LEXICON DYNAMICS IN THE MASS-MEDIA LANGUAGE[1]

Abstract: *The lexicon dynamics deals with the changes that occur in language from a historical stage to another. As part of a living organism, words emerge and fade away, bearing the mark of the linguistic norms. The linguists' preoccupation with the accuracy of language goes back in time and is related to lexicon, semantics, grammar, spelling etc.*
The present study is designed as a concise presentation of certain mistakes frequently met in the current written press, with a view to correcting them. Some deviations from the norms are minor, others major, whereas their causes are numerous. Recent loans, neologisms, confusion of styles and excessive use of clichés are only a few aspects to be approached in the present work.
Key words: *dynamics, linguistic norm, semantics, clichés.*

Résumé: *La dynamique du lexique concerne les changements qui se produisent dans le langage, dans le passage d'une étape historique à l'autre. Comme composantes de la langue perçue comme un organisme vivant, les mots apparaissent et disparaissent, portant la marque des normes linguistiques. La préoccupation des linguistes pour l'exactitude de la langue remonte dans le temps et concerne le lexique, la sémantique, la grammaire, l'orthographe, etc.*
La présente étude est conçue comme une brève présentation de certaines erreurs fréquemment rencontrées dans la presse écrite actuelle, en vue de les corriger. Certains écarts par rapport aux normes sont mineurs, d'autres sont considérables, alors que leurs causes sont nombreuses. Les emprunts récents, les néologismes, la confusion des styles et l'utilisation excessive de clichés sont quelques aspects à prendre en compte et abordés dans le présent article.
Mots-clés *: dynamique, norme linguistique, sémantique, clichés.*

Introduction

Any language undergoes in its evolution a series of changes characterized by a high diversity. The speaker, beneficiary or "creator" of language participates voluntarily or involuntarily in the evolutionary process of language under the influence of factors inside and outside the linguistic phenomenon. The intervention of the subjective factor in some idioms or constructions can act as a modelling sense in the use of the language. The frequent appeal to the non-recommended areas of the language, the high number of ironic constructions, the various

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expressive forms of the media vary from one stage to another, from one situation to another.

The language of the written press is the most eloquent by its dynamics and variety of manifestations, by its great responsiveness to linguistic innovation. Words in today's media are not randomly selected, but generate new meanings with a strong psychological effect on the receiver. The word as the perpetuation of a thought acquires unusual values according to the speaker's intention. Part of our everyday language does not make a clear difference between what is right and wrong. The flow of information is so large, that by speaking incorrectly or using bad language is due to lack of knowledge, sloppiness and lack of self-control.

The insatiable desire to write in order to produce an effect on the reader is effaced by what might be called "linguistic mutilation". Words are used randomly, in a confusing and unrefined way. The social transition of the modern world has also created a linguistic transition abounding in inauthentic and misfit terms. Words are consumerist without a correspondent in the thinking. We are dealing, therefore, with "ziceri fluviu" inconsistent with the printed texts that do not communicate anything. The redundant flowery language of the media is the prerogative of political groups contaminated by ignorance, illiterate expressions and linguistic slips of the tongue. The way in which the message is perceived is correlated with the reader's level of competence. The frequent use of slang expressions emphasizes the idea that the message can develop an ironic tone intended for a wider range of readers.

The present study proposes an exploration of the mass-media language, which although meant to impose certain requirements of the language rules, abounds in incoherent phrases, repetitive structures, syntactic errors, misuse of punctuation marks etc. As R. Zafiu states "the frequently forced pamphleteer verve sinks everything into oblivion" (2007:28). Nevertheless, U. Ecco (2002: 14) tends toward "a natural language seen as a *holistic* system ... involving a worldview". Furthermore, "the noblest language must comply with naturalness".

Lack of attention and interest of the text reviewers inevitably generates a series of language inconsistencies, lacking substance and rigor. The language of the press has often been superfluous, strewn with phrases that highlight both the lack of precise information, and the author's irony toward certain situations or characters activating in political, social, and cultural areas.

The study aims to analyze the types of lexical-semantic errors, dynamics of meanings, linguistic clichés and quantifying structures specific to the written press. All these have more or less satisfying consequences for the language. Lexical and linguistic diversity and insertion of neologisms are signs of an "energetic" language, open to the idea of innovation and linguistic reality. In reference to the dynamics of language, M. Avram acknowledges this term as a figure of speech "…language dynamics would designate what, by metaphors that evoke swiftness, visibility, enthusiasm or quantitative accumulation in other fields, is denoted by unrest, turmoil, tumult, excitement or boom…" (2002: 318). The lexicon is the

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main component subject to this dynamics due to freedom of use, especially after 1989. There are numerous studies that capture and describe the current language dynamics phenomenon comprehensively: *Vocabularul limbii române actuale. Dinamică, influențe, creativitate* – A. Stoichițoiu-Ichim, *Dinamica lexicului românesc ieri și azi* – Florica Dimitrescu, *Diversitatea stilistică în româna actuală* – Rodica Zafiu, *Ortografie pentru toți – 30 de dificultăți* – Mioara Avram etc.

The lexical-semantic errors in the media publications are intended to draw attention on the misuse of terms with a view to correcting and revising them. Language dynamics is translated primarily by the massive penetration of Anglicisms, resulting in enriched vocabulary, and extended or restricted use of certain terms.

English as a global language

At a global level, English is referred to as "a teaching –learning industry." The frequently used term of the English language community denotes areas in which people of different nations live, learn, exchange information and draw a general picture of an ever-changing world characterized by continuous language dynamism, information transfer and acquisition of new skills. English provides social and intellectual mobility, as long as large masses of people travel from one place to another to switch learning experiences. English is the language of science and most English speaking communities reflect on such terms as: computer-mediated learning, video-conference, blending learning, multiculturalism, pluridisciplinary etc.

According to specialists, all loans are objectively justified and explain the well- known effects of globalization that has affected almost all areas of life. Although opinions about the large number of English terms are controversial, the phenomenon itself is not negative and is no more dangerous for the Romanian language than other influences in the past and today. "…it raises a question about the correct use and the balance that involves solving the conflict between generations and their attitude toward Anglicisms." (Avram, 1997: 5). Anglicisms are mainly used in the field of communication and public relations.

Lexical-semantic errors

A term often used on various websites is *awareness*, collocating with various nouns and adjectives such as: *brand awareness, self-awareness, civic awareness, cultural awareness, moral awareness* etc. In a broader sense it denotes "the state or quality of being aware of something." The Romanian translation of such terms rather incorporates the psychological meaning of *percepție, conștiență*.

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Brand-awareness (recunoașterea unei mărci) is more than a simple recognition of a product. It also makes reference to its intrinsic qualities, which people must be aware of. *Self-awareness* (conștiință de sine) conveys a psychological sense, whereas *civic awareness* persuades people to be highly involved in the community life (elections, decision-making, planning etc.).

In their growing tendency to use a flowery language, the Romanian speakers avoid using such phrases as *dezvoltă conștiința de sine*, in preference for *dezvoltă self-awareness-ul / brand awareness-ul* etc.

The adjective *comfortable*, < Fr. *confortable*, has the meaning of "care oferă confort, comod; (fig.) care asigură o liniște sufletească; important, considerabil" (*MDN* 2000). If the English form was initially limited to physical or mental comfort, in time, it has enriched its semantic area with new meanings: *comfortable lifestyle* (viață decentă), *comfortable lead in the game* (un avans considerabil la joc), *to become comfortable with a topic* (a se familiariza cu un subiect), *a comfortable income* (un venit bunicel) etc.

L. Graur, the general manager of Turceni Energy Complex receives a ***comfortable salary*** (www.econtext.ro)

Some of these phrases have been taken as such while others *feel / become / get / make yourself comfortable* just assume their temporary status in the language.

Another controversial noun is *expertise*, whose meanings are slightly different in English and Romanian. *DULR 2007*, p. 451, records the meaning 1."constatare și estimare făcută de un expert (la fața locului); 2.raport întocmit de un expert asupra cercetărilor făcute, evaluare." The English *expertise* renders the above mentioned sense adding the extra meaning *experience*.

They have considerable expertise in the field.

The works translated from English mostly include the term *expertise* with the meaning of *calificare, competență, experiență bogată*.

România asigură președinția Rețelei de Centre Balcanice cu expertiză în domeniul securității (www.sri.ro)

The adjective *determined* was taken from English with the meaning "hotărât, decis", although its Romanian equivalent was "care a fost precizat, care a fost stabilit (*DEX*, 1998). The English influence caused the excessive use of the word with its meaning *ferm, decis*, which the Romanian language works consider inappropriate. For most speakers, both the verb *a determina* and its past participle form have the meaning *generat, definit*.

A sentence of the type *Furia investitorilor a determinat CNVM să-i paseze Parlamentului desființarea RASDAQ* (www.zf.ro) is entirely accepted in

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Romanian, unlike *Sunt determinat să asum inițiative pentru depășirea situației* (www.bursa.ro) which is felt as non-Romanian.

The French origin word *inférer* (a infera) occurs frequently in the printed media with the meaning "a trage o concluzie generală din mai multe fapte particulare." (www.webdex.ro). Although the Romanian speakers have always used the equivalent *a trage o concluzie*, the presence of this neologism justifies the language preciosity, with a certain impact on the reader.

> *...nu-i greu de inferat că numărul celor dispuşi să parieze mânaţi doar de o speranţă genuină....* (www.revistacultura.ro)

Another term that underwent a semantic transfer is *trivial*, whose Romanian significance is "vulgar, obscen, indecent", whereas the English term *trivial* refers to *insignificant, ordinary or having little value* as in *Do not bother me with trivial matters*. However, the *trivial language* of the Romanian speakers conveys a stronger semantic weight than such phrases as *trivial changes / thoughts / things*. By their force of expression, such words bear a significant emotional weight and can become real tools for the speaker depending on his audience, the argumentative strategy and the state of mind at the time of enunciation.

Linguistic clichés

Talking about the nature of the cliché, Ruth Amossy and Elisheva Rosen define it as "discursive, par opposition au lieu commun qui ne se laisse par définir au niveau verbal" (1982:14). At the language level, the cliché stands for a common place, a stereotype, a trivial expressionless stylistic formula, whose role is to attract the reader's attention only to the extent that it introduces an element of novelty.

The cliché is therefore a fashion specific to a historical moment of the language, a standardized transient structure which reveals lack of imagination and verbal mobility. According to Françoise Thom "We do not speak to say something but to produce an effect" (2005:15).

Clichés are banal words without content and coherence, and are continuously repeated in writing, newscast, feature reports etc. Such stereotype structures can be grouped into semantic categories and are not necessarily language errors, but become annoying by their exaggerated repetition. Most clichés belong to the political sphere: *criză financiară, din punct de vedere politic, clasă politică, grupuri de interese* etc. Others invade the news space, and their extensive use has been rigorously analyzed and refuted by linguists (Guțu Romalo, 2008, Dascălu Jinga 2009, I. Iordan 1961 etc.).

The high number of clichés is related to the linguistic "fashion" of the contemporary society or the speakers' affinity for various "lexical songs". "Mental laziness and senility are current sources of stereotype speech". (Pleşu, 2011: 247)

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Spreading clichés are associated with the search for sensational of some speakers liable to become imitators, and they are extremely diverse both in structure and persistence in language. Some are simple words: *interesant, senzațional, deosebit, practic* etc., others have two words: *în exclusivitate, în cadrul, sportul rege,* etc. There are also metaphorical structures designed to impress and create the idea of flowery language. For example, when a person is sent from one place to another to solve a problem, the biblical-related expression *from Ana to Caiafa* (de la Ana la Caiafa) is used metaphorically and signifies a deliberate delay that most often involves a refusal.

De la Ana la Caiafa pentru un raport al activității concrete a agenților antidrug (www.ziarulunire.ro)

The expression *to run the gauntlet* (a trece prin furcile caudine) is related to a historical event between the Romans and the Samnites, and remained in the scholarly literature with the meaning of "a impune învinsului condiții umilitoare; fig. a supune unei critici severe, cf. lat. *fauce caudinae.*" *Fata Morgana* has kept its original variant and describes an atmospheric mirage, occurring at sunrise. It has pervaded the common language, designating an optical illusion. The *Tower of Babel*, on the other hand, highlights a chaotic and confusing world: *Turnul Babel de la Casa Poporului* (www.evz.ro, 18 martie 2008), *Retrospectiva – Eficiența Justiției, Fata Morgana* (jurnalul.ro).

Repeated journalistic patterns have exceeded their status of stereotypes and migrated to the common language. Some have a longer life, while others are threatened by the emergence of various refreshing structures with improved stylistic nuances that pervaded the language.

The degrees of intensity of some cliché adjectives often render the appreciative tone toward the information sent. The adjective *nice* (drăguț) does not only refer to the pleasant appearance of a person, but also includes pejorative meanings or simple appreciation: *Dezavuez mesajele drăguțe transmise de A. Videanu…*(www.revista 22.ro), *vorbă* or *compliment drăguț, comedie drăguță, melodie drăguță* etc. Also, this stereotype combines perfectly with such diminutives as: *hăinuță, supiță, glumiță, rochiță, săndăluță* etc.

Deosebit and *interesant* mark appreciative contexts or help to establish differentiation. *Deosebit* tends to lose its basic meaning *diferit* in favor of the English model *special, neobișnuit, distins*. To say that something is *interesting* has almost become a mimetic act, i.e. another way of saying you do not have enough information to express a point of view.

The rhetorical interrogations *de ce nu?, nu-i așa ?, cum așa ?, da?* etc., exhibit a wide range of attitudes and ideas meant to produce an effect. They are intended to convey information in an expressive manner in order to generate great stylistic effects. Unfortunately, the reporters' desire to impress the audience, using these clichés has become an automatic reaction. The expansion of these

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interrogations in the written language has created a disturbing phenomenon in itself.

The semantic field of quantity

The semantic field of quantity is subject to a comprehensive analysis, both in qualitative and quantitative terms. The phenomenon of approximation and imprecision is well represented by a series of expressions specific to the journalistic style. Their role is to emphasize both the lack of precise information and the author's sarcastic tone to different situations. The expressions *un soi de, un gen de, cât de cât, niscai* etc., generally convey negative connotations, inexactness, distrust in a position or a ludicrous situation.

Such phrases are common in the written press and demonstrate the plasticity of language. The plural nominal groups are characterized by great flexibility. If a sentence of the type *The Germans drink much beer* does not necessarily imply that all Germans drink beer, it can be perceived as a general characteristic that reinforces the globalizing idea rendered by the plural nominal group. The approximation of the quantity is usually rendered by numerical and non-numerical quantifiers.

The numeral preceded by the preposition *peste* (quantitative superiority), adverbs and adverbial phrases of quantity *cam, prea, destul, cât de cât* etc., abound in the current language of the press and develop various implications due to their argumentative orientation. On the other hand, the quantity-related adjectives *un puhoi de, o groază de, un ocean de, o liotă de, o sumedenie de, un potop de, un munte de, un maldăr de* etc., have broadened their semantic scope, gaining metaphorical connotations. The journalists express reality in a conspicuous way to capture the reader's attention.

Țara se scaldă într-un ocean de gunoaie. (antena 3.ro)
Potop de moldoveni la granița de est a țării. (jurnalul.ro)
În frunte cu Traian Băsescu, puhoi de politicieni la Salva. (presaonline.ro)

The analysis of journalistic tropes often shows exaggeration and highlights a wealthy inventory of expressive means designed to introduce the reader into a diversified communicative framework.

Conclusions

As a living, ever-changing organism, language is concerned with vocabulary, semantics, grammar, phonetics and spelling. The present study was designed as an inventory of mistakes commonly used in the mass-media language.

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The aim of the study was to familiarize the reader with the most frequent deviations from the standard language, while helping him to use the necessary resources, in order to decide if he deals with more or less serious mistakes. Although language mistakes are difficult to predict, a periodic review of the rules of language is needed, because some may become obsolete or outdated.

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