POPULAR EXPRESSIONS AND SLUM VOCABULARY. COLLOQUIALISM IN THE PRESS LANGUAGE.

Carmen Neamţu[*]

Abstract

A long time from now on the dominant style of the Romanian press will be a Latin one, with a waste of raciness, with ironies and stings, with a playful spirit and colorful expressions. These are features of our culture of existing and communicating: we could, at any time, sacrifice any BBC-like rule for the sake of a pun.

The journalist embraces this style, which refers to the live registers of the spoken language even in writing, as opposed to the style before the year 1989, when you could talk about immobility in narrations, about a wooden language in the style of communication in general, not only the press's style. Slum expressions win in the press discourse, the rudeness of the language attracts the audience of OTV-like programs and many others.

In a desire to write in a very interesting way for the avid for sensation public, journalists make abuse of inverted comas and colorful expressions.

Keywords: journalism, communication, vocabulary, language

[*] Carmen Neamţu, Ph. D., is an Associate Professor at the "Aurel Vlaicu" University in Arad. contact: carmen_neamtu2000@yahoo.com

BDD-A10149 © 2013 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:25:16 UTC)

Extending the colloquial tone in the press is real, the theeing and thouing invading the audio-visual, talk shows or Vox shows (street voice, a sort of mini street investigation, after that the newscaster draws the conclusions: the people from Arad think/do not think that...; the people from Arad trust/ do not trust... etc.). Here is a sample of slum language, which passed from orality to written language: *We may have the toughest law in the world, as long as the gypsy boors with a 3 kilogram necklace, that goes with the Jeep, the blondes, who look through the Mercedes steering wheel, politicians kids, prosecutors and judges, parliamentarians wives and many others are hand in hand with the body, which they seem not to see, we won't get rid of the troglodytes from the streets. The code and its sanctions are only for losers, just like before.*

Andrei Plesu also talks about the colloquial tone which is in trend now, in an editorial from February 2004 in the "Jurnalul National", a contemporary text in his theme, from which we quote: „(...) We do not have prejudices, we do not have judgments nor fancies. We are theeing and thouing each other. We are friends. We were born yesterday. It is perfectly normal for a television reporter to walk along the street with his microphone and thee and thou the passers, to whom he wants to talk to, even though he meets them for the first time. It is normal for a professor to thee and thou his students. It is normal for an angry politician to thee and thou his opponents. It is normal that everyone thees and thous everyone on the beach, at the disco or at entertainment shows. In this conditions, using „You" all of a sudden is abusive. „You" is used only in mockery, only when you want to express your aversion, disbelief and loathing. Only thee and thouing is normal (...)". Andrei Plesu has different types of thee and thouing, the *macho style, the man who fights soft girls and shady bimbos, „on stage" thee and thouing, through which the unpopular presenter and the star presenter show their authority, police thee and thouing, the boss's thee and thouing towards his employees, the road thee and thouing of hysterical drivers, the war thee and thouing, ironically-protective* or *friendly.*

Here are a couple of news from a the „24 de ore" newspaper no. 556, an entire page 16, from the main local newspaper from Resita, which combines, in a wrong manner for a non- satiric publication, the uncut information with the commentary:

Three small Romanians, climbed on the bridge of the Cultural banisters in Resita, warbled yesterday in Spanish, that the blackboard is frying them. Maybe they should intensify security in that area. Romanians leave us also without the bridge's banisters.

The House of Culture from Caransebes, which is led by colonel Ioan Cojocaru, also called Coaja, set the date of the ceremony for the Flag Day today at 14:30. When the meteorologists announce 40 degrees. Mister Coaja, the army is abolished!

The Baile Calacea resort, situated between Timisoara and Arad, also has a beach. On Sunday, it was full of people and frogs. The beach was full of croaking. Aren't frogs searched for in exports? Especially this kind of species. Not pond frogs, but beach frogs.

The famous minister of health, the liberal Eugen Nicolaescu promised yesterday to the villages from Banat itinerant pharmacies, as the carnival came in town. Then you are going

BDD-A10149 © 2013 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:25:16 UTC)

to hear how the drum plays in the village. Here comes the Algocalmin, here comes the Piramidon, run old woman or you will lose the Coprol!

Expressions such as: *he spent his life around the train stations in Arad, to chill out, to not care, to get pranked, to do pranks, to go shopping, to go for free*[2], appear in the pages of newspaper, because of the desire to familiarize with the reader. The more we see them in the written press, the more annoying they are. Here is a title from "Observator", no. 1425, page 4: *DIM – a prankster who ridicules the genius.* DIM are the initials of a man, who sent a 1.9 billion uncovered check to SC SOFT-MALT ROMANIA SRL, and who in the article's author, L. Valeriu, vision "made the most appreciated prank of his activity".

The requirement for using popular expressions stylistically, with ironic humorous touches is to have "a special sense of appropriateness to the situation, the object, the communication register. Otherwise the process might get out of control" (p. 273). Rodica Zafiu talks about the role of colloquialism in the written language in the volume "Stylistic diversity in the current Romanian language". The linguist draws attention upon a possible misunderstanding of such expressions, giving transcription examples of the confusing orality.

*"Extending the colloquial tone in the press is risking a very serious danger: article authors might lose their knowledge of the differences between the written and oral code, endorsing the false idea of orality as pure transcription. Orality, as we know it, is written with well controlled words, based on selection, on elimination of redundancy (...). The rule of a well written text is to give the impression of orality, by adapting it to other conditions of communication, by removing it from the context (absence of mimic, intonation, of immediate correction) and putting it back in: it is so a suggestion, not a recording, an exact reproduction." (*Zafiu 2001:*278)*

Stefan Munteanu, linguist from Timisoara, also talks in his book **Language and Culture**, , about some "ways of spoken folk language" (Munteanu 2006:46), such as *hey!, oh!, oh my!, get out of here!, you don't say!, it's true!,* which liven the expression and give it a dramatic character. Stefan Munteanu thinks that there are words, such as those belonging to the slum, which make the language uglier, such as: *dude/chick* (for boyfriend-girlfriend), *crappy* (when something is ugly, ineffective), *cool* (as opposed to *crappy*) etc. We could also add to the list: *awesome, neat, cool* (pronounced *cul*), trendy words, which replaced the absolute superlative.

Alin Ionescu, TV columnist at the "Cotidianul" newspaper, referring to the language familiarities that the public enjoy, even gives a guide to success in an article called "How to speak on TV" (no. 14 46-96, p. 24), reinforcing the role of colloquialism in the conquer of the public. Alin Ionescu finds some clichés, which ensure the success of an efficient communication: *"(...) It is preferable to use expressions such as "to put an obstacle in someone's way", "to cope with the situation". Make simple pranks or tell jokes, which you have approved in secure environments. Speak slowly and clearly, so that nobody can interrupt you. Know when to look modest: "If you ask me what the solutions are, I can say that I do not have them, but that does not mean I could not have them in the case...". Do not show that you have clear sympathies: "I do not agree with X, but that does not mean that I*

[2] *şi-a făcut veacul prin zona gării Arad, a se alipui, a trece ca prin brânză, a lua ţeapă, a da ţepe, a face piaţul, a merge de-a fitea/ficea.*

BDD-A10149 © 2013 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:25:16 UTC)

agree with Y". Show respect for those who have read a lot and seem to know, but do not forget to show curiosity about the financial profitability of their occupations. The spirit is good, but the materialistic part should not be neglected. Everything goes through the stomach. Show your indignation for gas or bread prices. Say that everyone lies, but you are honest, really, why would you lie? Be a patriot, but moderate, because you do not want to seem nationalist. Do not omit the country, the mother, and the values. You risk being called a cosmopolitan. Try to look concerned about your private security: "It is dangerous to be honest these days". Praise the Romanian educational system, which even in the current conditions produces values, attention, and "notables". Do not forget this word! (...)"

The journalist embraces this style, which refers to the live registers of the spoken language even in writing, as opposed to the style before the year 1989, when you could talk about immobility in narrations, about a wooden language in the style of communication in general, not only the press's style. Slum expressions win in the press's discourse, the rudeness of the language attracts the audience of OTV-like programs and many others. Here are some language vulgarities from the "Romania Mare" magazine: the sycophant, shameless stanchness, crappy boss, the oligophren, the faggot, the bandit, the parachutes... etc.

The frequency of using the word *to put*, with the versions *to steal someone's stocked money, to put someone in the hospital, to put someone in a coma*[3], translates the misunderstood level of a simple style for a larger number of readers.

„*CJA stole the stocked money"* – the „Observator" newspaper, no. 664 (p. 4, article signed by Marian Buga)

„The mushrooms have put a child in the hospital" - *the* „Observator" newspaper, no. 660 (p. 4, article signed by Tibi Ettenberger)

„Distracted and drunk
A man has been put in a coma by an automobile" - the „Observator" newspaper, no. 792 (p. 5, article signed by Florines Ghile)

In a desire to write in a very interesting way for the avid for sensation public, journalists make abuse of inverted comas and colorful expressions. Here is some news from the „Observator" newspaper.

Through the parquet's „care"

Sexu and Corcobauru have chilled out from robberies[4]

Prosecutor Florin Roman, from the parquet near the Court from Arad, has put at our disposal two files of former students who have been robbing other fellow students, using threatening, and intimidation.

Gheorghe Adrian Lazar, 20 years old, and Florin Barna, 19 years old, both from Arad, were „operating" in the children's park, where groups of students were going home. After their nicknames, Corcobauru and Sexu used to buy liquor with the stolen money or selled goods. The fatal complaint on them was made on October 3. We will press it. On Friday, the Court's file, as a result of the indictment", declared prosecutor Florin Roman. (no. 1255, p. 4)

Five runagates passed the customs officers very easily[5] *(no. 1439, p. 2)*

[3] a se băga la banii de rezervă ai cuiva, a băga pe cineva în spital, a băga în comă.
[4] Sexu şi Corcobauru s-au alipuit la tâlhării.

BDD-A10149 © 2013 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:25:16 UTC)

Five villains, caught by surprise[6] *(no. 797, p. 4)*
A man from Curtici wanted to travel free by train[7] *(no. 584, p. 4)*

Slang elements in the journalistic style

Slang is an ensemble of terms and frasal constructions expressively marked, developing new unusual senses, which are the most of the time incomprehensible for the outside speakers of the small sociolinguistic circle in which they are used. (See: Irimia 1999: 122, Slang). It is used by someone with the intention of not being understood by persons, who do not belong to that certain group. „Dumitru Irimia says that using slang terms characterizes almost exclusively the socio cultural groups and/or groups of contradicting ages way of speaking: scholars and students, on one hand soldiers, on the other hand sergeants and a third category: the socially emarginated of different reasons, those who fought the law, prisoners etc". (Irimia, 1999: 122)

The linguist Iorgu Iordan explains the use of slang by scholars and students, by invoking adolescence, the age at which fantasy and the spirit of defiance are exacerbated. Dumitru Irimia also has the opinion that, using slang gives the teenager „the conscience of a free spirit", „it emphasizes the feeling of individuality, of personality, by the affirmation of a much desired capacity now: being spiritual satisfies these aspirations, by concentrating the attention on him."

Linguists distinguish the slang of villains, thieves, of scholars and students, of sportsmen, of typographers etc. Ilie Rad in „Stylistics and mass-media**"**, looks over the origins and evolution of slang, specifying that some slang words and expressions come from the common language, and mentioning that the speaker gives them new meanings, which are sometimes based on comparison, metonymy, or synecdoche: *pumpkin* for head, *shyster* for attorney, *blagging* for robbing, *stove* for wife, *vinyl* for mother-in-law, *borsch* for blood etc. Ilie Rad distinguishes a certain category of slang, which comes from the regional idioms or from borrowings from other languages, such as: *to bootleg* (for stealing), *to bust a grub* (for eating), *kaput* (from German, for broken), *bosh* (for invaluable thing), *Bolshoi* (from Russian, for sea) etc.

It seems that slang brings more picturesqueness, more expressiveness, and more exoticism in the oral language. For example, in writing student slang expressions ironically translate aspects from the students' lives: *to bolo* (for failing an exam), *fresh meat* (for freshman), *nail* (for a very hard exam), *off-topic* (not knowing the subject), *chick* (a very beautiful student), *buzz off* (do not bore me), *to be mocked up by a teacher* (being listened from all the courses), *getting a pox* (getting a 4), *to doll up* (to dress up), *to eye* (to observe), *blatist* (the one who eats in a canteen illegally or the one who travels by train without ticket), *house painter* (Arts student), *mason* (Sculpture student) etc.

Here are a few examples from the newspaper press:
Even retirees prank the CFR („Observator", no. 746, p. 4)
A man from Bucharest pranked AMARAD („Observator", no. 924, p. 11)

---

[5] Cinci transfugi au trecut ca prin brânză de vameşii arădeni.
[6] Cinci infractori, luaţi ca din oală
[7] Un curticean a vrut să călătorească cu trenul de-a fitea

BDD-A10149 © 2013 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:25:16 UTC)

REFERENCES

Iordan, Iorgu, *Romanian language stylistics*, final edition, Scientific Ed., Bucharest, 1975.

Irimia, Dumitru, *Introduction in stylistics*, Polirom Ed., Iaşi, 1999.

Munteanu, Stefan, *Language and Culture*, West University publishing house, Timisoara, 2006.

Rad, Ilie, *Stylistics and mass-media***,** Excelsior Ed., Cluj-Napoca, 1999.

Zafiu, Rodica, *Stylistic diversity in the current Romanian language*, University of Bucharest publishing house, 2001.

BDD-A10149 © 2013 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.142 (2026-11-14 18:25:16 UTC)