



# The beginnings of Norwegian teaching in Romania (Bucharest, the 1960s-1980s)

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## Abstract

*The present paper focuses on important figures involved in promoting Norwegian language and culture in Bucharest, Romania, in the communist period, more precisely between the 1960s and 1980s. Leiv Flydal, Arne Halvorsen, Valeriu Munteanu and Ilinca Constantinescu all made their contribution to a better known image of Norway in Bucharest before the Romanian Revolution of 1989. In our research, we have used not only written proofs to be found in libraries or archives but also corresponded with time witnesses (either relatives or acquaintances of the above-mentioned), who could share with us valuable memories. In some situations, both the knowledge referring to the topic and the memories were limited, so we had to put all the information together like in a puzzle.*

## Rezumat

*Lucrarea de față se axează pe personalități importante implicate în promovarea limbii și culturii norvegiene în București, România, în perioada comunistă, mai exact între anii 1960 și 1980. Leiv Flydal, Arne Halvorsen, Valeriu Munteanu și Ilinca Constantinescu și-au adus cu toții contribuția la popularizarea imaginii Norvegiei la București înainte de Revoluția Română din 1989. În cercetarea noastră, am folosit nu doar dovezi scrise, ce se găsesc în biblioteci sau arhive, ci am purtat și corespondență cu martori ai vremii (rude sau cunoscuți ai celor mai sus menționați), care ne au putut împărtăși amintiri valoroase. În unele situații, atât cunoștințele referitoare la subiect, cât și amintirile au fost limitate, prin urmare, a trebuit să potrivim toate informațiile ca într-un puzzle.*

**Keywords:** memory culture, Norwegian studies, 1960s-1980s, University of Bucharest

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## Introduction

According to Jan Assmann, “the art of memory relates to the individual and presents techniques to help form personal memory. By contrast, ‘memory culture’<sup>1</sup> is concerned with a social obligation and is

<sup>1</sup> Referred to as *Erinnerungskultur*.

firmly linked to the group. The question here is: ‘What must we not forget?’<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, the present paper focuses on important figures involved in promoting Norwegian language and culture in Bucharest in the communist period. Since we ‘must not forget’ the beginnings of Norwegian teaching in Romania between the 1960s and 1980s, we intend to shed light on the role played by several promoters of Norwegian, either from Norway or Romania in the above-mentioned period.

We thus make reference to the visiting professors Leiv Flydal and Arne Halvorsen, who taught Norwegian in the 1960s and to the role of the Romanian university lecturer Valeriu Munteanu, at the same time a translator and lexicographer, in promoting and preserving Scandinavian languages starting with the late 1960s. Munteanu’s contributions with a view to Scandinavian dictionaries, phrase books, as well as his translations from all the Scandinavian literatures (Knut Hamsun, Sigrid Undset, August Strindberg, Artur Lundkvist, Peter Høeg, Hans Scherfig etc.) were extremely important to the development of later Scandinavian studies, and his efforts were also acknowledged from abroad. Moreover, in 1980 a comprehensive *Norwegian Grammar* (the Bokmål linguistic variant) was published for the students of Norwegian at the University of Bucharest. The author was Ilinca Constantinescu from the Institute of Linguistics of the university.

Among the time witnesses we contacted when we did this research were: Sanda Munteanu (October 2019), Steinar Lone (November 2019), Jardar Seim (December 2019), Larisa Avram (December 2019), and Signe Flydal Blichfeldt (March 2020).

### **The Beginnings of Norwegian Studies**

The first visiting professor to teach Norwegian in Romania was the linguist Leiv Flydal (1904-1983). He was Professor in Romance philology at the University of Oslo in the period 1963-1971. Flydal is known for having dealt with variational linguistics, and he was also the one who “introduced the terms diatopic (for the spatial axis) and diastratic (for the social axis) in

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<sup>2</sup> Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 16.

an article in 1951.”<sup>3</sup> Since professors were entitled to one sabbatical year, Leiv Flydal wanted to study Romanian and moved to Bucharest in the summer of 1966. At the same time, he received an ordinary salary for his professorship in Norway. Flydal moved to Romania together with his wife and children. While his son attended the German high school in Bucharest for a year, his daughter, Signe Flydal (later Signe Flydal Blichfeldt), already studying Spanish in Norway before departure, applied for and received a state scholarship to study Romanian and Spanish in Bucharest.

Leiv Flydal also convinced the historian Jardar Seim to apply for a student scholarship to Romania in the academic year 1965-1966, as part of the existing cultural agreement between Romania and Norway. The following year, it was Signe Flydal who was granted the same student scholarship. In fact, since 1964, the two countries had agreed on “two-year cooperation programs regarding cooperation in science, education and culture.”<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, on 23 November 1976, Norway and Romania expressed their consent to the ratification of a cultural agreement through their representatives in Oslo, namely minister of Foreign Affairs Knut Frydenlund and the Romanian ambassador Teodor Vasiliu. The following articles were included in this agreement, which was to be valid for five years:

- “Article 1: the Parties shall encourage and develop cooperation in science, education, culture and other fields.
- Article 2: with a view to achieving the objectives referred to in Article 1, the Parties shall promote:
  - exchange of scholars, researchers, teachers, specialists, artists and other cultural workers, students, etc.,

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<sup>3</sup> Viggo Bank Jensen, “Eugenio Coseriu, Scandinavian Linguists and Variational Linguistics”, *Dacoromania* 17 (2/2012), 154.

<sup>4</sup> Utenriksdepartementet, “St. prp. nr. 78 (1976-77). Om samtykke til ratifikasjon av en kulturavtale mellom Norge og Romania, undertegnet i Oslo 23. november 1976”, [https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Storingsforhandlinger/Lesevisning/?p=1976-77&paid=2&wid=a&psid=DIVL914&pgid=a\\_0525&s=True&fbclid=IwAR3XOye6A7Z6e3PqYmmi6EuT4hGuArr1jBSl2SeFKPPcBJSh-UGL7pYnoJE](https://www.stortinget.no/no/Saker-og-publikasjoner/Storingsforhandlinger/Lesevisning/?p=1976-77&paid=2&wid=a&psid=DIVL914&pgid=a_0525&s=True&fbclid=IwAR3XOye6A7Z6e3PqYmmi6EuT4hGuArr1jBSl2SeFKPPcBJSh-UGL7pYnoJE), accessed 3.04.2021. “toårige samarbeidsprogram vedrørende samarbeid innen vitenskap, undervisning og kultur” (my translation).

- arrangement of lectures and talks,
  - exchange of research materials, scientific and professional publications, books, statistics and other information and documentation materials, including textbooks and visual aids.
- Article 3: each Party shall, as far as possible, grant scholarships to the other Party for studies and specialization in the fields of education, science, culture, etc.
- Article 4: the Parties shall encourage the study of the language and culture of the other country through exchanges and cooperation.<sup>5</sup>

Before arriving in Bucharest, the Flydals attended summer courses in Romanian language and culture in Sinaia. Then Leiv Flydal got close to the linguistic milieu in Bucharest, also within the Romanian Academy. Since he was a linguist and a native Norwegian, he was asked to teach the Scandinavian language for a few hours a week while being in the capital. Thus, he taught at the University of Bucharest for a small group of interested people. Norwegian was not part of a formal study, that is why, there was no exam related to his teaching.

Since Norway did not send Norwegian lecturers (so-called *sendelektorer*) to Romania until 2015, Flydal was employed neither in Romania nor in Norway to teach in Bucharest. He came as a scholar, not as a teacher, and did not have a state scholarship. The most eager of his students

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. "Artikkel 1: partene skal oppmuntre og utvikle samarbeid innen vitenskap, undervisning, kultur og på andre områder.

- Artikkel 2: med sikte på å nå de mål som er nevnt i Artikkel 1, skal partene fremme:
- utveksling av vitenskapsmenn, forskere, lærerpersonell, spesialister, kunstnere og andre kulturarbeidere, studenter etc.,
  - arrangement av forelesninger og foredrag,
  - utveksling av forskningsmaterieill, vitenskapelige og faglige publikasjoner, bøker, statistisk og annet informasjons- og dokumentasjonsmaterieill, inklusive lærebøker og visuelle hjelpemidler.
- Artikkel 3: hver av partene skal, såvidt mulig, yte den annen part stipend til studier og spesialisering på områdene undervisning, vitenskap, kultur etc.
- Artikkel 4: partene skal oppmuntre studiet av det annet lands språk og kultur ved hjelp av utveksling og samarbeid." (my translation)

was probably Ilinca Constantinescu, who continued studying Norwegian also after his departure.

Arne Halvorsen (1939-2014) came to Romania the following year, namely in 1967. In an interview published in *The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies*, Halvorsen confessed: "It is a long story, and as it often happens the result of chance. But in brief: I was studying old French when the one who was professor of Romance languages, Leiv Flydal, spent his sabbatical year in Bucharest and began to teach Norwegian there. He thought that I should go and take over the teaching lessons. After I looked at the map and found out that Bucharest was the capital of a country where a Romance language was spoken, I said yes. After a language course in Sinaia, I went to Bucharest with a Romanian state scholarship. I stayed there from autumn 1967 to spring 1968. I thought that Romanian was a difficult, but fascinating language. A passionate love story probably maintained the interest as well!"<sup>6</sup> The starting point for Halvorsen's coming to Romania was provided again by the existing agreement between the two countries.

Arne Halvorsen, who later became professor in Romance linguistics at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Norway, made consistent efforts to establish a Romanian language lectureship in Trondheim, which functioned between 2008-2011. During his career he authored among others *Rumensk-norsk ordbok / Dicționar român-norvegian*, a dictionary with 25000 words (Sypress, 2001), *Norsk-rumensk ordbok, Bind I, A-K / Dicționar norvegian-român, Volumul I, A-K* (Tehnopress, 2015) and the first *Romanian Grammar in Norwegian – Rumensk grammatikk* (Sypress, 2012).

Halvorsen also worked as a translator, a commentator for the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation (NRK), and later as a university lecturer at the University of Bergen. He started his activity at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in 1978.

In the above-mentioned interview, Halvorsen recalls that "Romania was a different world in 1968 [...] My encounter with Romanian intellectuals was a shocking experience for a slightly arrogant Western European: the

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<sup>6</sup> Crina Leon, "A Life Dedicated to Romanian Language. Interview with Professor Arne Halvorsen", *The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies* 6 (1/2014), 208.

level of knowledge among students and teachers in Bucharest was impressive."<sup>7</sup>

Another prominent name in terms of promoting Scandinavia in Bucharest at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is Valeriu Munteanu (1921-1999)<sup>8</sup>. Munteanu was not only a university lecturer but also a linguist and a translator. He studied law and philology in Romania, then continued with Nordic languages in Uppsala. In 1968 Munteanu laid the foundations for Swedish language courses in Bucharest, and in 1970 Danish language courses also appeared. Munteanu published four Scandinavian phrase books in 1977 and 1980-1981.

In addition to translating a significant number of works from Swedish and Danish literature or even three Icelandic sagas, Munteanu successfully managed to promote Norwegian literature through translations from Sigrid Undset's work (*Gunnar's Daughter*, 1973) and especially from Knut Hamsun's novels (*Pan: From Lieutenant Thomas Glahn's Papers*; *Victoria: A Love Story*, 1967; *Hunger*, 1967; *Mysteries*, 1997; *Dreamers*; *Under the Autumn Star*, 1998, *Benoni*; *Rosa*, 2000 and *The Growth of the Soil*, 2002).

In the late 1970s Valeriu Munteanu taught Swedish at the University of Bucharest, while Ilinca Constantinescu from the Institute of Linguistics taught Norwegian. Constantinescu had started studying Norwegian in Romania with Leiv Flydal and she also attended the Summer School of the University of Oslo.

At that time, students could choose to study among others Swedish, Norwegian or Danish as a compulsory subject. The course lasted for three semesters, two hours a week. Afterwards, those who wished, could continue to study these languages as elective courses. The group of students in Norwegian was quite small (4-5 students).

Jan Willem Bos, who taught Dutch at the University of Bucharest between 1982 and 1984, writes in his 'Romanian' autobiography that in that

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>8</sup> For further details regarding Valeriu Munteanu's life and work, see Crina Leon, "Valeriu Munteanu," in *O istorie a traducerilor în limba română din secolul al XX-lea. Domenii literare și nonliterare. ITLR. Volumul I*, coord. Muguraș Constantinescu, Daniel Dejica, Titela Vilceanu (București: Editura Academiei Române, 2021), 411-413.

period “students had to choose a supplementary subject (C) in addition to their major (A) and minor (B). In fact, for language C, the students of German could choose between Old German, the Scandinavian language that was offered that year, and Dutch.”<sup>9</sup>

In 1980 Ilinca Constantinescu published *Gramatica limbii norvegiene – Bokmål / Norwegian Grammar – Bokmål* at the Institute of Linguistics of the University of Bucharest. As stated at the beginning of the book, the grammar is meant for the students in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> years of study at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, and the author gives her thanks for the support among others to the University of Oslo (Nordisk Institutt and International Summer School). In the same year, 1980, Constantinescu also published an article entitled „Elemente cu statut facultativ în limbile norvegiană și română” / “Supplementary Elements in Norwegian and Romanian”<sup>10</sup>. There she gave examples of ellipsis or tolerated omissions in Norwegian.

After a while, the subject within which Norwegian was taught became a seminar of Old English, and Ilinca Constantinescu no longer taught the Norwegian classes. One of her former students is Professor Larisa Avram from the English Department of the University of Bucharest. She studied English and French at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures in Bucharest in the period 1978-1982, but her interest in Norwegian led to her writing a Bachelor thesis entitled *The Temporal System of English and Norwegian*. Some years later, in 1987, she even published an article “The Romanian *Prezent* and the Norwegian *Presens*. A semantic description”<sup>11</sup>. Together with Andrei Avram, also a former student of Norwegian at the

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<sup>9</sup> Jan Willem Bos, *De la Rin la Dunăre și înapoi. Autobiografia mea românească* (București: Humanitas, 2022), 115-116. “Pe atunci, studenții erau obligați să aleagă pe lângă specializarea A, și specializarea secundară B, dar și o materie suplimentară C. Practic, pentru limba C, studenții de la germană puteau opta între germana veche, limba scandinavă care se oferea în anul respectiv, și neerlandeza.” (my translation)

<sup>10</sup> Ilinca Constantinescu, „Elemente cu statut facultativ în limbile norvegiană și română,” *Studii și cercetări lingvistice* 31 (4/1980): 365-368.

<sup>11</sup> Larisa Avram, “The Romanian *Prezent* and the Norwegian *Presens*. A semantic description”, *Revue Roumaine de Linguistique* 3 (1987): 207-212.

University of Bucharest, she translated a selection of folk tales by Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe from Norwegian into Romanian.<sup>12</sup>

Professor Andrei Avram is a 1983 graduate of English-Arabic at the same faculty as Larisa Avram. In 1982 he published a review on Friederike Braun's PhD thesis, *Anredeverhalten im Norwegischen / Forms of Address in Norwegian*<sup>13</sup>, defended at the Christian-Albrecht University of Kiel. Another review on a Scandinavian topic authored by Andrei Avram was published in 2011, this time on Attila Kelemen's PhD thesis defended at the Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca and entitled *Influența scandinavă asupra lexicului și sintaxei limbii engleze vechi și medii / Scandinavian Influence on the Vocabulary and Syntax of Old and Middle English*.<sup>14</sup>

### Present Development

Nowadays, Norwegian is no longer considered such an exotic language in Romania. Starting with the 1990s there has been a constant interest in studying this Scandinavian language, be it for a future career, for further studies in Norway, for finding a better paid job or simply as a hobby. Cluj-Napoca is the city where the program of study *Norwegian language and literature* was introduced as a minor in 1991 and as a major in 2008. Moreover, PhD studies in Norwegian literature and language began to be offered at the "Babeș-Bolyai" University in 2010.

At the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, the first Norwegian courses were offered in the academic year 2005-2006 when a language course was included in the Master's program "German Culture in a European Context". Then the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași introduced supplementary Norwegian language courses in 2011 and Norwegian culture and civilization courses in 2014.

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe, *Murgul năzdrăvan: basme norvegiene* (București: Editura Ion Creangă, 1989), translated into Romanian by Larisa and Andrei Avram.

<sup>13</sup> Andrei Avram, "F. Braun, *Anredeverhalten im Norwegischen*", *Studii și cercetări lingvistice* 33 (6/1982): 512-514.

<sup>14</sup> Andrei Avram, "A. Kelemen, *Influența scandinavă asupra lexicului și sintaxei limbii engleze vechi și medii*", *Bucharest Working Papers in Linguistics* 13 (1/2011): 167-169.



Last but not least, since 2010 Norwegian courses (two hours a week for one semester) have been offered at the university level for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students of Swedish at the University of Bucharest.

## Conclusions

In the present article we intended to shed light on the role of those who taught Norwegian at the University of Bucharest before the Romanian Revolution of 1989. Thus, we have made reference to the first Norwegian visiting professors who taught Norwegian in Romania, Leiv Flydal and Arne Halvorsen, and to the role of the Romanian university lecturer, translator and lexicographer Valeriu Munteanu in promoting and preserving Scandinavian languages, starting with the late 1960s. Ilinca Constantinescu also contributed to promoting Norwegian through the *Norwegian Grammar* published in 1980 or the prolific influence she had on her students.

Nowadays, the Norwegian language is taught in Romania at the university level in Cluj-Napoca (BA major and minor, and PhD studies), Iași (supplementary language and culture and civilization courses) and Bucharest (one optional course).

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