USES OF PROVERBS AND SAYINGS IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL DISCOURSE[1]

Abstract*: The present paper aims to point out the complex use of proverbs and sayings, which have well fixed forms and represent the expression of an impersonal voice beyond time and space, in contemporary political discourse.*

Keywords*: proverb, political discourse, hearer.*

1. The present paper sets out from the observation that both in media discourse and in political discourse, regarded as genre systems of an assembly called social discourse, proverbs and sayings which are quoted or modified frequently occur.

As this phenomenon has been noticed, two questions need an answer: first, which are the causes? Second, how does the device that allows the modifications function and which are the results? The present paper aims to study the grounds that make the political discourse speaker use proverbs, as well as the way that proverb occurs in the products of this genre of discourse, in declarations performed in Parliament.

Considering that the main goal of the communication with political character is no other but persuading the hearer to adopt the truth of the speaker, the occurrence of these sui-generis quotations in political actors' speech can be explained, because they facilitate the new information transmitting and they apply to a mutual informational background where the new element is easy to be ranged. Moreover, by using these phrases which represent repetitions of some sentences previously performed that belong to all the speakers who used that proverb, the speaker outlines at least two fundamental features of political ethos: wisdom and his/her image of common person, who belongs to the same group as the hearer. Although they may seem to exclude reciprocally, the advisor-political actor's authority and his being integrated to the same category as hearer are universals of political ethos that represent premises for the successful performance of persuasive act. The superior position of that person with authority and credibility who tends to create an opinion trend is proved and strengthened by using proverb as expression of peoples' wisdom. But political actor wants to be regarded as "one of us", "an average man", thus, from the very beginning he establishes with his audience a type of relation that is based on trust, on the adhesion to a mutual set of values accepted by both sides. The necessity of matching these two premises for achieving hearer's adhesion materializes in modifying proverb, in changing its meaning or in its "being actualized".

Contemporary political declarations, as well as articles in mass media, abound in expressions and idiomatic phrases specific to colloquial speech, in proverbs and sayings that belong either to an old layer or to a relatively recently created one in colloquial speech. This option is contextually determined by the type of audience, both with media discourse and with political communication. Since a political actor speaks to a collective hearer that is not homogenous considering the social and professional category, as well as age or the instruction level, but he aims to get these votes, even if the election campaign is over or has not started yet, he uses those areas in the vocabulary which are accessible to every member of the language community, regarded

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as wide as possible. Journalists also do not have as a main goal informing the audience, but, most of the times, creating an opinion or inducing one that has been already formed to a large number of people, so the audience is not homogenous in many respects. In order to persuade, one must gain the other's good will, he has to create a relation based on trust and this goal governs the choice of linguistic means. One of the most efficient methods to make the majority of hearers consider the political actor a commoner, a reliable person consists in selecting the elements specific to colloquial speech. Idiomatic phrases, as well as proverbs or sayings (sometimes fragments of folk songs) belong to the same language level which the speaker-political actor prefers when he is to project his own image to a hearer who should find himself in it, too.

Political and media discourse rely to a great extent on the context, depends on it regarding both the processes at the speaker's pole and the achievement of an efficient reception; as there has been noticed that the hearer and the context have an influence over the activity of the speaker, the concept has been detailed and discourse is considered to be interactive and contextualized. "Understanding a sentence means not only referring to a grammar and a dictionary, but also involving various knowledge, formulating hypothesis and judgments, building a context that is not pre-established and fix" (Maingueneau, 2007: 18).

The performers of the media discourse, generally, and the performer of the political discourse, especially, intend to convince the hearer to do something or to believe something about issues related to the present, which is not conceived narrowly as the moment of speech, but as a period that includes this moment, so their language is dominated by that function which manifests when the focus of communication involves mainly the hearer. One of the means by which the speaker points out an aspect of the reality, while expressing his opinion about it, materializes in modifying certain proverbs. These proverbs become present; they are related to "now" and "here" in order to attract the hearer and to orientate him to a certain perception (a negative one, most of the times) of that topic.

So, the performer of political discourse sometimes uses proverb as it is, adding to his voice the force of the authority which proverb is endowed with and, in this situation, his position of an experienced person who adheres to a set of moral values that the hearer also appreciates is pointed out.

However, he may use only the proverb genre of discourse or a certain text to achieve an imitation, to render his discourse formally similar to a reflection and, by this means, the speaker tries to invest his discourse with the authority that is frequently associated with the meaningful saying.

If in a certain proverb there occur elements which are related to the broader context of performing a text, then the speaker points out both his ability to formulate pertinent opinions about situations in the public interest and the similar way of thinking (thus, of reacting) shared by speaker and hearer.

2. Several types of situations which involve the use of proverb in contemporary political discourse may be described. The present paper does not aim to achieve an exhaustive list of types of proverb occurrences in the texts which this genre of discourse produces nowadays; the main goal of the present paper is to outline a broad typology which may be further detailed by noticing the way that proverb is quoted or modified.

2.1. To quote – "it is said that"

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"Saying a proverb means allowing another voice, that of 'the wisdom of peoples' which the responsibility of the sentence is attributed to, to be heard by means of speaker's own voice" (Maingueneau, *op. cit.:* 206).
As a phenomenon which creates the polyphony of text, proverb quotation, whether graphically marked or not, belongs to the vast domain of inter-text relations.

The speaker uses proverb or popular saying that are not modified and that are framed by quotations marks as a powerful argument, so he stresses upon the distance between the two voices:

Din păcate, vechea zicală "unii cu munca, alții cu gura" se adevereşte. (CD, 30.09.08)
B. Si miniştrii lui se ghidează după vechea zicală românească "Fă ce zice popa, nu ce face el!" atunci când... (CD, 02.03.10)

The quotation which belongs to a set of well-known sentences may occur without being separated from its co-text by graphic marks, it may be syntactically integrated to the co-text, because it is easy to be acknowledged by the hearer:
*Ca doi brazi dintr-o tulpină, ca doi ochi dintr-o lumină! (*CD, *27.03.07)*
Semne bune anul are. (CD, 07.02.06)
Se adevereşte că, atunci când doi se ceartă, al treilea câştigă. (CD, 13.03.07)
Chiar şi de ar fi să nu dăm crezare înțelepciunii populare, care ne spune că nu iese fum fără foc... (CD, 27.03.07)

The speaker's intention to reinforce the opinion he aims to make the hearer adhere to is evident when he uses the argument represented by proverb and the analogy with present situations:
Dacă nema putirință, ce mai chichirez gâlceava (şeful scârț şi moşul pârț) (CD, 02.03.10)
Omogenizări de genul comasării […] azvârlă oamenii din munți şi omoară găina care face ouăle de aur. (CD, 02.03.10)
Aici, la noi, hoții strigă hoții! (CD, 12.02.10)
Nu-mi rămâne decât să apelez la proverbul: „hoțul strigă <prindeți hoțul>" (CD, 14.11.2006)
*S-a dovedit şi de această dată că minciuna are picioare scurte. (*CD, *27.03.07)*

A relatively reduced number of political declarations include either reflections that belong to some personalities in the world's culture, or Latin proverbs and they may express the intention to amaze the hearer; they may also counterbalance the effect of extreme simplicity of language which other methods, including proverbs in the native tongue, could create.
Mens sana in corpore sano. (CD, 16.02.10)
Divide et impera; O, tempora, o, mores! (CD, 27.03.07)

2.2. To imitate – to captivate

According to its definition, a proverb represents a sentence with a form that lacks variation so it is easy to be noticed by the hearer: short, binary structured, often rhythmic, and displaying syntactic or/and semantic symmetry, the latter ones being based either on the synonymy of certain words, or on the contextual antonymic relation between words. The imitation of this pattern may go towards a "positive" pole, to get the pragmatic value of proverb.

By imitating the syntactic pattern of proverb and some lexical elements, the speaker creates a text which is intended to have the same persuasive power as the type which represents its base and the speaker may reveal this very technique:

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Un proverb românesc spune că "ziua bună se cunoaşte de dimineaţă". La fel putem spune şi faptul că anul bun de la început se cunoaşte.(CD, 12.02.08)

Not only proverbs, but also folk songs can offer the speaker – political actor that base on which he may structure the content with a meaning which should be the object of persuasion:

*Vorba cântecului: "Foaie verde, drum de fier, mi te paşte un transfer!" (*CD, *27.03.07)*

2.3. To imitate – to parody

"There is […] subversion when the text that imitates aims to discredit the imitated one, so this might be called a parody strategy" (Maingueneau, *op. cit.*: 211). If the proverb which is created by the speaker presents elements specific to this discursive genre, but the parody intention, the intention to actually get to an anti-proverb, is evident, then the imitation device differs from the one presented previously. The element which makes the difference between these two types of texts consists in the speaker's intention, a key-element in defining any discursive genre; while the first type of text has a form similar to the one of a proverb and its meaning is also similar to the one of a proverb, a core of wisdom with connections to experience, the second type only assumes the form of a proverb or a saying, but the speaker's voice moves away from the voice of the first speaker. The linguistic marks of this movement are to be found especially in those lexical elements which are different from the imitated text and which lead to an ironical meaning.

Although proverb seems to be quoted and the quotation marks are present, it is, in fact, modified and, instead of asserting a value from that set which is unanimously shared, it denies it:

O nouă ispravă din seria "dacă dormea, mai înţelept era". (CD, 12.02.10)

*Vorba cântecului: "Foaie verde, drum de fier, mi te paşte un transfer!" (*CD, *27.03.07)*

2.4. To bring into the present

The change of proverb from an expression with a well fixed form, a projection of an impersonal voice which is not related to a specific space or time into an expression related to a restrained context including the actual utterance which brings it into the present is interesting with respect to the reasons that make it happen.

Cine seamănă vânt culege furtună. *PSD şi PDL au semănat vânt şi vor culege furtună.* (CD, 07.10.2008)

2.4.1. The pattern of proverb is used to captivate, replacing one or several elements in the original structure by others that bring it closer to the present:

Unde nu-i minte, vai de popor! (CD, 06.05.2008)

Alegerile vin şi trec, comunităţile rămân. (CD, 13.05.2008)

La aşa preşedinte, aşa ţară! (CD, 17.06.2008)

The modification of proverb/saying involves the replacement of one or several words by others that can achieve the link to the extra-linguistic context:

Politicienii mor de grija securişilor, poporul duce grija zilei de mâine. (CD, 12.02.08)

România, sat/stat fără câini?! (CD, 13.02.07)

La vremuri noi... aceleaşi obiceiuri. (CD, 13.02.07)

Prietenul la prime se cunoaşte! (CD, 02.03.10)

Aceleaşi obiceiuri în altă vacanţă... politică! (CD, 30.09.2008) seems to be far away from *Aceeaşi Mărie, cu altă pălărie*, but the syntactic pattern and the pair of pronominal adjectives which preserve the relation to the source are still present.

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2.4.2. By using the device of partial imitation of proverb, the speaker aims to get a part of the prestige and authority of proverb, which is universally known and accepted by the speakers of a particular language.

Nu moare "calul" uninominalului atunci când vor 'câinii" fățărniciei politice. (CD, 23.09.2008)

Hoții au strigat cei dintâi <Prindeți hoțul!> (CD, 23.09.2008)

The change achieved by adding determiners brings that ironical meaning that the speaker aims to:

Justiția nu este oarbă, ci doar chioară. (CD, 06.03.07)

Ai carte, ai parte (de)parte de carte! (CD, 02.03.10)

2.4.3. A fragment taken from a proverb may be reintegrated into another context and the change has an ironical justification in this situation, too:

sintagma preşedintelui căutător de paie în ochii celorlalți (12.02.08)

Cum să-ți vină mintea de pe urmă! (13.04.10)

2.4.4. Some proverbs undergo a modification by omission, doubled by the change of intonation. The construction turns from an affirmative sentence which asserts a reality proved by a long lasting experience into an interrogative sentence and consequently, a negative one at the semantic level: *Codrul, frate cu românul?* (CD, 27.03.07).

3. Besides proverbs, a series of phrases which have become famous lately, as they have been frequently used in media discourse and they are part of colloquial speech now, are integrated to the political discourse, too.

Vorbeşte liniştit, Serviciul veghează pentru tine! (CD, 27.03.07)

Speranța moare ultima. (CD, 07.02.06)

Iarna nu-i ca vara! Dar situația şi codul sunt portocalii rău! (CD, 09.02.10)

Agricultura a pierdut pariul! (CD, 16.02.10)

Puşca şi cureaua lată, ce frumos mințeam odată! (CD, 16.02.10)

Se spune că în România toată lumea se pricepe la politică şi la fotbal. Niciodată această vorbă de duh nu a fost mai adevărată. (CD, 02.03.10)

Sometimes the speaker marks clearly the relation to the source which is not actually a proverb, but represents an expression with a well fixed form in colloquial speech:

"Săraca țară bogată!" citat cu un puternic izvor istoric (CD, 30.06.2009)

De la "Să trăiți bine!" la "Numai noi să trăim bine!", pentru românul de rând deviza devenind "Scapă cine poate!" (CD, 02.03.10)

Quoting them is sometimes considered not to be necessary, so there occurs only the modified variant.

From a slogan in election campaign: *Ei cu ei, noi cu voi: ei cu ei şi-apoi pe voi, călare ca pe sclavi!* (CD, 02.03.10)

Dl. C.G. – vorba cântecului: "Ieri, mare la PSD, astăzi, mare la PD" (CD, 01.11.2004)

Drum lung, cale bătută în zadar. (CD, 22.04.2008)

Toate drumurile conduc la...investiții (CD, 23.06.2009)

4. Conclusion

The way proverb is used in contemporary political discourse derives from the dominant (even unique) communication intention consisting in persuading the hearer, in inducing him/her a certain opinion, a certain attitude. The political actor behaves like a persuasive agent.

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Political speech comes close to the journalese, due to the similarities between the two discursive genres which they manifest in and, nowadays, both of them move to the pole represented by the colloquial speech.

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