter, not nearly as successful as he claimed to be. This deceitful 'face-work' (Goffman, 1967) was meant to attract good and enthusiastic employees to the business. When these employees discovered the discrepancy between appearance and reality, they would quit their jobs.

For Goffman, the importance of the drama model does not reside in the analogy between the theatre and the social scene, but in the fact that the set of roles that an individual can perform defines his/her self. Whether we adopt the supposition that the individual possesses one self and several roles (Goffman, 1969) or one self and several agencies (as in the case of Melanesian ‘partible persons’ described by Strathern, 1988), it still appears that the behaviour of the individual represents her/him, no matter how distanced this behaviour is from the individual through role-distanciation or the power of the others’ agency. Thus, there is no way one can completely hide behind a role or move away from it without being affected/changed by the performance of the role. The interactions in which an employee engages, the tricks s/he plays, remain written on the self.

4.4. The play on intimacy, or the dichotomy between public and private language

One can distinguish two spheres of language use, substantially different but very much intermingled. During the socialist period, these spheres were defined by the place where language was used: one sphere was the home; the other one was the rest of the world. This was a direct result of the fear of being heard making dangerous utterances in public (and everything that was not part of the daily routine was potentially harmful). The ‘home’ – whose extension cannot be easily defined⁷ – provided a safe, hidden place, where only trustful persons were allowed (kin, friends, but also acquaintances that ‘inspired’ trust). The language used differed in its structure, extent of vocabulary, etc., but even more significantly in the way it was handled, accompanied by facial and bodily gestures, as well as pauses and changes in tonality, listening, and courtesy towards others’ speech.

After 1989, the spatial cleavage was removed and now, the spheres cannot be easily defined. As in many other (Western) societies, one would expect that the language used at the workplace (especially in conversations with superiors, during meetings, or public speeches, etc.) would fall into the ‘public language’ category, and the language used at home would fall into the ‘private language’ category. The form and the relation of public to private language

⁷ In the case of the Gorale community studied by Pine (1997) in Poland, language defines the private sphere as being as large as the village. This delimitation corresponds to a divide between trustful/not trustful, but also after 1989 with a divide between values linked to work: inside the village, hard work and honesty are appreciated, while outside the village a trickster spirit and individualism are valued (Pine, 1999). In Bucharest today, if we define the private sphere according to the sincere, truthful form of speech that is supposed to be associated with it, then the ‘private sphere’ could extend from the nuclear family to the public as a whole, as the model of familiar talk, thought to represent positive values, has been extended to all scales. The most salient manifestations of this phenomenon are speeches made by TV presenters and politicians.

should be an indicator of the perception of the social context in which language is used, and of the social status and social role of those who use it. However, I noticed that both languages were used at the workplace, since the individual oscillates between different roles. Whether the language used is the public or the private language is a main indicator of the role and social distance one wishes to establish towards the interlocutor. The play on the degree of intimacy proposed becomes so important because of the positive connotations of 'private language'. I prefer here Goody's use of the terms 'status' and 'intimacy' (1978) instead of Brown and Levinson's definition of social roles in terms of power and social distance (1978), because these terms seem better suited to a context created more after a kinship model than after a professional model. Establishing kin-like relations through a more familiar use of language lends the speaker greater opportunities, and thus this language is preferred whenever possible, even in encounters with strangers. This policy has its limits however, as misplaced familiarity in language could endanger the success of the interaction.

The socialist period witnessed a proliferation of 'newspeak' or 'cooked' language (Thom, 1989), and its most extreme forms were encountered during work meetings and 'political information' meetings, typical for workplaces. After 1989 the reaction against cooked language led to ultra-liberalism. In some enterprises, besides some rhetorical changes celebrating the newly acquired 'freedom of speech', new forms of official language only replaced socialist language. However, managers of the most 'progressive' workplaces, who had to be called 'comrade X' before 1989, became very liberal regarding etiquette after 1989. They would make a point of claiming that the form of address is not necessarily a form of respect, thus letting employees decide for themselves how they would address their colleagues, managers or customers. The exception among the organisations I observed was again represented by the pre-established terms of the dialogue between employees and clients in Beta. Even there, the 'official' language was often abandoned when employees felt that more intimacy with clients would make them more co-operative. Indeed, clients complained about the stiff, ultra-polite language used by sales representatives and did their best to take the employees out of her/his role. Many were suspicious about too much politeness and challenged the employees to stop confusing them in this way. Officially, professional language is associated with a lack of sincerity, as socialist 'cooked' language was. Ultimately, the use of formal, polite, 'professional' language is adopted by managers, employees or

customers when they wish to establish a distance and is perceived as a sign of distrust.⁸ The manager of Beta manifested his appreciation towards employees by kissing them on the hair or the cheek, or by making an American ‘well done’ gesture with his hands. He would congratulate them formally only when he was upset by the overall result or when the congratulated employee was somebody he wished to get rid of. In the same enterprise, while very polite language was used in relations with clients, from the back room clients could hear the scandals made by the boss when he lost his temper.⁹ Simultaneously, both familiarity and vulgarity were showed to potential clients who happened to be around the ‘true’ face of the pretended ‘professionalism’, something they did not hesitate to communicate to sales representatives before systematically refusing to become clients of Beta. Language use on a public/private scale does not help to determine what the workplace meant for these employees, because of the conscious manipulation of personal and official languages at work. Most enterprises do not legislate their own language, but rely on the language employees themselves bring from outside, essentially from the media and personal education. The media imposes the private, public and even the professional language.

I will show the influence of the media through a brief analysis of polite forms of address, as Esther Goody has underlined politeness as an important goal-oriented strategy in conversation (1978). In Romania, politeness is not only intentional, but also reflects respect towards the other. There is a distinction in Romanian between ‘*tu*’ (you, familiar) and ‘*dumneavoastră*’ (you, formal), their use being dictated mainly by the degree of familiarity with the interlocutor. The use of ‘*tu*’ (you, familiar) immediately triggers a certain familiarity, and the rest of the conversation follows in the same vein. TV advertisements from the mid-1990s addressed the public with the familiar form ‘*tu*’ (you), in order to distance themselves from socialist advertisements, which were very formal and polite. Advertisements reflect the way certain enterprises (the most powerful ones, who could afford expensive advertising) address the customer. As they are received via mass media, they have the power to dictate the fashionable language in interactions with clients. At the time, quite naturally, shopkeepers and administrative staff would constantly address you familiarly with ‘*tu*’. Approximately from

⁸ Humphrey showed that Buryat used Russian instead of Buryat to speak about the state, as a way of keeping its (disapproved) policies at a distance (1989).

⁹ ‘Look at me, follow me, do you think I am your parrot? If you don’t work, don’t stay here. There are many jobs on earth. I don’t even deserve some respect? Get out and cry there. Do you think I am your parrot that you cry in front of me? Don’t invent excuses: Easter time, etc. You signed a contract; respect your job. I’ve had enough of paying your wages from my money. Have some respect for your job. It is unbearable to accept these types of clients like the one you had yesterday. What a f..., this 17-year-old girl? It is unacceptable for you to f... your business. Work well if you want to have a conscience, a job, a future. You have catastrophic results. I am nobody’s parrot. I paid 45 million for the phone bill (\$2250) ...’ and so on.

the end of 1999 onwards, I noticed an important change in the way advertisements addressed the public. They used the polite forms more often, and in turn shopkeepers began to correct themselves from 'tu' to 'dumneavoastră' when addressing their customers. It is however made clear that the polite form is addressed to the elder, and not to the customer as a category. Advertisements for beer, chocolate and dating agencies invite you as 'tu', because they are addressed to young, 'cool' people and are meant as unofficial, 'between us', internal signs of recognition. Advertisements for washing powder¹⁰ and the lottery invite you as 'dumneavoastră', because they are addressed to older people. One advertisement explicitly said, 'the winner could be you ('tu'); the winner could be you ('dumneavoastră'). Consequently, when the polite form is encountered in client-employee interactions, it is not because of the nature of the relationship, but because of the traditional respect due to seniority, which was shown by the experience of the previous years to be necessary in interactions with older customers. A tentative use of the polite form as a mark of respect towards customers, not as a mark of respect towards age, was made in Beta, where the manager required extreme politeness from the employees toward customers. Younger customers did not tolerate this behaviour; they explicitly asked for the informal use of 'tu'. Those employees who were unfamiliar with the use of formal address also broke the rule accidentally.

The above review shows how formal work and business relations become subject to the same rules as other human relations, and how they are dictated by traditional and mass media regulations, which impose respect for age and social status. While at the beginning of the 1990s the media took Western advertisements in their 'raw' form and translated them into Romanian, the market experience gained as years went by has led to the development of new forms of advertisements more adapted to Romanian culture, and thus also more efficient.

Since even in the media, before a large public audience, familiarity and side talk are used as a reaction to rigid language, it is no wonder that both types of language also coexist in workplaces. Returning to the distinction between 'being' and 'appearing', we notice that the memory of socialism (i.e., a time when 'being' was equated with 'private', and 'appearing' with 'public') distorts the distinction between public and private spheres. By the use of private ('real', 'sincere') language, one can claim truthfulness – why not use it and abuse it. The

¹⁰ Friends drew my attention to the fact that half of the advertisements on TV were for cleaning products; one commented that the level of civilisation is measured in kilograms of soap used per person, and that Romania did not have any chance to enter Europe unless it increased its consumption of soap.

emphasis on 'personal' or 'private' ultimately demonstrates how personal – as opposed to impersonal – relations, behaviour or categories are appreciated. This shows that the basis for ethics is to be found in human relations and not in some impersonal, abstract principles.

Conclusion

My analysis of the language used in work interactions is an analysis of work practice in service enterprises. Language is not secondary to work relations, but is their substance. Language and face-to-face interactions are also the vehicle through which I, as a fieldworker, obtained my information. Interactionist and ethnomethodological approaches provided me with useful tools for understanding what was at stake in an interaction. These tools also raised questions linked to the reason why certain forms of interactions or language are privileged over others. While it could be argued that it is already biased to try to show through an analysis of relations that relations, and not work, correspond to a particular ethic, I hope that my conclusions derived from the use of language (personal versus professional; play on the cultural norm of the predisposition to understand) are testimony to the absence of the concept of work from many work relations. The workplace is mainly a privileged place from where one can pursue her/his own relations and interests, as the study of the informal economy in Chapter four plainly shows. While employees may refuse to take responsibility for their work, they accept personal responsibility toward others. When this personal responsibility is also refused, the employee's moral ethics are questioned. The question of respect is recurrent in all the case studies above, where behaviour towards another person was disrespectful or was perceived as such by the other.

Most cases of interaction presented here show the existence of a double language, one standing for truth, and the other one for lies. There would be no duality if there were no will to appear different, to endorse a positive role – for practical or moral purposes – as there would be no discrepancy if personal interests did not constantly conflict with work and business interests. This duplicity between one's values and one's behaviour undoubtedly has consequences for the self, as Goffman's theory of self suggests.