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Interferences between journalistic and political language in post-1989 Romania

Doctoral thesis (abstract)

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Chapter 1 Journalistic style and political language in literary Romanian language.

1.1. Style-language. Theoretical delimitations.

The first definitions of the concept of "style", in terms of "functional styles" or "language styles" – which is the sense adopted in this research –, were elaborated during the first decades of the last century, and they belong to the Linguistic School of Prague. The concept was then taken over by the Soviet colleagues of the researchers from Prague[1]. Nowadays, several Romanian researchers have attempted to capture as clearly as possible, in brief definitions, the concept of 'style of literary language'.

The concept of "language" has a much richer tradition in linguistics, mainly in relationship with "*langue*". The most frequent distinction between the two concepts states that "by language we must therefore understand an intrinsic human quality, a characteristic of the human species as a whole, and a faculty specific to each human individual, that of producing specific vocal signs, provided with meaning, to the purpose of interpersonal communication, in a social setting. Therefore, the existence of language is not real, but potential. People do not «speak a language», but a particular *langue*, only one at a particular moment, be it Romanian, French, Latin, Esperanto, or any other. Thus, by language we must understand the historical concretisation of the universal human faculty of language. While *langues* are multiple, natural human language is unique and has general or universal features"[2].

1.2. Journalistic style. Pros and cons.

The existence of a journalistic "style" or "language" within literary Romanian has been subject to many debates, especially during the period 1954-1985.

1.2.1. Pros.

Alexandru Andriescu claims that this style is quite old, and he states that "it was born in the 19th century (...), and the process of differentiation of its specific elements ended around 1860."[3] Nowadays, Rodica Zafiu rejects the strict idea of dividing language into several main styles, and she pleads in favour of a way of seeing language from an interdisciplinary perspective, "as a complex and nuanced, gradual reality, made up of the interferences of many languages and types of texts, with their more or less individualised rules of construction and of selection"[4].

1.2.2. Cons.

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[1] Alexandru Andriescu, *Stil şi limbaj*, Ed. Junimea, Iaşi, 1977, 239 şi Ion Gheţie, *Introducere în studiul limbii române literare*, Ed. Ştiinţifică şi Enciclopedică, Bucureşti, 1982, 149.

[2] Eugen Munteanu, *Introducere în lingvistică*, Polirom, Iaşi, 2005, 12.

[3] Alexandru Andriescu, *Limba presei româneşti în secolul al XIX-lea*, Ed. Junimea, Iaşi, 1979, 7.

[4] Rodica Zafiu, *Diversitate stilistică în româna actuală*, Ed. Universităţii, Bucureşti, 2001, 9.

On the contrary, Lidia Sfîrlea, Constant Maneca, Flora Şuteu, Luiza Seche, Ion Coteanu and Stelian Dumistrăcel have challenged the existence of particular elements that would certify a journalistic style. Coteanu, who is acknowledged as the most prominent critic against the inclusion of journalism among functional styles, discussed this issue several times, his conclusion being that such a functional unit, situated somewhere between the artistic and the scientific styles, does not exist.

1.3. Political language.

Political language was challenged from the perspective of functional stylistics because it presumably has no strictly marked individuality: "(...) it largely identifies with standard language, it resembles to a great extent to journalistic language – which takes it over but also influences it –, it uses a stock of specific terms, but this is not a rigorous terminology, it intersects with legal language (especially in parliamentary activities) and with administrative language (in government, in administration)"[5]. Rodica Bogza Irimie also challenges the existence of a "purely political language, in which all the terms express a political content"[6]. However, most researchers confer to this field the quality of having a distinct identity.

1.4. Interactions between journalistic style and political language. History.

The relationship between these two linguistic manifestations starts right from the moment when they became simultaneous in the Romanian area, that is, when the first publications emerged in the historical regions of Wallachia and in Moldova. Referring to that period, Andriescu makes a "special mention" about the "rich political terminology with which the mass of Romanian readers made contact for the first time in the pages of these publications. Political terminology, more than that of other sectors of activity, gives to journalistic style its special character"[7]. Closer to our time, the communist regime imposed, from the viewpoint of its construction and purpose, the dissolution of journalistic style into political language[8]. Thus, "Romanian mass-media lost some of their most important defining features", which led to the "incommunicability" of the press jargon[9].

1.5 Features of journalistic style.

Isolating the specificity of journalistic style has been a mission assumed, in a more or less applied manner, by most of the researchers who attempted to characterise it as a functional style.

[5] Rodica Zafiu, *Limbaj şi politică*, Ed. Universităţii, Bucureşti, 2007, 14.

[6] Rodica Bogza Irimie, *Termeni social-politici în primele periodice româneşti (rezumatul tezei de doctorat)*, Ed. Universităţii, Bucureşti, 1976, 3-4.

[7] Andriescu, *Limba presei*, 91.

[8] Rodica Zafiu, "Interpretarea limbajului jurnalistic", *Limba Română*, 7-9, Chişinău, 2007, 141-146.

[9] Maria Manoliu-Manea, "Maximele conversaţionale ale lui Grice şi discursul politic românesc", *Gramatica pragmasemantică şi discurs*, Ed. Litera, Bucureşti, 1993, 241.

The journalists' use of clichés is often quoted by the early researchers of this phenomenon, as well as the "flood" of superlatives[10]. In what regards the post-totalitarian press, Zafiu lists features of this language[11] as the rhetoric of titles, narrativisation and fictionalisation as strategies of creating the sensational, literaturisation and distancing (the embellishment of short news items, the use of pseudonyms) or the high levels of subjectivity and affectivity (the use of qualifying adjectives, of a hyperbolic language).

1.6. Features of political language.

Zafiu identifies for this language[12] the persuasive (but not manipulative) load whereby a view on the world, an ideology (in its neutral sense, a normal component of political discourse), the high level of accessibility of terms but also of ideas, a trend emphasised in recent decades through the political stakeholders' use of informal and familiar registers and the tendency towards using clichés which is linked to the need of accessibility; clichés are a form of stability, a means of reaching a consensus, of avoiding shocking or challenging the target recipients.

1.7. Journalistic genres.

There are several classifications of Romanian journalistic genres. One of the oldest belongs to Gheorghe Bolocan, who divided them into three groups[13]:

- newspaper information, press releases;
- articles on various topics, leading articles, columns, ample comments on foreign or domestic politics, political speeches;
- reports, reviews, serial-story columns, pamphlets, essays.

1.8. Genres of political language.

A division within political language could start from the "Parliament" as an institutional standard, as a central communicative setting, both the standpoint of quality, and from that of subgenres:

1. Parliamentary language.

Bills. Laws. Conventions. Legislative propositions. Commitments. Decisions. Political statements. Parliamentary debates. Simple motions and votes of confidence. Reports. Official papers. Legislative resolutions. Questions. Press statements. Speeches.

2. Non-parliamentary language (the Government, the Presidency, central and local authorities).

Legislative resolutions. Emergency Decisions. Decrees. Memos. Orders. Assignations.

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[10] Ana Canarache, "Să îmbogăţim vocabularul, dar să evităm greşelile de limbă", *Presa noastră*, 6-7, 1964, 32-33.

[11] Zafiu, *Diversitate*, 11-85.

[12] Zafiu, *Limbaj*, 15-23.

[13] Gheorghe Bolocan, "Unele caracteristici ale stilului publicistic al limbii române literare", *SCL*, II, nr. 1, 40.

Rules. Press releases. Speeches. Statements. Methodological standards. Standards. Instructions. Criteria. Amendments. Conventions. Treaties. Reports. Lists. Codes. Contracts. Protocols. Memoranda. Calculations. Records. Papers. Agreements. Minutes. Dispositions. Letters of advice. Understandings. Decisions. Interviews. Stand-taking. Newsletters. Open letters.

Chapter 2. Politics and press in the totalitarian period.

2.1. The press as an instrument of Power.

A discussion about the current state of a language cannot overlook the state of that language during the previous period. The effects of the 1989 fracture in this field are partial: to a great extent, the new was built on the old. The issue is all the more important as "the decisive role on society (…) materialises in *actions, activities* (…) but to a very great extent is exercised through *communication*, through *language*"[14]. A place where politics and the press met at the highest level, from a linguistic viewpoint, was represented by the columns/ leading articles published on the first pages. Usually not signed by anyone, this genre retook most of the topics as well as the persuasive formulae or procedures initially used in the political text issued by the Party or the Leader.

Chapter 3. Interferences between journalism and politics.

3.1. Cliché in the post-totalitarian Romanian press.

Both the politician and the journalist aim to persuade their recipients that the judgments they provide are valid. To this purpose, they use not only rational means (balance in approaching various topics, correct information, the attempt to keep one's promises, maintaining dialogue, surveying the other's needs) but also some means that are irrational/non-deliberate to some extent. The latter category includes verbal cliché, a universal rhetoric procedure but whose use in the current Romanian language of journalism and politics is motivated, in particular, by the reasoning, attitudinal and actional stereotypes induced in the both participants to the act of communication by the pre-1989 totalitarian regime.

3.1.2. Types of clichés.

Having initially emerged as innovations, the clichés used in the post-1989 Romanian journalistic and political languages may be divided, for instance, according to the criterion of their author:

Anonymous author: *nu ne vindem ţara* – we won't sell our country.

Known author: *sinergia faptelor* – the synergy of facts (Ion Iliescu).

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[14] Slama-Cazacu, *Stratageme comunicaţionale şi manipularea*, Ed. Polirom, Iaşi, 2000, 31. "Remanenţele discursului comunist" în presa şi discursul parlamentar din perioada 1990-1993 au fost enumerate de Lavinia Betea în "«Limba de lemn» - de la Ceauşescu la Ion Iliescu", Ilie Rad (coord.), *Limba de lemn în presă*, Ed. Tritonic, Bucureşti, 2009, 186.

3.2. A particular case: plagiarism.

Sometimes, the links between the two spheres go beyond the border of "creativity", and political language is "embellished" with fragments that are entirely copied from journalistic texts, eventually with small changes.

3.3. Semantic destabilisation.

Through the impact that they have on their recipients, the mass-media often "dictate" the meanings of words, even when they are contrary to the norms of language. Thus the use imposes the norm. Some words are reassessed from the viewpoint of the way in which they are received, and thus some of them get a positive connotation with respect to their past (*anticommunism, capitalism, competition, market economy*), while others get negative connotations (*Bolshevik, communism, Marxism*).

3.4. The rhetoric of titles.

A diachronic analysis of the titles of the votes of censorship initiated by Romanian MPs after 1989, available on the website of the Chamber of Deputies, www.cdep.ro, is revealing in this respect. During the period 1992-March 2003, the motion titles were largely flat and lacked creativity. In 2003 there was a "rupture"; it was the moment when was recorded the motion entitled *Mafia sufocă România - Corupția Guvernului P.S.D. sărăceşte România* – The Mob crushes Romania – The P.S.D. Government's corruption impoverishes Romania. The titles of censorship votes recorded during the period 2003-2012 bear many resemblances with the features of the titles published by the Romanian press.

3.5. Fairy-tale and myth.

The methods whereby contemporary journalists attempt to persuade their recipients within the boundaries of popular culture are varied. In the analyses of the news that presented victims on television, the interest in this type of news being justified by the high ratings of such materials, some researchers do not hesitate to claim that "reports about victims take over some narrative elements that make their structure similar to that of fairy-tales"[15]. Usually, the "hero" passes through difficult moments, and then gets help in order to defeat evil in the end. The model applies, for instance, to the news about terrorised families. For other researchers, the performance of the referential function of language itself requires "a tension between the imperative to talk accurately about what-it-is and the press' tendency to mythologize and schematise, to invent enemies and heroes"[16].

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[15] John Langer, "Ştiri groaznice la televizor", Peter Dahlgren, Colin Sparks (coord.), *Jurnalismul şi cultura populară*, Ed. Polirom, Iaşi, 2004, 133.

[16] Henrieta Mitrea Şerban, *Limbajul politic în democraţie*, Ed. Institutului de Ştiinţe Politice şi Relaţii Internaţionale, Bucureşti, 2006, 76.

3.6. The tendency towards spoken language.

Ever since the first half of the 19th century, journalistic and political languages have used the resources of spoken language to express their messages. After 1989, journalistic language became the first that opened towards spoken language, which became one of its features. The specificity of both spheres is given by the fact that they use words and meanings taken from familiar language and slang: *bulibăşeală* - mess, *şmen* - shenanigan, *gaură* - whole, *tun* - cannon, *ţeapă* - trick[17]. Many words from this register have been "seized by the language of the press", as a way of getting rid of the official language used during the previous period[18]. These words have developed "the most interesting semantic mutations", usually through metaphor, illustrating the so-called stylistic neology, which generates connotative meanings: *a aburi* – to vapour (someone, to trick by cunning words), *turnător* - telltale, *arici* – hedgehog (Velcro), *adidaşi* – common name for shoes, from Adidas[19]. Finally, the massive presence of the popular element "tends to have a heavy weight, being selected due to the senders'/political stakeholders' need to persuade/seduce a heterogeneous audience"[20].

3.7. Linguistic innovations.

This is a register that is often explored by politicians and journalists in their search of resources that would help them impose their discourse.

3.7.1. *Local baron*

This is one of the most successful expressions which have circulated simultaneously in the Romanian press and politics during the last ten years. It became famous as a definition of the dictatorial and corrupt behaviour of PSD representatives in the country, during the period 2001-2004, when this party was in government. In the course of time, the frequency and the variation of its use both in the press and in the speeches delivered in Parliament, led to the modification of its form: *de-baronisation, anti-baron, piggy-bank barons, baronet, baronets.*

3.8. Common sources.

Both journalistic and political languages get much of their inspiration from the formulae available from other languages, from which they usually take over cliché metaphors, which are very easy to decode by recipients. As they reflect occupations and interests embraced by many people,

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[17] Mioara Avram, "Vocabularul actual al limbii române", *LLR*, 3, 1997, 5.

[18] Luminiţa Roşca, „Mecanismele construcţiei mediatice", Ilie Rad (coord), *Stil şi limbaj în mass-media din România*, Ed. Polirom, Iaşi, 2007, 314.

[19] Adriana Stoichiţoiu Ichim, *Vocabularul limbii române actuale. Dinamică, influenţe, creativitate*, Ed. All, Bucureşti, 2008, 13.

[20] Adina Dumitru, *Limbajul politic actual*, Ed. Tiparg, Geamăna, 2010, 120.

sports and religion provide many sources of inspiration, which present the advantage of belonging to two very "popular" fields.

3.9. Figures of style and rhetoric.

3.9.1. Metaphor.

Just like in the totalitarian period, political language is characterised by an excessive use of metaphors, as political metaphor and political reality presuppose each other. In what regards journalistic language, this phenomenon remains the same, as metaphor, alongside irony, is "the main deliberate form of persuading readers"[21]. Some metaphors belong to wooden language while others are post-1989 creations.

3.9.2 Irony.

This rhetorical figure was "rationally" used before 1989, as its subversive side could engender unwanted destabilisation within the wooden language system[22]. However, after 1989, extra-linguistic reality found a very fierce critic in the press through the use of this figure. Politics and politicians are one of the main sources of irony in the press, but the latter also use this technique in their attempt to get closer to recipients.

3.10 Similarities between genres.

3.10.1 Political statement-news.

Bătută după 40 de pahare – Beaten after 40 glasses (Political statement by the deputy Tudor Ciuhodaru, meeting of the Chamber of Deputies, March 13, 2012)

"Cele 40 de pahare încep să aibă şi victime colaterale. După ce soţul a consumat în exces alcool, iar mama şi fiica au fost agresate, s-a ajuns chiar la tentative de sinucidere. – The tradition of the 40 glasses starts to make collateral victims. After the husband drank heavily, mother and daughter were aggressed, and there was also a suicide attempt (lead)

O pacientă de 21 de ani din Iaşi a necesitat măsuri de terapie intensivă după ce a ingerat benzodiazepine. S-au instituit măsuri de depurare a toxicului, prin emeză şi diureză osmotică, alături de suport ventilator şi circulator şi administrarea de nootrope. Mama de 46 de ani a refuzat să declare agresiunea, în ciuda faptului că noua lege privind violenţa domestică a fost promulgată. - A 21-year-old patient from Iaşi has needed measures of intensive care for having taken benzodiazepines. She was administered measures aiming to clean the toxic substances in her body, through emesis and osmotic diuresis, as well as ventilation and circulation support, and various

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[21] Ioana Cristina Pîrvu, *Arhitectura textului jurnalistic actual*, Ed. Universităţii, Bucureşti, 2008, 138.

[22] Elena Negrea, *Pragmatica ironiei. Studiu asupra ironiei în presa scrisă românească*, Ed. Tritonic, Bucureşti, 2010, 126.

drugs. Her 46-year-old mother refused to declare the aggression, despite the recent promulgation of the law on domestic violence. (context)

Îi vom asigura acestei familii suportul psihologic, prin voluntarii CIRTITA, precum şi posibilitatea refugiului într-un alt domiciliu, asigurat de o fundaţie." – This family will receive psychological support from CIRTITA volunteers as well as the chance of getting shelter in another place of living, provided by a foundation. (final paragraph)

3.11. A name-related issue and the press: a means of influencing political decisions.

Recently, at the Government's proposal, MPs have modified several articles of Law 119/1996 on registry papers. One of the reasons that made first names a legislative matter is that, after December 1989, for various reasons, the sources of inspiration for names have diversified, and the parents' choices have often gone to extremes. A special category is represented by Rroma ethnics, who are very keen on finding special names for their children.

3.12. Grounds for mistakes, deviations from literary language, deontological misdemeanours.

Even today public discourse is the grounds were many deviances emerge, starting with ambiguity, the wrong assimilation of English borrowings, verbal violence, incorrect expressions, writing with no special Romanian characters, the abuse of techniques aiming at shocking the recipients to the point of confusion, the inflectional instability of nouns, fleeting fashions, snobbish words, conceptual ambiguity, loss of neutrality, the invasion of emotionally loaded terms[23], the abuse of English terms, the simplification of syntax and the partial amputation of writing, the distortion of pronunciation in audiovisual media, as well as the parasitic use of textual and personal deictic[24].

4. Case studies.

4.1. Romanian Presidents after 1990 – linguistic contributions.

A. Absolute innovations.

In this category we include the new formulae, both in form, and, mainly, in content, whose previous attestation cannot be proven in public communication. Usually, these formulae become clichés through their excessive use in the mass-media or public discourse, and they change their form; this process of modification/enrichment is usually carried out by journalists.

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[23] Mihai Coman, *Mass-media în România post-comunistă*, Ed. Polirom, Iaşi, 2003, 74.

[24] Stelian Dumistrăcel, "Textul jurnalistic: un teren experimental de ambiguitate", Ofelia Ichim, Florin Teodor Olariu (coord.), *Identitatea limbii şi literaturii române în perspectiva globalizării*, Ed. Trinitas, Iaşi, 2002, 148.

E.g. *Tonomat* – Human jukebox (Traian Băsescu); *meandrele concretului* şi *sinergia faptelor* – The meanders of the concrete and the synergy of facts (Ion Iliescu).

B. Innovations taken over from somewhere else.

They had already existed in public or familiar discourse, but the prestige of the speaker that used them at a given moment led to their being revived at a different level, especially from the viewpoint of their frequency. E.g. *mogul* (Traian Băsescu).

4.2. Politicians-journalists, journalists-politicians.

There are three categories of politicians whose activity is linked with journalism:

- Those who acquired their linguistic skills before 1989; usually, during that period they were also authors of political speeches, which were influenced to a greater or lesser extent, by the norms of wooden language (Ion Iliescu, Adrian Năstase);

- Those who were journalists before 1989, and became politicians after that moment (Corneliu Vadim Tudor);

- Those who elaborated their journalistic texts and had a political career after 1989 (Cristian Preda, Sever Voinescu).

Conclusions.

Journalistic style and political language are consubstantial to such an extent that it is often hard to delimit a text's belonging to one or the other of the two linguistic realities of literary Romanian. Yet, in the relationship between journalism and politics, the pivotal role belongs to the former. For the mass-media, political life is just a topic among others, while, for political men, media channels are the most important means whereby they can show themselves to their voters in order to achieve their ultimate goal: the cyclic delegation of power. In their linguistic relationship, journalistic style is the one that "gives" more, while political language "steals", and there is no one to claim any copyright. The explanation is quite simple: in the recipients' eyes, the press has precedence over politicians, who attempt to "clone" the journalists' means of persuasion, and to convince others in their turn, mainly because, usually, audiences and voters are one and the same. This resembles an epical jungle battle in which, over time, an insect managed to copy the appearance of the plant on which it lives, and this camouflage gives it the means it needs to survive. In post-1989 Romania, the journalists' language has seduced the politicians, but the two fields had been previously linked by a marriage whose offspring was really bad – wooden language. After the divorce of 1989, this marriage left the two fields with a huge appetite for cliché, as well as for linguistic innovation, which, later on, has often been transformed into stereotype. It was the press that semantically destabilised many of the basic terms of the social-political vocabulary and that fed the politicians appetite for dressing their speeches in titles that seemed to have been taken over directly from the

pages of newspapers. This temptation went even further, as in political texts it is often quite easy to identify entire paragraphs taken over from columns, pamphlets, or the articles of more or less known journalists. At a higher level, some authors of political discourse have imported the structure of a series of journalistic genres (the news, the leading article) in order to make their messages more accessible to the conscience of their recipients. Very important for the occasional pre-eminence of political language is the sender's prestige: a person endowed with linguistic creativity, and who has access to several media channels at the same time, may impose new meanings for old words in the current vocabulary; in time, their excessive use may lead to their transformation into clichés. Under these circumstances it is easy to understand the emergence of a new phenomenon: after having used for years the services of consultant journalists or of various companies that knew the secret-of-journalistic-success, today, also favoured by the advent of the Internet, many politicians become journalists themselves: they launch blogs where they post materials that may be easily confounded with press articles, they keenly participate in various experiments conducted by televisions in which they take the place of presenters and moderators, they sign contracts to anchor prime-time television shows, they write columns, tablets or pamphlets in national newspapers. However, it is highly unlikely that this superimposition becomes identity; the new technologies and the emergence of civic journalism are a guarantee that this bi-directional relationship will continue, and this despite the inherent tensions which should exist between the speakers of the two languages.