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***THE STYLISTICS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE
BETWEEN PERSUASION AND MANIPULATION***
**PHD THESIS
- ABSTRACT -**

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**IAȘI
2013**

ABSTRACT

The impact of the political discourse over the audience is essential. A well structured political discourse can change the world, “it could even raise dictators to power, eliminate tempting personalities from a decision making position, orientate choices and strategies, in one word, can constantly influence the entire existence and functioning of the community.”¹ The political discourse is dominated by intentionality and for this reason at the origin of each discourse lies the will for power of a particular group. Any political actor aims at reaching power by means of those instruments that ensure legitimacy: “The foundation of the legitimacy of power is one pertaining to discursiveness.”² Michel Foucault states that the discourse is the object of desire, it is in fact the power that has to be conquered: “for the discourse – psychoanalysis has shown it – is not merely about what desire discloses (or conceals); it is equally the object of desire; also, for the discourse – history teaches this lesson again and again – is not just the transfer of the battles and domination systems, but it is equally that something for which and through which the battle is given: it is the very power that has to be conquered.”³

We have chosen this topic for our doctoral research *The stylistics of the political discourse between persuasion and manipulation* for its relevance for the present times and the importance of the issue within the sciences of the language, of social sciences, of communication sciences and of political sciences. The area of research in the case of the political discourse has expanded in the past decades due to its

¹ Constantin Sălăvăstru, *Discursul puterii*, Iași, Editura Institutul European, 1999, p. 19.

² Ibidem.

³ Michel Foucault, *Ordinea discursului*, traducere de Ciprian Tudor, București, Eurosong & Book, 1998, p. 16.

interdisciplinary nature. It is difficult, sometimes even almost impossible to operate delimitations within a project that focuses on a variform object. The discourse is not a manageable and transparent instrument, it has its own logic and is not limited to a reflection of the social world, but it also builds it at the same time.

The present thesis offers a possible model for a multidisciplinary analysis of political discourses; through the specific nature of the corpus chosen, it suggests an approach which can provide an answer to the questions: How do the stylistic-rhetorical figures contribute to achieving persuasion and manipulation in the political discourse? What place do they have in the creation of a political discourse, considering the elements that it can be related to in today's world: ideology, social psychology, the mass media? Identifying the circumstances in which the political discourse is created is an essential element in its research and for this reason we have chosen a multidisciplinary approach. Our research focused on a number of political discourses delivered within the context of two major events of significance in the Romanian society, the referenda for the relegation of Romania's President Traian Băsescu of May 19th 2007 and July 29th 2012.

The scientific approach of the thesis *The stylistics of the political discourse between persuasion and manipulation* has mainly investigated the use of the stylistic-rhetorical figures which are integrated in the complex context of the political discourse. The thesis is divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, *Style and stylistics, rhetoric and figures*, we have defined and outlined the terms involved, firstly style and the discipline that studies it, namely stylistics, then rhetoric, according to the views expressed by various experts in the domain. It can be stated that stylistics in its modern form offers the researcher a theoretical framework and a methodology that allows an analysis of the material at several levels, at the same time considering the extra-linguistic context in which the discourse is produced and delivered. Linguistic communication

implies the actualization of the language system at every level: phonetic, morphological, lexical and semantic, syntactic. We have started our process of analysis from this point, directing our investigation towards the three levels chosen: lexicosemantic, morpho-syntactic and stylistic-rhetorical.

On approaching rhetoric, we have considered the opinion of Chaïm Perelman și Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, the authors of the *Treaty on argumentation*, according to whom the persuasive discourse aims at obtaining the people's adherence and uses language to persuade and convince. We have also considered the definition of rhetoric proposed by Olivier Reboul in his introduction to *Rhetoric*, which, however, does not apply to every discourse, but only to those whose aim is to persuade, for rhetoric is the art of persuading by means of the discourse. The French author considers that any verbal, written or oral production, irrespective of its size, can be considered a discourse if it displays a certain unity of meaning. In presenting the various views on figures, we have started from the research in the 6th and 7th decade of the last century. After presenting several modern approaches of figures, we have emphasized the diverse and varied nature of the classifications and defined the concept of *stylistic-rhetorical figures*.

We have posed a working hypothesis regarding stylistic and rhetorical figures in order to integrate them in the political discourse, by combining four sciences: language sciences, social sciences, communication sciences and political sciences. The analytical strategy used on the corpus of discourses starts from the concept of *stylistic-rhetorical* figure, supported theoretically by arguments by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. They suggest a model for the interpretation of figures from the point of view of a rhetoric of argumentation, posing a double nature of figures⁴: they are rhetorical figures if we consider

⁴ Chaïm Perelman, Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, *La Nouvelle Rhétorique. Traité de l'argumentation*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1958, p. 229; Chaïm Perelman, *L'Empire rhétorique. Rhétorique et argumentation*, Paris, Vrin, 1977, p. 14.

their role within the context of creating and emphasizing persuasion, and at the same time they are stylistic figures if we consider the text of the discourse outside its context of enunciation. The figures represent a domain common both to stylistic and rhetoric; hence, starting from the term suggested by Gh. Dragomirescu⁵ of *rhetorical stylistics*, we designated them as *stylistic-rhetorical figures* and their analysis as *stylistic-rhetorical analysis*.

In the second chapter, *The political discourse* – an area of interrelations, we have proposed an interdisciplinary approach of the concept of discourse. We have first defined discourse in general, relying on the views of Dominique Mainguenu, Michel Foucault, Georges Vignaux, Émile Beneveniste, Teun A. Van Dijk and Jürgen Habermas, and went on to limit its scope and focused on political discourse only, seen as an area of interrelations, which leads to an interdisciplinary approach. We have especially used Christian Le Bart's opinion, according to which the context of the political discourse has a major role in that the political discourse can influence the context which, in its turn, can influence the discourse, which is ultimately a form of domination, hence of manipulation. Besides, irrespective of the type of political system, whether it is democratic or totalitarian, the political discourse is the fundamental instrument of political action and, according to Reboul, it is a vehicle for ideology. He have outlined the coordinates of the discourse, more exactly its main characteristics, types, functions, structures and contents. In order to draw a parallel between the contemporary political discourse and the discourse during the communist totalitarian regime, in the second part of the chapter we identified and discussed the characteristics of the political discourse during the communist totalitarian regime. The specific instrument of

⁵ Gh. N. Dragomirescu, *Dicționarul figurilor de stil*, București, Editura Științifică, 1995, p. 16.

th totalitarian discourse were presented, propaganda and the *langue de bois*.

The third chapter, *The political discourse between persuasion and manipulation*, links the political discourse with two of its most important functions, and also with social psychology. After defining the concepts of persuasion and manipulation, presented in the first two chapters, we identified the various ways in which they become constituents of the political discourse, starting from the idea that any power seeks to exercise a form of domination through discourse, which implies “some mechanics of the consensus”⁶ in which manipulation plays a decisive role. Therefore, the purpose of rhetoric of achieving persuasion also becomes the purpose of the political discourse, thus persuasion becomes an indispensable manner to influence the audience in democratic societies in achieving the aims pursued by the political actors.

In the subchapter *Social psychology, collective memory and the political discourse*, we have emphasized the considerable importance of social psychology in understanding the political element from the point of view of the social influence paradigm. According to Serge Moscovici, social psychology becomes “a machine which manufactures gods” since “Politics is the rational form of exploiting the irrational basis of the masses.”⁷ Within this context, the appeal to collective memory within the political discourse becomes a manner to influence the masses and equally to relate to the psychological mechanisms of the subconscious, which can significantly increase the effects of manipulation. Thus, considering that “memory is a fundamentally important political and cultural element”⁸, its importance for

⁶ Edward Bernays, *Propaganda*, Brooklyn, N.Y., Ig Publishing, 2004.

⁷ Serge Moscovici, *Psihologia socială sau mașina de fabricat zei*, traducere de Oana Popârda, Iași, Editura Universității „Al. I. Cuza”, 1995, p. 99.

⁸ Jean-Jacques Courtine, *Le tissu de la mémoire: quelques perspectives de travail historique dans les sciences du langage*, în *Langages*, no. 114, *Mémoire, histoire, langage*, Paris, Didier-Larousse, 1994, p. 11.

investigating the function of the political discourse is essential. By resorting to collective memory, along a set of discursive operations that organize recollection, repetition, also deletion and oblivion of what can be called the domain of the discursive memory, persuasion and manipulation can be enhanced. That is why broadcast political discourse makes use of the mechanisms of reviving the collective memory depending on the strategies of persuasion and/or manipulation used; in this, an important factor is the stylistic-rhetorical figures.

In the fourth chapter, *Current circumstances of the political discourse*, we emphasized the interdisciplinary nature of our research by presenting the role played by the mass media in the dissemination of the political discourse in achieving persuasion and manipulation. Mass media have a decisive contribution in outlining the political, especially during the electoral campaigns, when the influencing power of the broadcast discourse is at its highest.

The fifth chapter, *The analysis of stylistic-rhetorical figures in political discourses in the campaigns for two referenda (2007, 2012)*, begins by introducing the concept of referendum as a democratic manner of the citizens' participating in making decisions of general interest. Our case study is based on two referenda: the referendum for the relegation demission of President Traian Băsescu of May 19th 2007 and the referendum for the relegation of President Traian Băsescu of July 29th 2012. Neither referendum was a typical one, as they were shaped as aggressive political confrontations involving intense political campaigns. If the referendum of 2007 was an exercise meant to confirm Traian Băsescu's political legitimacy, as the political battle was between the relegated president and the 332 MPs, the referendum of 2012 carried an altogether different weight, that of political survival of the relegated president who, this time, did not meet the conditions of political legitimacy, which was eventually proved by the result of the referendum. Therefore, the referendum of 2012 turned into an aggressive political battle between the two

parties involved: on the one hand, the relegated president Traian Băsescu, who built his strategy on the principle of establishing his legitimacy, while the political discourse was turned into a propaganda discourse meant to appeal to the population's emotions; on the other hand, the USL coalition and its leaders, the interim president Crin Antonescu and PM Victor Ponta.

In the introduction to the case study, we have emphasized the role of the figures identified in the political discourses used in achieving persuasion and manipulation, with special reference to syntactic figures and semantic figures, on which analysis was focused. We have presented our analysis methodology, which is quantitative but mainly qualitative. The discourses in the corpus were analysed in their extra-linguistic contexts and at a morphological-syntactic, lexical and stylistic-rhetorical level. The overall objectives were: a) the statistical value of the frequency of key words, extracted to emphasize their role in achieving persuasion and manipulation, which is proved by the frequency of their occurrence; b) extracting the morphological-syntactic classes and categories that contribute to the stylistic profile of the discourses; c) identifying the syntactic figures (anaphora, epiphora, enumeration, repetition, anadiplosis, polysyndeton) and of semantic figures (metaphor, epithet, simile) and identifying their role in achieving persuasion and manipulation.

The corpus used for analysis consisted of nine selected and transcribed speeches that were delivered by two important actors, the leaders Traian Băsescu (Romania's President / Romania's relegated President) and Crin Antonescu (Romania's interim President). The selection was guided by the fact that they were the protagonists of characteristic political actions in Romania's recent history. The corpus includes the following speeches:

1. three political discourses delivered by Traian Băsescu on the occasion of the referendum of 2007: a. the discourse of April 19th 2007, delivered

during the spontaneous meeting in University Square in Bucharest immediately after his relegation by Parliamentary vote; b. the discourse of April 22nd; c. the discourse of May 19th 2007 delivered after the end of the referendum.

2. two political discourses delivered in critical circumstances of political crisis in 2012: a. Traian Băsescu's speech of January 25th in response to the rallies caused by the discontent within the context of the economic crisis; b. the discourse made by Crin Antonescu in another difficult political circumstance on June 10th 2012 on the relegation of President Traian Băsescu, occasion on which Crin Antonescu became the interim president.

3. four political discourses delivered during the campaign for the referendum of 2012: a. the discourse delivered by Traian Băsescu in Cluj on July 14th; b. the discourse delivered by Traian Băsescu in Iași on July 21st; c. the discourse delivered by Traian Băsescu in Bucharest on July 26th; d. the discourse delivered by Crin Antonescu on July 26th.

In the first discourse of April 19th delivered during the referendum of 2007, it is evident that the speaker has no pre-established strategy, the discourse being delivered during a spontaneous meeting with a strong element of improvisation, which can be traced in the reduced number of figures used. The discourse of April 22nd, however, is shown in our analysis to be completely different, in that the discourse is remarkable for the dichotomy Traian Băsescu suggests by means of the frequent use of the pronouns *eu* "I" and *ei* "they" meant to create the opposition between the President and *they* the MPs. At a lexical level, the recurring resort to the number 322 referring to the number of MPs who voted for the relegation, shows the speaker's intention to identify his opponents and expose them to public contempt. At a stylistic-rhetorical level, the speaker uses the anaphor with the aim to persuade; also, the intention to

manipulate can be traced in the frequency with which the rhetorical question is used. In the last of these speeches, an obvious intention to appeal to the population's emotions is discernible in the recurrent use of the words *Romanians*, *Romanian*.

To provide a broader framework for our analyses, we have included in the study corpus two political speeches delivered during a critical period. The first speech was made by President Traian Băsescu and was made in response to the population's manifestations caused by the extended economic social crisis. In this case, persuasion is achieved by means form every level of the discourse: at a morphological-syntactic level the recurrent use of the adverbial phrase *extrem de* is obvious, with the aim of creating a dramatic effect. The classical dichotomy *I/we* versus *he/she/they* is distorted in order to organize the discursive components in such a way that the result should be persuasion; however, the intention to manipulate is also discernible. The use of the pronoun *I* has an important role in construing the President's political legitimacy; at the same time, it creates the impression that he is in control in spite of everything; on the other hand, this is extended to the dichotomy created in order to be delivered to the citizens of Romania, as *I* the President and *it* the people merge in a single entity, us the people of Romania, opposed to *they*, the politicians, the MPs. At the lexical level, the key word used in organizing the speech is the noun *crisis*, used 20 times; this thus becomes an emblem of the entire speech. At the stylistic-rhetorical level, the epithet and the metaphor are important elements: one of the key metaphors is that of Romania as a ship at sea, with Traian Băsescu as its captain who has never failed reaching the destination, who is the only one capable of lead the ship out of the crisis.

The second speech was selected in order to draw a comparison with the previous one; it the speech made by interim president Crin Antonescu on July 10th 2012, against the background of political crisis which resulted in the relegation

of President Traian Bănescu and the referendum organized in 2012. His speech could be entitled “the discourse of normality” on account of the frequent use of the words *normal* (“normal”), *normalitate* (“normality”) with the obvious aim of releasing the existing tension caused by the critical situation and, at the same time, with the implicit intention of manipulating the audience. At the stylistic-rhetorical level, it can be seen that persuasion is achieved through the use of anaphora, enumeration and epithet in order to provide positive associations to a would-be normal state of things. There is a clear difference in the politicians’ reactions to a critical situation: in the former, the speaker chooses to create a discursive strategy which emphasizes the idea of crisis in order to promote himself as the saviour of the country – the metaphor of Romania as a ship; in the latter speech, the speaker chooses to emphasize the “normal” nature of the circumstances relying on the use of anaphora and repetition, of the frequent recurrent use of the two words *normal* (“normal”) and *normalitate* (“normality”). The analysis of the two speeches reveals that the speakers’ intention to persuade is deviated towards manipulation.

A different strategy can be identified in Traian Bănescu’s discursive strategy in the case of the referendum of 2012 as compared to that of the referendum of 2007. The political circumstances are widely different, in that the relegated president no longer has popular support, which is reflected at discourse level in the more frequent use of syntactic and semantic figures. His campaign strategy for the referendum of 2012 was directed to three major urban centres where Traian Bănescu delivered his speeches: Cluj, Iași and Bucharest. In the speech at Cluj he seeks to establish his legitimacy and at the same time to identify his political adversaries. The metaphors hold major roles in achieving persuasion and manipulation at the same time. An illuminating example is the metaphor of the *chair*, which refers to the position of head of the state; the metaphor of *decapitation* also holds a major role in vilifying his opponents. It is the speech of “restoration”: by using this

term as an extension of the *decapitation* metaphor, Traian Băsescu identifies himself with the state whose head/chief he is in order to suggest that “*l’état c’est moi*” and his political adversaries have beheaded the state. In the speech made at Iași, syntactic figures are prevalent and the key idea of the discourse switches from restoration to “the coup.” The discourse insists even more on the population’s emotions, as Băsescu identifies himself with the country and the population by using recurrently to the pronoun *noi* (“we”).

On the last day of the campaign for the referendum, two speeches were delivered simultaneously: that of the interim president Crin Antonescu and that of the relegated president Traian Băsescu. The difference between the two at the level of analysis is obvious: Crin Antonescu uses the epithet and the enumeration in order to create a psychological profile of the Romanian citizen who will cast his vote; he also uses the anaphora, epiphora and metaphors with a religious tenor in order to persuade and also to manipulate; on the other hand, Traian Băsescu’s speech is sharp, enumeration and anaphora are used to achieve and intensify persuasion with an intention to manipulate. It should also be mentioned that Traian Băsescu resorts to social memory in his intention to influence the audience regarding their vote. The analysis on corpus reveals that Traian Băsescu’s speech is richer in stylistic-rhetorical devices, which he uses more frequently and efficiently with a view to achieve persuasion and, at the same time, with an intention to manipulate.

In its multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary nature, the thesis *The stylistics of the political discourse between persuasion and manipulation* set as its objective to establish a paradigm to research the political discourse; the final objective was that of identifying the mechanics and resources of the political discourse – the stylistic-rhetoric figures – in achieving persuasion and/or manipulation. The originality of the theme can be found in the interdisciplinary approach of the political discourse, in the novelty of the corpus used for analysis from

two uncharacteristic referenda and, at a practical level, in the result of the analyses which can be contribution to the process of decoding the mechanisms of persuasion and manipulation within the political discourses. The mapping of the present thesis reveals interdisciplinary intersections and crossroads where several directions meet. Thus, the choice of a single path has often posed a challenge since each of the viable options leads to a yet another crossroad. We trust, however, that the “compass” we have used in our research has indicated the most appropriate way, but the journey does not end here.