VERBAL AGGRESSIVENESS IN THE ROMANIAN PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE. PAST AND PRESENT[1]

MELANIA ROIBU, MIHAELA N. CONSTANTINESCU

Abstract. The paper intends to present, from a pragma-rhetorical point of view, the main marks of the verbal aggressiveness, as revealed in the parliamentary debates, with reference to certain rhetorical and argumentative choices. The data are represented by several Romanian parliamentary debates, ranging from 1866 until nowadays. The present approach questions the difference in the verbal aggressiveness, by comparing the early Romanian parliamentary debates and the present-day ones. It is true that, throughout the parliamentary interaction, the indirectness softens the verbal attacks of the MPs, but the degree of indirectness is highly variable. The paper focuses on the rhetorical devices and on insults, the latter directed either at the adversary's person or at his/her discourse. The comments point out some frequent cases of fallacies. In the authors' opinion, impoliteness, sometimes rudeness, in the debates, could be revealed by studying the way other MPs and other debates are evaluated and staged.

Keywords: verbal aggressiveness, on/off record strategies, rhetorical/ argumentative choices, fallacies.

1. INTRODUCTION

It is worth mentioning, from the very beginning, that the cover term *aggressiveness*, as used in the title of this article, refers to all sorts of inappropriate (non)verbal behaviour, in order to designate (scalar) notions like: **impoliteness** (behaviour that does not conform to the politeness rules), **rudeness** (non-justified impoliteness, beyond the shared institutional "habits") and **verbal aggressiveness** *stricto sensu* (FTAs intentionally exacerbated, 'boosted', or maximised – Bousfield 2007: 2187).

Consequently, by *aggressiveness* we understand communicative strategies meant to attack face by performing intentional FTAs, with a conflictive potential, provoking social conflict and disharmony (Culpeper et *al*. 2003: 1546; Bousfield 2007: 2186). In interpreting the face attack, the term *face* is understood in a broad

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sense, following Spencer-Oatey (2007: 644)[2] and Ilie (2001, 2004). Thus, a face attack involves a multiple vulnerability (Ilie 2004: 50), "individual" and "institutional", including, for each category, different subordinate roles (Ilie 2001: 247–248).

In the ongoing interaction, the participants construe a "face threat/ loss / gain" whenever there is a discrepancy ("mismatch") between a characteristic claimed (or denied) – the *Ego* perspective, and a characteristic perceived as being attributed by the others – the *Alter* perspective. We agree with Spencer-Oatey in that the affectively sensitive multiple self-aspects (attributes) vary, have a dynamic in interaction, being context dependent (Spencer-Oatey 2007: 644−647).

Conceiving *face* as a continuum, an FTA could provoke an attack both on the positive and the negative poles of the face. That is why we gave up the distinction between positive and negative impoliteness, which often co-occur, preserving, however, the distinction between *on record* and *off record* strategies. Within this framework, we have tried to observe how the rhetorical and argumentative choices work together and sometimes overlap, in order to create a linguistic landscape marked by inappropriateness in relation to the institutional context.

The corpus we used is represented by Romanian parliamentary debates, from the end of the XIXth century and the interwar period; it also includes some more recent debates, from 2006 and 2007. Nevertheless, throughout the whole period taken into account, the Parliament is seen as "a highly competitive institutional setting" (Ilie 2004: 53), involving an "adversarial and confrontational political process" (Harris 2001: 451; cf. also Ilie 2001: 259), which explains the frequency of the face attacks.

Within the rhetorical field, we have chosen to speak about wordplays, metaphorical projections, syllepsis, and idioms. As far as the argumentative choices are concerned, we have restricted our investigation to the address forms and insults.

2. RHETORICAL CHOICES

2.1. Wordplays*:*

(1) A.C. Cuza: You (II, sg: d-ta) are so generous. I could call you (II, pl.) Mr. Călinescu 'charmant' ('charming'). (…)
A.Călinescu: Mr. Cuza has always been *sweet*.
A.C. Cuza: But without tasting from your *sugar*. (1931)

The previous example contains a *paronomasia*, which involves the first name of an MP, Armand Călinescu. In the code switching, the first name sounds like the

[2] "in cognitive terms, face and identity are similar in that both relate to the notion of 'self'-image (including individual, relational and collective construals of self), and both comprise multiple self-aspects or attributes".

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French adjective *charmant*. The adjective has the meaning of 'charming, graceful, lovely', but the context indicates an ironical use, via *antiphrasis*. Cuza seems to enter the game of creativity, developing the frame and using the opponent's evaluation as a starting point. He thus combines *metonymically sweet* and *sugar* (the cause – effect pattern).

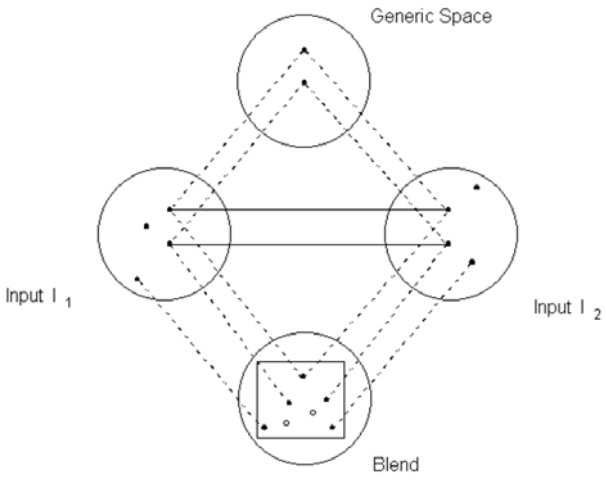
This wordplay, *Armand/ charmant,* seems to have had a great impact upon the MPs, as proved by the fact that it was re-used by another MP, in another situation. This is an interesting case of *intertextuality*, a strategy which falls under the scope of the metadiscursive commentaries in absentia, emphasizing the common conversational history and the power of interdiscourse.

(2) C. Argetoianu: I got used to listening to you as 'Charmant' ('charming') Călinescu! (Hilarity). Now I'm listening to you as 'Marchand' ('merchant/ tradesman'). (1935)

The adjective *charmant,* placed in front of the noun, activates the meaning of 'disagreeable' (but it is used ironically in both examples). In a subtle metathesis (resulting in an *anagram*), it is replaced by another French word, a common noun, *marchand* – 'merchant/ tradesman'.

2.2. Metaphorical projections

The first category is represented by the *metaphorical chains*, combining words from the same semantic field – the image of the country as a 'flock' lead by a 'shepherd' (see ex. 3). The second category is represented by the *blended metaphors* used for framing the target's portrait. We could explain the metaphorical projections resorting to the mental space theory and the blended metaphors (Fauconnier's frame). The blended metaphor makes use of either the public or the private roles.



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2.2.1. Public roles

2.2.1.1. *Political characters (dictatorial personalities):*

For the 19th century debates, the reference is chosen from the oriental political space (the Ottoman Empire) – the vizier (I_1). It is worth mentioning that the debate illustrated by ex. 3 took place shortly after the Independence War against the Ottoman Empire:

(3) I.C. Brătianu (PL): (...) then, any foreigner, trusting the words of hon. Mr. Kostaki, will say – as another gentleman said it yesterday – that in this country there are a flock and a shepherd and the shepherd is the one who's leading, that is, the government. Is this Romania, Mr. M. Kostaki? Or have you made this picture out of mischievousness...?
M. Kostaki (PC): What I wanted to say was that this country was lead by the vizierate. (1879)

In the metaphorical frame used as an *ad personam* fallacy, there is a blending between the attitude of Brătianu (the Prime Minister – I_2) and the Ottoman political practices (ex. 3).

One can observe that both participants use metaphorical frames. Brătianu resorts to a quotation belonging to another speaker (metadiscourse with external source) and uses the latter's allegory of political government (evaluating it negatively – metadiscourse with autonymous connotation): the country as *a flock,* and the governmental majority, as the *shepherd*. He thus criticizes the *Alter* perspective, according to which the head of the government would be the absolute master, in charge with taking all the decisions, while the rest of the citizens would be nothing but an amorphous mass (implicit metonymy *citizen – sheep*). The prime minister criticizes this lexical choice and elicits a response from one of the leaders of the opposition, to whom he attributes the same perspective – implying that his perspective is an insult to the citizens, in the first place, and a manifestation of a negative feature, too (*mischievous* represents another evaluative term, but this time it refers to the person, not to the statement). The representative of the opposition reacts to this attack and implies that his perspective is directed at the person of the interlocutor (the prime minister) – he is the one imposing an absolute regime, as the Ottoman vizier[3] used to do. It is obvious that the fallacious arguments used by Brătianu – *ad personam*, *ad verecundiam* (Kostaki as an authority), manipulating the presuppositions (evaluating the person) receive a counter-reaction with an *ad personam* fallacy – so this is a congruent response.

[3] Turkish medieval rank which is the equivalent of a prime minister nowadays.

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For the present-day Parliament – the I_1 is represented by different well-known dictatorial personalities, from Romania's history (whose most famous and frequent example is Nicolae Ceauşescu) and from Europe's history (from Stalin to Lukashenko). The I_2 is represented by the president's actions in the internal and foreign policy. The blended space offers the image of Traian Băsescu as a dictator. The direct attacks (on record) combine with off record attacks:

(4) Sergiu Andon (PC): The foreign policy is not supposed to be made in pubs, diplomacy is not supposed to be practised in bathing costume. The MPs of the Conservative Party will vote accordingly, defending the Constitution and defying the dictator's outbursts. (Applause). (2007)

In other cases, the speaker resorts to off record strategies (metaphorical framing), exclusively:

(5) Crin Antonescu (PNL): The great man, sung by the country's bards, from Boc to Berceanu, will come with the others' records again… We will say that Romania wants to come out from the shadow of the King. (Applause from the parliamentary groups of PNL, PSD, PRM, PC). The shadow of King Charles, from the recent history, the shadow of King Nicholas, the shadow of King Trajan, now, each with his Helen, each with his people…each with his lies./ In the shadow of the King grows something that Mr. Băsescu *takes for* people, that is, a vegetation of bocs, bercens, bourens[4], jesters of the King. (2007)

(6) Cozmin Guşă (independent): When I resigned from the Democrat Party I expressed my regret that instead of a Romanian **Atatürk**, we've ended up by placing at Cotroceni a president that evokes **Lukashenko** (2007)

In our opinion, Crin Antonescu's metaphorical framing is extremely interesting because it involves a multiple analysis in the field of mock politeness. The irony, an off-record strategy, is achieved via antiphrasis (*great man, bards*). Firstly, the lexical choice of the hyperonym is meaningful, in itself: *Vodă*[5] is a title used in the Middle Ages to refer to the rulers of the Romanian Principalities. The selection of this title (whose use is restricted to a certain historical period) activates negative connotations in the syntagmatic use – *the shadow of the King*. The title connotes a dictatorial regime, and functions as an *ad personam* fallacy (multiple vulnerability; individual construal of self for TB).

[4] Common nouns converted from former proper nouns which designate some well-known political supporters of Trajan Basescu: (Emil) Boc, (Radu) Berceanu, (Cristian) Boureanu.

[5] Romanian medieval rank, which is the equivalent of a ruler/ king; *vodă* < sl. *(voje)voda.*

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Secondly, the title is used in combination with the names of some well-known Romanian dictators of the 20th century – Charles and Ceauşescu, and then TB's name appears in the same combination. The MP pushes forward the comparisons, using the *petitio principii* fallacy: *each with his Helen, each with his people, each with his lies*. This fallacy, along with the *ad personam* fallacy, implies extramarital liaisons (multiple vulnerability; relational construal of self for TB); if the referent of the first occurrence of *Helen* (another wordplay based on antonomasia) is Elena Lupescu, mistress and then wife of King Charles II, the referent of the second one – Elena Ceauşescu, the wife of Nicolae Ceauşescu, the third one implies an immoral liaison between TB and his former councillor (present minister) – Elena Udrea. Thirdly, the MP uses a wordplay mechanism, antonomasia, in order to transform the proper names of some TB's supporters (E. Boc, R. Berceanu, C. Boureanu) in common nouns – *bocs, bercens, bourens* (the plural form), which he reformulates by means of two hyperonyms – *vegetation* and *jesters*.

The example conveys the idea of nonfactiveness, via the lexical meaning of the VP *takes for* (implying that what the president conceives as people, is not exactly people). The fact that their referents are not people (endowed with full attributes, such as the freedom of choice, action and/ or thought) is also emphasized by their metaphorical projection onto a lower level, that is, the transposition into the vegetal world, as suggested by the derogatory use of the noun *vegetation*. This is another form of the *ad personam* fallacy, associating TB with a group of negatively evaluated politicians (multiple vulnerability; collective construal of self, in-group association).

On the other hand, the connections made by Cozmin Guşă (6) – with Atatürk and Lukashenko, illustrate another interesting wordplay based on antonomasia and make use of two referents from the "oriental" space – Turkey and Ukraine, one from the beginning, and the other one from the end of the XXth century, placed in an anticlimax structure.

2.2.1.2. *Social dimension*

The social roles are usually conceived as a sum of two subordinate roles, the first one representing the former profession and the second one, the temporary political position of the target. The effect of blending is more apparent if there is a clash between the two subordinate roles. This is the case in the following example.

(6) C.V. Tudor: I'm speaking about the polls made at the end of March by three of the specialized institutes, so it is amazing that a former sailor (…) should boast about the fact that, in some occasions, he used to drink even two or three bottles of whisky a day and, in other situations, told the press, full of pride, how he used to go to brothels in the harbours of the world, so it is

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amazing, then, how such a sea wolf could get his hopes up[6] and make illusions that the Romanians have a crush on him, rush to just touch him, like the holly relics, to take pictures of him and, certainly, attach him to icons. (…). (2007)

The two input spaces contain information about what a sailor's behaviour is supposed to be in a general mental representation (overtly expressed by Corneliu Vadim Tudor, identified with I_1), and what a president is supposed to do, how he should behave as a public person. By mentioning the former profession of TB's – captain in the commercial Romanian navy during the communist period, the blended metaphor offers the image of a president who behaves like a sailor/ ship captain (I_2).

2.2.2. *Private roles*

On the other hand, when speaking about some characteristics of the private roles, as addicts to alcoholic drinks (in the case of TB and Leonida Lari), there are on record attacks in some non-authorized interventions (see insults below):

(7) C.V. Tudor (from the audience): And what about Băsescu? What has he been? Blue-eyed[7] Băsescu! Blue-eyed Băsescu! (…). Give him vodka! Give him whisky! Water is harmful! Water is harmful! (MP Marius Iriza brings a bottle of champagne and puts it on a small table, next to the tribune). (2006)

The verbal rudeness in the beginning of the turn has a non-verbal complement. We consider this to be more than relative impoliteness because the force of the attack is disproportionate in relation to a possible triggering event.

2.3. Syllepsis (ambiguization via polysemy)

Some of the evaluative terms used are polysemic and activate simultaneously two different meanings in the same context. The following example is taken from the 19th century debates, illustrating an interpersonal duelling, although both MPs belong to the same party:

(8) I.C.Brătianu: I'm asking Mr. Kogălniceanu if (…) he ever took advantage of a favourable situation from the history, so that to make a foreign country more open…
M. Kogălniceanu: This is finesse.

[6] Literally, 'to get drunk on plain water'.
[7] Slang for the people who used to work for the former Romanian Secret Police (Securitatea).

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I. C. Brătianu: It is not finesse and if it were, I've learned it from you.
M. Kogălniceanu: Not from me, because I don't have such finesse. (1882)

The reactions emphasize the fact that *finesse* has two different meanings activated in the context: 'delicacy, diplomacy' // 'cunningness'. In evaluating Brătianu's statements, Kogălniceanu uses *finesse* in a metacommunicative comment. Brătianu interprets the evaluation in a negative sense – 'cunning, astute' and, after rejecting it, he uses the same term, attributing it, as a quality, to the interlocutor. In his turn, the interlocutor rejects the quality attributed. This is another case of congruent responses within the field of mock politeness.

2.4. Idioms

There are several examples of this category: *a se îmbăta cu apă rece* (litteral translation: 'to get drunk on plain water' // non-literal translation: 'to get one's hope up; to delude oneself'), *e apă de foc şi are 42 de grade* (litteral translation: 'it is fire-like water and it's got 42 degrees' // non-litteral translation: 'it is alcohol'), *Băsescu securistu'* (litteral translation: 'worker of the former Romanian Secret Police (Securitatea)' // non-litteral translation: 'Blue-eyed Băsescu').

3. ARGUMENTATIVE CHOICES

3.1. Address forms (politeness pronouns and qualifiers)

The politeness pronouns account for various degrees of politeness. Throughout the 19th century, *dumneata* and, later in the century, *dumneavoastră* were the polite forms in the second person, irrespective of the degrees of politeness. At the beginning of the 20th century, their co-occurrence made it possible to distinguish between different degrees of politeness: *dumneavoastră* is more polite than *dumneata*; likewise, for the 3rd person, *dânsul*, despite being a personal pronoun, is considered more polite than *el,* but less polite than *dumnealui*, the same as the latter is less polite than *Domnia Lui/Sa.* Sometimes, the more polite a form, the more ironical it is (dumnealui → dumneasa → Domnia Sa), as proved by the example below, where the highest form of politeness in the 3rd person combines with antiphrasis.

(9) C.V. Tudor: Wasn't that Mr. Băsescu dancing 'geamparaua' [8], on his knees, (…) while the gipsy dancers would wave their colourful and baggy skirts over his (Domniei Sale) intelligent head, of course while the country was under waters?... (2007)

[8] A Romanian folk dance.

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The use of qualifiers is another means to express different degrees of (im)politeness, showing the speaker's attitude towards the interlocutor(s). Sometimes, as it is the case in the example below, two labels are used together, given that they both bear negative connotations and share the same level of language (the familiar register): *bă*[9]*, beţivule (you, drunkard).*

(10) C.V. Tudor: We are going to condemn *you, drunkard*! It's you we are condemning! (2006)

In the previous example, the attack reveals itself as a form of verbal aggressiveness – the utterances have an amplifying effect by the direct address form in the second person singular, the qualifier, the repetition (almost a chiasmus) and the shift in the word order.

3.2. Insults

Generally, insults represent an 'all inclusive' strategy, placed at the meeting point of the rhetorical choices (taboo words, metaphors) and the argumentative choices (they are mainly based on fallacies and are caused by another insult or offending situation). The first example we are listing here combines taboo words (*liar, ignorant, illiterate, drunkard, poofs*), with a slang metaphor (*blue-eyed* Băsescu), an *ad personam* fallacy and an instance of non-verbal impoliteness.

(11) C.V. Tudor (from the audience): And what about Băsescu? What has he been? Blue-eyed Băsescu! Blue-eyed Băsescu! (…). Give him vodka! Give him whisky! Water is harmful! Water is harmful! (MP Marius Iriza brings a bottle of champagne and puts it on a small table, next to the tribune). (…) *Boo! Liar! Ignorant! Illiterate*! (boos, rumours, protests within the parliamentary groups of the PRM). (…). We are going to condemn you, *drunkard*!
T. Băsescu: The difficulty comes from the systematic hiding (…) of the information regarding the situation of many of those victims. The persecution of the ethnic, religious, cultural and sexual minorities… (boos, rumours, protests within the parliamentary groups of the PRM).
C.V. Tudor (from the audience): *Down with the poofs! Down with the poofs! Down with the poofs!* (Rumours, protests). (2006)

The second example (12) strengthens the idea of Traian Băsescu's addiction to alcohol, by reference to his idols, which he shares with an MP, Leonida Lari. The polysemy of the noun *idols* is quickly solved by a metalinguistic comment,

[9] Shortened from *băiat* 'boy' *or bărbat* 'man'.

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pointing at the secondary meaning (*When I say that, I mean the two idols named Johnny Walker and Jack Daniels.*), which is further explained by means of an euphemism (*it is fire-like water and it's got 42 degrees*). In the case of "fire-like water"[10], one can observe another wordplay based on polysemy and a cultural allusion, too.

(12) (…) We actually did understand the attitude of the lady in question, more specifically, that they are brought together by a shared love for their idols. *When I say that, I mean the two idols named Johnny Walker and Jack Daniels.*
Bogdan Olteanu: Come to an end, please.
Daniela Buruiană-Aprodu: I'll finish now, the last statement, Mr. Chairman. Dear colleagues, it isn't worth spoiling this special day, when Romania is going to meet normality. We consider that we needn't waste our time on nothing, on certain *streetwalkers by profession*, *but we remind our distinguished lady that soap and water have been invented for her, too, even though it is fire-like water and it's got 42 degrees.* (2007)

When the target of the insult shifts to Leonida Lari, she is identified by the use of an antiphrasis (*distinguished* lady) and a taboo metaphor (*streetwalker by profession*)[11].The attack is extremely violent and an argument in support of our affirmation is the reaction of the Chairman of the assembly, apologizing to the lady in question on behalf of the Romanian Parliament.

4. CONCLUSIONS

There are some cases where the MPs involve themselves in direct verbal confrontations; in the old Parliament one can observe their tendency to enter verbal duelling, using the second person plural or singular, in response to non-authorized interventions, which results in entertaining the dialogue. In the present-day Parliament, there are some direct address forms, in the second person plural (rarely, singular), but the tendency is to overlook the non-authorized interventions; the Chairman has a very important role in controlling the MPs' interactions ("dominant third party intervention" – Vuchinich 1990, *apud* Bousfield 2007: 2215).

[10] *Apa de foc* appears in the Romanian translations of Karl May's books.

[11] Slang metaphor initially used to designate a prostitute, who goes through a certain 'itinerary' in order to pick up clients (in Romanian, *traseistă* is derived from *traseu* 'itinerary'); quite recently, the word entered the political informal language, and refers to a person who moves frequently from one political party to another, usually in order to pursue personal interests, rather than out of any political idiosyncrasies. All in all, the slang metaphor *streetwalker by profession* could be equated with *political prostitute.*

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There is a delicate equilibrium from directness to indirectness, but we consider that the latter is more offending and conveys a more aggressive attack (indirectness and the ludic ethos are rewarded by the audience with laughter and applause – as manifestations of a positive evaluation of the style and of the content). The ludic ethos appears throughout the vast majority of the debates, from both the 19th and the 20th century. The wordplays favour the semantic level, cultivating the ambiguity generated by polysemy and, rarely, by homophony and metathesis.

In framing the target's portrait, the first common feature is the constant use of the *ad personam* fallacy, usually oriented to his/her *public role* – the analogy with past and present dictatorial personalities (dictatorship being a reality which activates negative connotations within a democratic culture). Nevertheless, in the present-day Parliament we have observed a frequency of the *ad personam* fallacy, causing the personal/individual vulnerability within some characteristics of the private roles (as addicts). By comparison with the debates in the old Parliament, the aggressiveness of the attacks in the present-day parliamentary debates seems more apparent: attacks on the private role of the MPs, as well as the use of the taboo words, are rare in the old Parliament, but frequent nowadays.

Another common feature is that the same verbal exchange may contain various strategies, either *off record,* with different sub-strategies (such as wordplays and mock politeness), or a combination of *on record* and *off record* strategies.

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