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The Language of Manipulation and Control: Operational Methods of the Securitate in A. Belc's Film *Metronom*

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Abstract: The objective of the present study is to analyze the operational methods employed by the secret police agency (Securitate) in exerting influence and control over individuals within the Romanian communist society, as depicted in the film *Metronom* directed by Alexandru Belc. Through an analysis of the dialogue between the protagonist and a Securitate officer, this research explores the tactics used by the Romanian secret police to manipulate and deceive citizens, preserve power, and maintain social control. Drawing on critical discourse analysis and theories of power, this study reveals the subtle and insidious ways in which the Securitate operated within the Romanian society to silence opposition, spread propaganda, and maintain a stranglehold on society. In this line of work, a set of elements has been delineated, aimed at evaluating the manipulative nature of communist discourse strategies. The findings provide insights into the cinematic portrayal of the Securitate in Romanian communist society, highlighting the use of language and discourse as tools for controlling and manipulating both the population and individuals.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; manipulation; power; control; Securitate; *Metronom*

1. Introduction

This study focuses on the concepts of manipulation, control, and power to investigate the techniques used in the discourse of totalitarianism, particularly within the context of communist ideology in Romania. These discursive mechanisms played a pivotal role in reconfiguring communication between citizens and power-holding agents, with the goal of regulating expression. Consequently, the language of power became the endorsed language of the individual, marking political integration and the emergence of a new societal norm. From this frame of reference, the study of communist discourse has employed an interdisciplinary approach, with various fields exploring aspects like the social impact of language, the discourse of power, the ritualization of communication, insidious and blatant persuasion techniques, and the role of social groups in the communication act.

Utilizing the concepts from critical discourse analysis, this paper delves into the phenomenon of totalitarian communication, examining the mechanisms of control, manipulation, and re-education used to shape the behavior of individuals and masses. It specifically focuses on the language and rhetorical devices employed to intimidate and manipulate, such as imperative verbs, qualifying adjectives, personal pronouns, metaphors, repetitions, generalizations, wooden language, and doublespeak. The film *Metronom*, directed by Alexandru Belc, accurately illustrates the use of such devices deployed by the agents of the Department of State Security (*Securitate*), the Romanian secret police, to influence individuals' speech and behavior. Set in October 1972, the film portrays a group of secondary-school seniors who organize a subversive gathering involving a letter intended for Radio Free Europe. The *Securitate* intercepts the letter, leading to investigations and threats.

The working hypotheses of this study focus on examining the two parties involved in communication: the sender, in this case, Lt. Col. Biriş, a vector of ideological power, and the receiver, represented by Ana, the film's protagonist. Ana is charged with engaging in



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“harmful and dangerous liaisons with foreigners, and actions that undermine the integrity of the Romanian state”. Initially reluctant to cooperate, she is pushed into writing a statement, which ultimately reveals the intricacies of manipulation, coercion, and control within the dialogue between her and Lt. Col. Biriş. This dialogue forms the core subject of study in the present article.

2. Methodology

From a methodological perspective, the present research study is founded on the scrutiny of a small corpus—a transcript of the dialogues between the protagonist, teenager Ana (played by Mara Bugarin) and a communist official, Lieutenant Colonel Nicolae Biriş (played by Vlad Ivanov). The research method is qualitative and primarily entails a detailed analysis of language through the application of critical discourse analysis (CDA) theories. It is also grounded in the principles of interpretivism, which acknowledges the subjective nature of language structures.

Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach to analyzing spoken or written language that primarily examines “the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted” (Van Dijk 2001, p. 352) in contexts such as politics, media, and everyday communication. Interpretivism, as a foundational concept, emphasizes the interpretation of subjective meanings and perspectives in various settings. When incorporated into CDA, interpretivism aids in dissecting the dynamics of discourse within socio-political contexts, acknowledging the complex nature of language and its role in negotiating and perpetuating power relations, ideologies, and societal structures.

In the context of this study, applying interpretivism to CDA means, firstly, subjective interpretation. The analysis will delve into how the parties involved interpret and respond to the language used, considering their unique perspectives and experiences. Secondly, interpretivism encourages an exploration of the context in which discourse occurs. In the case of this research, this means considering the historical and political context of communist-era Romania and how this context influenced the language choices made by the characters. Thirdly, interpretivism in CDA underscores that meaning is socially constructed. Language is not a fixed, objective entity but something shaped by social norms, power structures, and cultural values. The analysis will aim to uncover how the characters’ language use constructs and reinforces power dynamics within the given context.

This study follows a deductive approach, commencing with the theoretical framework and subsequently building upon it using the collected data. The primary focus of the analysis centers on the techniques used by communist speakers to persuade and influence their interlocutors. As a qualitative study, this study is not intended to establish universally applicable findings for all interactions during the communist era. Instead, it aims to identify how the methods of the communist regime for influencing and intimidating citizens continue to manifest in contemporary culture, specifically within Alexandru Belc’s film *Metronom* (Belc 2022).

Our analysis will encompass a wide range of linguistic elements that can be utilized for manipulative or persuasive purposes, contingent upon both intention and context. These elements may include examining vocabulary for ideological connotations, formality, and the presence of indirect or metaphorical content. The grammar of the dialogue will be examined to understand how sentence construction, verb tenses, modality, transitivity, imperatives, and questions contribute to the intended or covert meaning. Also, non-verbal aspects such as tone of voice and gestures will be considered to gain insights into the speakers’ intentions, attitudes, and emotions. Furthermore, the interaction between the two participants will reveal the dynamics of social roles and the positions of power.

3. Literature Review

The Securitate was the secret police agency in communist Romania that upheld and reinforced the policies and authority of the communist government; its role was to protect the communist ideology from any intervention designed to denounce or undermine it. In

addition to psychological manipulation and coercion, it used other well-known methods: the surveillance and interception of correspondence, the manipulation of dissidents, obtaining information notes from recruited “sources”, the signing of commitments by recruited informants, the annotation of their reports by officers outlining tasks and strategies for monitoring citizens under surveillance, etc. The consistency and cohesion in implementing these methods, aligned with a clear objective, are astonishing. The flawless meshing of this cogwheel system becomes evident when examining surveillance files such as general intelligence surveillance or individual surveillance dossiers, operated by Directorate I (Information).

The early years of Romanian communism (1947–1965) were marked by the leadership of Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. Romania was under Soviet influence, and the atmosphere of terror prevailed. However, during his last years in power, Gheorghiu-Dej began to assert Romania’s independence and oppose Soviet dominance. After Gheorghiu-Dej’s death in 1965, Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power and continued the policy of de-Russification. The forced Soviet cultural influence that characterized the 1950s was halted, and Western media began to circulate more freely in the country. Romania thus experienced a period of cultural liberalization in the late 1960s, but in the early 1970s, Ceaușescu’s regime embraced an “ideological inflection”, adopting “an autarchic nationalism” and oppressive measures (Gridan 2011, p. 126). After visiting China, North Korea, North Vietnam, and Mongolia in 1971, Ceaușescu became captivated by the concept of complete national transformation, inspired by the policies of the Workers’ Party of Korea and China’s Cultural Revolution. He was notably receptive towards the personality cults of Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung. Upon returning, Ceaușescu shaped Romania’s system after North Korea, influenced by Kim Il Sung’s Juche philosophy (Tismăneanu 2005, pp. 2411–13).

The regime imposed strict discipline on individuals and organizations, restricting contact with foreign citizens, particularly journalists, as stated in Law no. 23 of 17 December 1971, which prohibited Romanian citizens from engaging with foreign media that defamed or opposed the interests of the Romanian state (The Great National Assembly 1971). The Securitate implemented a comprehensive surveillance plan to monitor suspects and prevent dissent, ensuring a positive international image and preventing the leakage of hostile materials that could have been turned into “cases” by Radio Free Europe. Employing a range of tactics from positive influencing to blackmailing targets, the Securitate closely monitored and suppressed individuals and groups with opposing views, employing tailored strategic actions for each case to effectively pre-empt any dissenting initiatives (Pavel 2015, pp. 70–71). This is the historical, social, and political context of the film *Metronom*.

3.1. Power and Control

In totalitarian regimes, power is wielded to maintain order, control behavior, suppress dissent, and manipulate language to shape public opinion, and CDA is a valuable framework for examining these power dynamics in communication (Willig 2014). CDA examines how discourses construct and legitimize power abuse and social inequalities (Wodak and Meyer 2009, p. 33). It also aims to disclose covert power relations in discourse, whether through direct elements (tone, pauses, laughter, shouting, politeness, or forms of address) or indirect means (e.g., syntax, turn-taking) (Fairclough 1995). CDA highlights the importance of often-overlooked contextual elements such as time, space, and social factors (Van Dijk 2007, pp. xix–xlii).

The interaction between Colonel Biriș and Ana is analyzed considering both the direct exercising of power and indirect (persuasive and manipulative) strategies, with a focus on discursive power relations and contexts. The analysis investigates the language employed in the speakers’ interaction to identify indications of their goals and representations of events, as well as the structural organization of the discourse, the use of quoted material, recurring phrases, vocabulary, grammar, modality, and rhetorical devices such as turn-taking, pauses, or metaphor, generalizations (Wodak and Meyer 2009; Van Dijk 1993).

Interdiscursivity, another significant CDA concept, acknowledges the interconnection and influence of discourses across social and cultural contexts (Wodak and Meyer 2009), and is relevant for comprehending the perpetuation of power relations and ideologies. For example, Col. Biriş draws on various discourses (e.g., national security, communist privileges, national interests) to construct a particular narrative about dissidence. The discourse of national security is used to frame the teenagers as potential threats to the country, while the discourse of communist privileges they benefit from is used to depict their act of rebellion in more negative tones. The discourse of national interests is used to justify the harsh measures taken against non-compliant citizens. Analyzing the interplay between these discourses provides insights into how dissidence is constructed and denounced in communist rhetoric.

3.2. Manipulation

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, to manipulate means to operate upon with intelligence, with skill (Oxford English Dictionary 1989). But its third definition entry indicates management “by dexterous contrivance or influence; esp. to treat unfairly or insidiously for one’s own advantage”. While manipulation can encompass positive attributes, it is commonly associated with deleterious techniques, having “negative associations [...] because such a practice violates social norms” (Van Dijk 2006, p. 360). Manipulation is thus regarded as the strategic exploitation of others’ vulnerabilities for personal or political gain.

Manipulation and persuasion, as Sorlin (2017) explains, differ significantly: persuasion involves open argumentation with complete information, while manipulation selectively highlights certain aspects, conceals others, and restricts interpretation. Manipulation is often associated with imbalanced social conditions and power abuse, “when speakers are manipulating others in their role as a member of a dominant collectivity” (Van Dijk 2006, p. 364). Scholars (Radu 2011, p. 85) often consider manipulation and influence as conceptually related, as seen in the Securitate files, where the term “influence” is used instead. Manipulation targets various human needs and motivations, including fear as a powerful emotional response (Breton 2006, p. 72). It involves control, dominance, and the distortion of facts to obtain consent that was initially absent (Breton 2006, p. 83), often by exaggerating the situation and by falsely validating irrational arguments.

A crucial facet of political manipulation lies in the practice of doublespeak. “Basic to doublespeak is incongruity, the incongruity between what is said, or left unsaid, and what really is. What doublespeak does—mislead, distort, deceive, inflate, circumvent, obfuscate” (Lutz 1990, p. 255)—lies in its deliberate use of language to obscure the truth and misrepresent facts. This can include employing euphemisms to soften harsh realities, creating intentional linguistic ambiguity, or reversing meanings. In the realm of political propaganda, downplaying is a tactic that utilizes omission, diversion, and confusion, while intensifying relies on repetition and association, to manipulate perception.

Manipulation frequently manifests through coercion, whereby individuals are pressured into specific actions or the adoption of prescribed beliefs and discourses. To counter coercion, individuals often resorted to mimicry of obedience and embraced the use of wooden language in communist contexts. This allowed them to resist external pressures while outwardly conforming to prescribed beliefs and discourse. According to Cazacu (2000, p. 71), wooden language is a linguistic subsystem consisting of fixed, clichéd expressions with established meanings authorized by specific entities. These expressions are dogmatically used to promote ideologies by those in power, who disseminate them widely through repetition, subduing independent thought within the masses and reinforcing authority. However, by employing wooden language, individuals acquiesced to the use of doublespeak and double-truth, exemplifying a schizoid condition that characterizes totalitarian regimes and societies plagued by fear. “The conformist, epideictic speeches conveyed a ritualized message of unconditional submission” (Zafiu 2009, p. 158).

Linguistic assertiveness is another salient aspect of manipulation, especially in power-imbalanced situations or self-advocacy. It conveys confidence and power through various

linguistic features like modulation, vocal inflection, and choice of words, and it helps to exert authority through techniques like imperative statements and loaded language that evokes strong emotional responses and create a sense of obligation or urgency in the listener (Kellerman 2006). For instance, Col. Biriş communicates with Ana using concise and forceful statements, employing direct orders, threats, and loaded language with metaphors and exaggeration to create an impact on the teenager.

4. Analysis

According to Bach (2006, pp. 152–53), the function of discourse is the result of the interplay between intention and expressive modality, revealing the reinforcement of power structures and ideologies through language. The power imbalance between Col. Biriş and Ana, with him representing the state's ideology, is apparent. Using persuasive language and emotional appeals, he coerces her, limiting her agency and reinforcing the prevailing discourse. Col. Biriş positions himself as an authoritative figure, while Ana is seen as potentially disruptive, needing discipline and guidance.

In this section, a CDA approach will be employed to explore the dialogue between Colonel Biriş and Ana (see Appendix A), focusing on the aims, positionalities of the speakers, and linguistic devices utilized.

4.1. Power, Control, and Manipulation Strategies

The examination of the conversation between the two actants uncovers significant elements pertaining to power dynamics, control, manipulation, and intimidation, as manifested through the use of language. The discussion presents several observations:

4.1.1. Ideological Positioning

Col. Biriş emphasizes the importance of enforcing the law and protecting the socialist order. He portrays Ana's actions as a threat to the state and accuses her of engaging in hostile propaganda: "you gather in apartments, write letters" (23); "Do you want me to charge you with conspiracy, as co-author, provider of material and moral support?!" (25). This reflects the ideological control exercised by those in power and the attempt to preserve dominance while maintaining citizens in a state of passive obedience for fear of repercussions: "You're done for, that's it! I'll take care of this" (23).

4.1.2. Power and Control

Col. Biriş holds a position of power and authority, which is evident in his actions, tone, and language. He taps his finger on the desk, points his finger at Ana, pats her on the shoulder, uses commanding language, and asserts control over the conversation. In contrast, Ana's non-verbal cues (her silence, head movements, downward gaze, and hunched posture) convey an overall display of submission. However, certain gestures, such as direct eye contact and crossing her arms over her chest, may be interpreted as acts of defiance towards his authority.

Right from the opening turns ("What's this?!", "I asked something!"), Col. Biriş expresses surprise and indignation, signaling his authority and expectation of compliance from Ana. By employing a confrontational and demanding tone and a blunt demand, the nature of their interaction and relations is thus established: a power dynamic where he expects immediate obedience and submission. Moreover, a sense of distance is evident through his use of the formula "miss" and the polite pronoun *dumneavoastră*, which serves as a formal and respectful way of addressing someone (akin to the pronouns *vous* in French or *Sie* in German). However, despite the simulated politeness, his tone exhibits condescension and paternalism, with parental inflections in the early stages of their encounter, which align with the Securitate's established strategy, aiming to initially resort to positive forms of influence. His paternal tone conveys an evident power imbalance between him as an authoritative figure and the young woman.

4.1.3. Intimidation and Manipulation

Col. Biriş resorts to various strategies to intimidate and manipulate Ana. He grins, makes threatening remarks, and uses heavy, malicious tones. By referencing the criminal code, he instils fear in Ana, making her question her actions and creating a sense of guilt. In the second part of their encounter, Col. Biriş continues to control the conversation. He uses a mix of empathy and intimidation to sway Ana's decision-making process. By mentioning her father's desperation and pleading—"Your father asked me on his knees to help you. He begged me not to hand you over to the prosecutors" (32)—he creates emotional pressure and instils a sense of obligation and gratitude towards him. This manipulative tactic aims to ensure Ana's compliance and cooperation.

Col. Biriş resorts to veiled or direct threats and intimidation tactics when Ana shows signs of resistance or dismissiveness. Additionally, his later comments about her—"I thought you were a smart girl" (33)—and the threat of relegating her to the basement with men who would rape her—"Why don't I send you down to the basement with a couple of fellows to get gang-banged" (23)—introduce gendered forms of control and punishment. He also mentions the potential consequences of mocking or disobeying him, indicating that he holds the power to destroy both her and her father's future. He repeatedly insinuates that Ana is guilty and involved in illicit activities, even though she is not and denies it. He uses the fear of consequences and loss to pressure her into compliance. Col. Biriş also uses dehumanizing language and insults her intelligence—"you idiot" (25), "get the hell out of here" (33)—threatens her with sexual violence (23), and blames her for potentially causing harm to her parents—"I pity your parents! You're going to put them in hospital!" (25); "I'll destroy you both" (32). These tactics aim to humiliate and disempower the teenager, to undermine her agency, and create a sense of terror, guilt, and shame.

4.1.4. Discursive Shift

Van Dijk (2006, p. 370) suggests that manipulators conceal their personal interests by strategically emphasizing collective terms such as "nation" and inclusive expressions such as "all of us". They may also discuss assumed shared interests with their collocutors to foster trust and alignment with the audience. Accordingly, Col. Biriş starts the interrogation with a friendly demeanor to cultivate trust. He tries to evoke empathy, camaraderie, and the feeling that he resonates with Ana (he talks about his daughter, mimics interest in Ana's plans). He uses first-person plural pronouns (*we, us*) and attempts to elicit sympathy and cultivate a likable persona.

Although Col. Biriş adopts a confessional tone, he expresses control and dominance through his directive behavior, condescending remarks, and paternalistic gestures. He tries to establish a personal connection by simulating empathy—"You've had a long day" (37), "It was a moment of confusion" (27); mentioning her father—"Poor guy. It's a good thing he's got your mind right, otherwise. . ." (30); and promising to help her if she cooperates—"We will make sure that you get into university, that you pass your exams, that they don't assign you to a job in Hicksville" (29). Biriş employs guilt and emotional manipulation by saying he feels sorry for her father and insinuating that signing the requested documents is a way to save her future and her parents. Furthermore, later in their interaction, he assumes a noticeably benevolent demeanor, particularly as the stakes become higher.

Nevertheless, Col. Biriş oscillates between amiable behavior and intimidation, a deliberate tactic to keep the individual off-kilter and perplexed, ultimately reinforcing the interrogator's power. Initially, the colonel assumes an outwardly affable, courteous, and patient stance, aligning with the Securitate's strategy of positive manipulation. Nevertheless, as he faces Ana's resistance to acknowledging the events and signing the compromising statement implicating her friends, his demeanor undergoes a marked shift. He adopts a menacing and verbally aggressive tone, accompanied by explicit threats of reprisals.

Upon successfully persuading Ana, through her father, to provide the statement, he reverts to a genial disposition, offering her coffee and cigarettes, assuming a warm tone, and employing gestures of goodwill. He entices her with promises of a prosperous future

in her chosen domain. Nonetheless, these ostensible acts of benevolence come with a caveat: she must assume the role of an informant for the Securitate. Given her blemished record ensuing from this incident, Ana becomes susceptible to indirect forms of blackmail. The discourse gradually shifts again from coercive tactics to a more apparent attempt to make the situation appear as a choice. Col. Biriş declares that Ana does not have to sign anything immediately and emphasizes that he wants her to decide without pressure: “You don’t have to sign anything now. I’ll give you a few more days to think it over. I’m not forcing you to sign anything. And I don’t want you to make a decision on the spur of the moment” (37). He amplifies the stakes by asserting that it should be her who pleads to assume the role of an informant, positioning it as a privilege rather than a concession to the Securitate: “If you want to do this together, I want total commitment, I want you to come to me and convince me that you deserve this chance. Not everybody gets that chance, do you understand?” (37).

Transitioning from being an individual accused of conspiracy against the state and staunchly refusing to cooperate with the Securitate, Ana finds herself in the precarious position of fervently seeking to assume the very role she previously rejected. This entails not only providing a statement but also becoming an informant for the very institution that instils fear within her. Therefore, the power imbalance and manipulation tactics make the apparent choice still heavily influenced by his control.

4.1.5. Assertiveness and Manipulation

The dialogue showcases an assertive approach in terms of demanding information and compliance, but it is heavily intertwined with manipulative tactics aimed at coercing and intimidating Ana into providing the desired statement. Initially, Colonel Biriş is assertive in demanding the statement from her (2). He maintains a firm tone when instructing Ana to write a statement showing the real perpetrators of the crime and describing the facts, as he reiterates the need for specific information in the statement and expects compliance. Moreover, he bluntly reprimands her and asserts his authority and control: “We are the ones who ask the questions. You just answer. When I ask where I want to hear a place. When I ask who you tell me a name and so on. Do you understand?” (12). He further emphasizes the gravity of the situation (6) and reminds her of the potential legal consequences.

4.2. Linguistic Devices

“Language offers to speakers a whole arsenal of means to realize manipulative aims. Linguistic manipulation is marked by language signs of different levels that help interpret the speaker’s intentions” (Akopova 2013, pp. 78, 79). Linguistic choices used to persuade include imperative verbs, qualifying adjectives, personal pronouns (*I/we* vs. *you/them*), and modality. These linguistic devices aim either to exert control and induce fear, or to appeal to personal interests and emotions.

4.2.1. Imperative Verbs

The role of imperative verbs is to leave people little room for argument: “Please write a statement showing the real perpetrators of the crime”, “Describe the facts” (4); “Please gather your thoughts, take a deep breath and let’s focus”, “Come on, please” (12); “TALK!” (24); “Go on, run home, get some rest” (38). These explicit instructions can be seen as a linguistic manifestation of power roles, serving to assert dominance and establish hierarchical relationships. Using explicit instructions, Col. Biriş aims to control and influence Ana, shaping her behavior and actions according to his own agenda. These instructions often carry a falsely benevolent and polite tone; however, they are designed to allow no negotiation or resistance, further solidifying the power imbalance between the two participants in the discourse.

4.2.2. Qualifying Adjectives

Qualifying adjectives are used to create a particular emotional tone, emphasize certain aspects, and frame information in a way that serves the Colonel's agenda. Some are utilized to evoke positive or negative connotations and manipulate the collocutor's interpretation of events ("that innocent doe-eyed look", "particularly serious offence"). Moreover, superlatives and comparatives are used to exaggerate the qualities of a person, event, or object, creating an extreme perception that may not accurately reflect reality. By presenting something as the ultimate or most extreme, manipulators seek to influence the emotions, opinions, and actions of the audience: "You think you're smarter!" (25).

4.2.3. Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns are used as manipulation devices to create a sense of inclusion or exclusion, to foster identification or distance, and to evoke emotional responses: "We are the ones who ask the questions. *You* just answer" (12); "You don't like that WE offer you education, schooling" (25). Such oppositions create divisions and advance a sense of otherness. By using the contrast *we-you*, Col. Biriş creates a negative perception and bias against the defiant teenager. This tactic is used to dehumanize, marginalize, and vilify the individuals and groups whose actions are perceived as hostile towards the regime, thereby justifying punitive actions.

Another common manipulative tactic is the use of inclusive pronouns, such as *we* or *us*, to create a sense of unity, complicity, and shared identity. By employing these pronouns, Col. Biriş seeks to establish a connection with Ana, implying that she can become part of a collective or common cause. This technique can foster a sense of belonging and loyalty, making it easier for manipulators to influence opinions and actions: "And don't forget: what we talked here is. . . *our* little secret" (39).

Furthermore, Col. Biriş exploits personal pronouns, such as *I* or *you*, to establish power dynamics and influence Ana's behavior. He asserts authority and control by using the first-person pronoun *I*, emphasizing his expertise and influence: "I asked something!" (2); "I'll take care to add a few notes here and there [. . .] But right now I'm trying to help you" (27). Moreover, he uses the second-person pronoun *you* to appeal to Ana's emotions and fears, or to emphasize her accountability: "Now do you understand what you have done?" (20); "You met clandestinely, you plotted, you wrote letters, you contacted foreign citizens" (18).

4.2.4. Modality

Modality refers to the expression of possibility, probability, necessity, or obligation in language. It conveys the speaker's attitude, judgment, or degree of certainty. In this dialogue, we can observe different modal expressions.

Firstly, we observe epistemic modality, which concerns the speaker's assessment of the truth or likelihood of a statement. Within the dialogue, instances of epistemic modality can be observed through the utilization of phrases such as "I was under the impression" (20) and "You may not understand" (12). These linguistic expressions serve to convey Col. Biriş's underlying uncertainties regarding Ana's capacity to fulfil the requested role as an exemplary citizen.

Secondly, we observe deontic modality, which relates to obligations, permissions, or prohibitions. In the dialogue, we can identify deontic modality in statements such as "Citizens are prohibited" and "Failure to comply. . . is punishable" (10), used by Col. Biriş to intimidate Ana; but there is also the teenager's statement including the sentence "I must revise my attitude" (26), with the role of showing submission and obedience.

Thirdly, we observe dynamic modality, which refers to the expression of ability, willingness, or capability. In the dialogue, we can observe dynamic modality in phrases like "I'll take care" (27), "I'll see to it" (28), "We will make sure" (29), and "I promised him I would do everything" (27), to convey Col. Biriş's willingness or ability to implement certain

actions that either disadvantage or benefit the adolescent and, thus, to exert pressure on her to cooperate.

These manipulative uses of modality aim to control the character's actions and responses. Evaluative modality is also employed as a form of manipulation, where Col. Biriş offers positive assessments or promises of assistance to influence the character's compliance and cooperation. He presents a future vision of opportunities, such as attending her desired university, in an attempt to persuade her to follow his instructions: "You'll see! You'll make new acquaintances, new friends. [...] You will get into whatever college you want" (28). The modalising item "will" stands for "a very strong prediction of how events will unfold in the future and the way it is presented excludes all possible doubts" (Vâlcea 2016, p. 97). These linguistic strategies help create a power dynamic and advance the manipulative agenda.

4.3. Rhetorical Devices

4.3.1. Turn-Taking

Turn-taking is the process by which participants in a conversation alternate between speaking and listening, and it serves as a manifest indicator of power dynamics. Within these conversational exchanges, Col. Biriş embodies the emblematic authority of the state, and therefore adeptly manipulates the turn-taking structure. In this dynamic, Ana's participation is predominantly restricted to furnishing pertinent responses to Col. Biriş's interrogations, wherein the criteria for relevance remain subject to his discretion. Distinct from Ana, Col. Biriş, being in the interrogative role, enjoys a more versatile array of communicative actions within his turns. He employs legal references, dispenses directives, and issues evaluative feedback in the form of answer repetitions or commendatory remarks.

Formulation is a common device in turn-taking where one shapes the conversation by rephrasing prior statements, articulating implications, and effectively guiding collocutors to align with one's perspective, narrowing the range of available responses to maintain control over the discourse. By using formulation, Col. Biriş effectively limits Ana's options for future contributions. He steers the discourse toward his own version of events, reducing Ana's ability to introduce alternative interpretations or perspectives. This narrowing of options is a key component of control, particularly evident when Col. Biriş emphasizes the severity of potential consequences or pressures Ana to align with his stance (20). Col. Biriş's use of formulation extends to controlling the interpretation of the conversation's events. This control over interpretation is a central element of the power dynamic within the dialogue.

4.3.2. Metaphors

Metaphors are employed to make the message as persuasive and comprehensible as possible. In this context, manipulators are rewarded not for how truthfully they present their opinions, but based on how persuasive and convincing their arguments can be (Vestermark 2007, p. 1), by enticing people to share a specific representation or interpretation of social reality. Here are a few examples of metaphors in the dialogue: "You stick out like a sore thumb" (25). This metaphor implies that the person being addressed is easily noticeable or stands out conspicuously, in a time where citizens were praised for not standing out and for taking part in social uniformity. "You're going to put them in hospital" (25). This metaphor suggests that Ana's actions or behavior will cause great distress or harm her parents, emphasizing the negative consequences of her actions. "Gather your thoughts" (12). This metaphor advises Ana to reconsider her stance and cooperate with Col. Biriş. "Take us for a ride" (28). Col. Biriş employs this metaphor to convey his skepticism regarding Ana's complete honesty. It serves as a subtle reminder that, while he outwardly appears to be convinced by her statement, he sees through the facades and implies that her collaboration as an informant has the role of reinforcing her change in attitude. "A well-behaved young woman". This metaphor implies that Ana should be perceived as obedient, and it suggests a level of submission or conformity to certain expectations or standards.

4.3.3. Repetitions or Generalizations

By repeating certain phrases, words, ideas, or arguments, Col. Biriş aims to reinforce his message and increase credibility: “We will make sure *that* you get into university, *that* you pass your exams” (29). Repetition can also serve to wear down resistance and make the manipulated individual more susceptible to influence and to relinquish resistance: “You met clandestinely, you plotted, you wrote letters” (18). Such sentences can also be categorized as generalizations, on the other hand, since that was the only action of the kind Ana was involved in. Generalizations can be used to oversimplify complex issues, to delete nuances and reach distorted conclusions in order to create emotional responses.

4.3.4. Wooden Language

The substitution of natural language with wooden language effectively resulted in the erasure of individuality, the dissolution of human agency, and citizens being readily inclined to generate slogans in response to external stimuli. Such observations can be discerned from the statement written by Ana after being influenced to deliver it as requested. Hence, Ana’s capitulation is only a convention, lacking genuine conviction. While her statement adheres to the requested format, it only feigns compliance with the stipulated requirements. In truth, it is composed in the rigid language characteristic of Romanian communist discourse, serving the dual purpose of concealing genuine thoughts and conforming to the official narrative. This employment of formulaic language relies on clichés to align with the prescribed ideological discourse: “I acknowledge and regret my actions”, “I have deeply erred”, “what happened . . . gave me much to think about”, “I have been made aware of the danger that this radio station represents” (26).

Carré (2013, pp. 23, 31–33) defines manipulation as a form of indirect psychological obedience that induces changes in individuals’ thoughts and behaviors without their awareness. However, Ana consciously changes her behavior and discourse in response to external demands, adhering in the end to everything she had repudiated before. This form of manipulation involves here a subtle game where Ana pretends to be convinced by arguments to avoid the consequences of non-compliance. She employs tautology (“the deed remains a deed”) and extensively utilizes ideologically charged clichés. Her statement includes a list of terms whose semantic depth is diluted, as seen in the phrase, “I must reconsider my approach to society, education, and family, redirecting my efforts toward endeavors that benefit our society.” She predominantly resorts to wooden language in her statement as a strategy to manage the stress arising from the incongruity between her words and her inner thoughts, along with the discord between conflicting thoughts and verbal expressions.

4.3.5. Doublespeak

In the interrogatory, notable instances of both intensifying and downplaying doublespeak can be identified.

Intensifying doublespeak is manifest in Col. Biriş’s tactics. He heightens the accusations against Ana, pressuring her to admit involvement (18); intensifies the threat by highlighting the severity of potential punishment, implying that Ana has committed a serious crime (20); and employs strong, intimidating language, to instill fear and coerce Ana into cooperation (23). Additionally, he intensifies the accusations and consequences, emphasizing potential imprisonment and directing insults at Ana (25).

Conversely, downplaying doublespeak is evident when Col. Biriş employs strategies to mitigate the situation. He downplays the gravity of the matter by inquiring if it is Ana’s first crime, insinuating that cooperation may result in leniency (14). He also downplays his role as an interrogator, framing it as an effort to enforce the law and identify the guilty to justify his methods (16). Furthermore, he minimizes the significance of signing the collaboration form, presenting it as a mere formality (30). He diminishes the pressure by suggesting that Ana does not need to make an immediate decision, granting her additional time for

contemplation (37). Moreover, he downplays the secretive nature of their conversation with a casual "our little secret," diminishing the idea of moral compromise (39).

In their dialogue, there are also instances of doublespeak understood as intentional ambiguity in language and as inversions of meaning, particularly in the way certain statements are made to manipulate and control Ana's understanding and response.

For instance, when Ana seeks clarity by asking, "What exactly am I being accused of?", she does not receive a direct response, but rather, an evasive and ambiguous answer, causing further confusion. Similarly, Col. Biriş tells Ana that she does not have to decide immediately, creating ambiguity about the urgency of the situation. Later, Col. Biriş asks Ana to write a statement showing the "real perpetrators of the crime" (4). This request implies that Ana herself is a perpetrator, inverting the meaning of her involvement. Additionally, Col. Biriş employs a fatherly tone while asking Ana to convince him that she deserves a chance (32), yet it becomes evident that he is not offering a genuine choice, thereby inverting the meanings of "chance" and "choice."

5. Limitations

The application of CDA to the realms of literature and cinema has not been without challenges, as it entails balancing the dramaturgical needs of a scene with the authenticity of real-world interactions, which are inherently less structured. Notably, this duality enables an analytical approach that scrutinizes discourse as though it were organic, everyday conversation. This perspective, allowing for the analysis of both genuine discourse and its representation in cinema, is pivotal in this study. While scrutinizing the discourse of *Metronom* as a film, I am afforded the flexibility to consider it as if it were authentic dialogue. This unique vantage point provides the means to examine the film through the lens of CDA methodologies.

Moreover, the selection of *Metronom* as a case study is not arbitrary but grounded in a personal connection to the era and its ideologies. Having lived through the communist regime and researched its discourse, ideology, and the tactics employed by entities such as the Securitate, my judgment led me to identify *Metronom* as a realistic portrayal of interrogatory practices. This authenticity can be partially attributed to the director, Alexandru Belc, primarily being a documentary filmmaker, whose meticulous examination of the era's intricacies is evident in his work.

6. Conclusions

The present research study investigated the linguistic structures and mechanisms of language control, manipulation, and persuasion, specific to the communist discourse of the Romanian socialism period, as well as the psychological and sociological effects that they generate at the level of the individual (e.g., confusion, fear, obedience, and submission), as reflected in the film *Metronom*. The study aimed to understand the mechanisms through which discourse was used to control and manipulate opinions and behaviors. The examination of various language and rhetorical devices used in the discourse revealed the dynamics of power, control, and manipulation at play in the interaction. The findings show the strategic deployment of imperative verbs, qualifying adjectives, personal pronouns, modality, metaphors, repetitions and generalizations, wooden language, and doublespeak as means to exert influence and shape the teenager's perceptions and beliefs.

This analysis highlights the significance of language as a tool for maintaining authority, silencing opposition, and perpetuating control within oppressive systems. It underscores the importance of critically examining discourse to uncover hidden agendas, power imbalances, and the intricate ways in which language can be utilized to shape individual values and behaviors. Moreover, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between language, power, and manipulation within socio-political contexts, as portrayed in cinematography. Ultimately, the paper focuses on the depiction of the way in which the autocratic political power put forth a rigidly prescribed communicative framework that encompassed various strategies, such as persuasion, manipulation,

ensorship, and coercion, in a process of alleged (re-)education. At the individual level, adopting and promoting this communicative model of wooden language entailed adopting predetermined discursive formulas, which provide social integration and recognition within the system. Through this research, we hope to have shed some light on the complex phenomenon of communist discourse and contributed to a better understanding of the psychosocial effects of language manipulation and control, as they continue to have reverberations in contemporary visual arts.

While this study focused on the historical context of communist discourse, the tactics and mechanisms of language control and manipulation are not confined to that era and continue to be employed in various forms in modern communication. For example, they are observable in biased news reporting, where certain news outlets may use loaded language, euphemisms, or doublespeak to influence their audience's perception of events. Other relevant examples are online disinformation campaigns, often relying on manipulating language and employing tactics to confuse or mislead the public, or political speeches, with political leaders employing the same linguistic strategies to gain support or deflect criticism. Though these tactics persist in contemporary discourse, delving into their contemporary applications falls beyond the specific scope of this study. Nonetheless, the continuance of these linguistic strategies in present-day communication underlines the lasting impact of the phenomenon explored in this research.

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Appendix A

Presented below is the two-phase dialogue between Ana and Colonel Biriş. The turns are numbered. Suspension marks between brackets indicate moments of silence and dashes indicate longer pauses. The accompanying gestures of the protagonists are provided within brackets. "A" refers to Ana while "B" represents Col. Biriş.

- (1) B (pointing to the sheet and tapping his finger on the desk): What's this?! (. . .)
- (2) B: I asked something!
- (3) A: The statement. (He grins and hands her another sheet.)
- (4) B: Please write a statement showing the real perpetrators of the crime. Describe the facts as they happened.
- (5) A: I don't want to hurt anyone.
- (6) B: The damage is already done, miss.
- (7) A: I don't understand.
- (8) B: We're not here to discuss, Miss. Your statement is incomplete.
- (9) A: What have I done so wrong?!
- (10) B (grinning and taking the penal code): Allow me to read to you from Law 23/1971. This is October 1972; the law has been in force for a year now. "Romanian citizens are prohibited from having any kind of connection with foreign radio and television stations or press organs that, through their actions, carry out activities that defame or oppose the interests of the Romanian state." Failure to comply with the legal provisions constitutes a particularly serious offence and is punishable under criminal law. (He taps his finger on the desk again). Do you understand?
- (11) A: I haven't done any of those things. What exactly am I being accused of?
- (12) B (grinning): Miss Stefan, please gather your thoughts, take a deep breath, and let's focus a bit on the statement for a moment. You may not understand how things work

around here. We are the ones who ask the questions. You just answer. When I ask where, I want to hear a place. When I ask who, you tell me a name and so on. Do you understand?—Come on, please. (. . .) (At this stage of the dialogue, his tone is calm, with occasional parental inflections, and condescending at times. He uses the formula “miss” and the polite pronoun *dumneavoastră*.)

- (13) (He puts on his glasses, with nervous gestures, and opens her criminal record.)
- (14) B: You’ve never been here before, this is your first time, right?
- (15) A: Right.
- (16) B: We just want to enforce the law and identify those who are guilty.
- (17) A: I haven’t done anything.
- (18) B (looking menacing and taking off his glasses): You met clandestinely, you plotted, you wrote letters, you contacted foreign citizens to take the letters to Radio Free Europe. . . Yes? Should I go on?
- (19) A: I haven’t done any of these.
- (20) B: I was under the impression that you were a well-behaved young woman. (. . .) (He takes a long look at her, in a threatening, intimidating manner. Then, he reads from the criminal code again, after steadily flicking through it with slow, heavy movements): The crime of hostile propaganda against the socialist order is punishable by six years’ imprisonment and deprivation for a period of four years of all rights provided for in Article 64 letters (a) and (b) of the Criminal Code. Now do you understand what you have done? (She shakes her head.)
- (21) B: Come on, please. With name, surname, date of birth, exactly as my colleagues instructed you.
- (22) A: I wrote it all down. I have nothing more to add. (She looks down, hunched over. But when she answers, she looks at him.)
- (23) B (in a heavy, mischievous tone): You gather in apartments, write letters, and then you come here and look at me with that innocent doe-eyed look. But guess what? You’re done for, that’s it! I’ll take care of this. Why don’t I send you down to the basement with a couple of fellows to get gang banged. Let’s see what you say afterwards. Hmm?! (. . .)
- (24) B (shouting): TALK! (. . .) (She continues to look down and crosses her arms over her chest.)
- (25) B: You’re not looking at me, huh? You think you’re smarter! That you stick out like a sore thumb, that you stand out! Do you want me to charge you with conspiracy, as co-author, provider of material and moral support?! Answer!!! This is about prison, you idiot, about years of hard time, do you realize that?! You don’t like that WE offer you education, schooling, that we give you everything on a silver platter, no! It’s your problem! You’re an adult now, you’re responsible for your actions!—I pity your parents! You’re going to put them in hospital, you idiot! (She returns from the cell and gives a new statement.)
- (26) B (reading the new statement): “I acknowledge and regret my actions and consider that I have deeply erred. What happened and the fact that I ended up in front of the State Security organs gave me much to think about. I have been made aware of the danger that this radio station represents, and I acknowledge that I have violated the laws of our country when I proceeded to write this letter. Even if the content does not belong to me, the deed remains a deed, and that is why I believe that in the future I must revise my attitude towards society, school and family, to reorient and direct my strength and ability to work towards which are things useful to our society.” Very well.—(He pats her on the shoulder in a fatherly way.) What parents won’t do for their children. . . (Then he asks her about her future plans and which university she wants to attend. He offers her water or coffee. She refuses. He tries small talk about universities, but she remains silent. He tries to strike a sentimental chord and adopts a confessional tone.)

- (27) B: Your father is desperate. He begged me to help you somehow, to do something for you, and I want to help him. I promised him I would do everything in my power. The statement you gave will look good on your record. Well, I'll take care to add a few notes here and there to reinforce the idea that you didn't participate in writing the letter, that you didn't know about the plan the others put together, that you opposed it. After the dust settles, we'll talk some more and see how we can help you go to university and have a normal life. But right now, I'm trying to help you stay out of the hands of the prosecutors.—It was a moment of confusion. Am I right so far? (She nods, unconvinced.)
- (28) B (in a warm, enthusiastic tone): You'll find that university years are the best. You'll see! You'll make new acquaintances, new friends. I'll see to it that you get into whatever college you want. You don't want to go to law school? That's fine! There are others, but it's hard or very hard to get in. But you'll get in wherever you want. I give you my word. It's just that. . . we have to make sure you're trustworthy, that you don't take us for a ride. (He offers her more coffee and cigarettes, but she refuses.)
- (29) B (Handing her another sheet): A formality to make sure you understand what you need to do. And that from now on, you'll be more responsible and attentive to what's going on around you. And WE will make sure that you get into university, that you pass your exams, that they don't assign you to a job in Hicksville, or who knows where. Understand? (She reads as he explains.)
- (30) B: A written confirmation of what we discussed. Just name, surname, date of birth, sign your name and that's it! You're going home. Your daddy's waiting for you to go home. Poor guy. It's a good thing he's got your mind right, otherwise. . . I don't even want to imagine. I'm a parent too. My daughter's older than you by. . . a few years. She's finishing law school next year. You're a lucky girl. You should say thank you. (She puts the sheet aside with a hostile, dismissive gesture. He frowns, but continues in a calm, fatherly tone.)
- (31) B: Think of your future. (. . .) (He looks at her more and more menacingly, with a sadistic smile, and then, frowns, becomes dire and talks in a hostile, hateful manner.)
- (32) B: Your father asked me on his knees to help you. He begged me not to hand you over to the prosecutors. He gave his word for you. He said you were sorry, that you wanted to make it right, that I'd give you another chance.—I felt sorry for him when I saw him like that. But if you mock me—(leaning dominantly towards her), I'll destroy you both, is that clear? (. . .) (She puts her face in her hands.)
- (33) B: If you want to sign, fine! No, goodbye! But don't waste my time. I thought you were a smart girl. It's your problem if you want to ruin your future, your parents! Feel free to do so! I'm not going to stay in your way.—(he raises his voice, his tone is aggressive and forceful) What, you think I'm going to beg you! Get the hell out of here and don't show your face again! (She hunches her back, still with her face hidden in her hands.) (. . .)
- (34) A: I'm sorry.
- (35) B (raising his tone aggressively): Did you say something? I didn't hear you.
- (36) A: I'm sorry. I would like you to give me another chance, please.
- (37) B (sitting down next to her): Here's the thing, let's not drag this out. You're tired, you've had a long day.—(He points a finger at her) I'll give you another chance, though. You don't have to sign anything now. I'll give you a few more days to think it over. I'm not forcing you to sign anything. And I don't want you to make this decision on the spur of the moment.—If you want to DO this together, I want TOTAL commitment, I want YOU to come to me and convince me that you DESERVE this chance. Not everyone gets that chance, do you understand? (She nods.)
- (38) B (patting her on the shoulder): Go on, run home, get some rest and I'll see you in a few days, okay? (. . .)

- (39) B (pointing his finger at her again): I'm sure you're a smart girl and will make a wise decision. And don't forget: what we talked about here is... our little secret (grins). Go on, run. We'll be in touch, okay?

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