LEXICAL INTERFERENCES BETWEEN JOURNALISTIC AND POLITICAL LANGUAGE IN POST-1989 ROMANIA[1]

***Abstract**: The results of the events that took place in December 1989, freedom of speech and the democratic political system have had multiple effects on public communication. As a result, out of the manifestations of mediatised political discourse, the vocabulary has undergone radical transformations, being invaded, among other things, by new forms, which represent different realities. These new forms are heavily broadcast owing to the importance that language users assign to the mass media.*

***Keywords**: politics, journalism, language.*

History of the Relationship between Politics and Journalism

The relationship between these two linguistic manifestations started when they became simultaneous on the Romanian territory, that is, when the first publications emerged in the old kingdoms of Walachia and Moldova: Curierul Românesc (April 8, 1829), and Albina (June 1, 1829), respectively. Referring to that time, Alexandru Andriescu makes a "special mention" related to the "rich political terminology with which the Romanian readers made contact for the first time in the pages of these publications. The terminology of politics, more than that related to other fields of activity, gives to journalistic style its special character." (1979: 91) The Romanian researcher provides a list of political terms that imposed themselves on the Romanian language with the help of these first publications: *aboliționist (abolitionist), capitalist (capitalist), communism (communism), congres (congress), constituțional (constitutional), democrație (democracy), dictatură (dictatorship), libertate (liberty), oponent (opponent), parlament (parliament), partid (party), republică democratică (democratic republic), revoluție (revolution), terrorism (terrorism)* (*ibidem*: 92-93). Later on, Dumitru Irimia claimed that social-political terminology represents the core of the main lexical fund of journalistic style. (1984: 252)

For the same time period, Gheorghe Bulgăr adds up several neologisms from the administrative-political sphere, words that were less common in the literary works of that time, but quite frequent in the pages of periodicals: *ambasador (ambassador), voturi (votes), parlamentar (member of parliament), suveranitate (sovereignty), candidat (candidate)*. (1958: 89) Some of these terms were sometimes explained with the help of glosses, as in the case of Curierul Românesc: *constituție - constitution* (the edifice of political settlements), *negoțiațiile – negotiations* (agreement talks). (*ibidem*: 93)

Closer to our times, the communist regime imposed that the journalistic style be included into political language, from the standpoint of its construction and purpose.

"The reality described by the theoretical studies of that time was atypical for journalism: subject to censorship, vehicles of propaganda, periodicals (just as the audiovisual means) encompassed to a great extent political and administrative language, under the rigid, cliché-full form that we currently call wooden language". (Zafiu, 2007)

[1] Sorin Cristian Semeniuc, "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iaşi, semeniuc@yahoo.com.

*This work was supported by the European Social Fund in Romania, under the responsibility of the Managing Authority for the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development 2007-2013 [grant POSDRU/88/1.5/S/47646].

BDD-A5888 © 2011 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 17:03:38 UTC)

Thus, "the Romanian mass media lost their most important defining features", which led to the "un-communicability" of the press jargon. (Manoliu-Manea, 1993: 241)

Dumitru Irimia states that, in general, journalistic style enters with political "style" a process of "mirroring", "from different but intertwined perspectives the relationship between the essence of human beings and the social-political organisation of their existence". However, Irimia says that political texts are a division of journalistic style, building for themselves "a relatively specific identity in their oral manifestation, when rhetorical-persuasive structures are combined with gestures, mimics and with the supra-segmental elements of linguistic utterances (accent, intonation, pauses)". More elaborate, written political texts are nevertheless closer to official-administrative style. (1999: 168)

Post-1989: Change, Change, Change

One of the main effects of the post-1989 period on the Romanian language vocabulary was its extremely strong politicisation. (Preda, 1992: 483-490) From a stylistic viewpoint, another result is represented by the pressure exerted by oral language on written language, which has led to "the transgression of the border between official/public and familiar/popular/argotic." (Guțu Romalo, 1994: 20-30) What happened in 1989 might be compared with a moment when "culture change", bringing numerous changes in language: "new words are created to express new ideas; old words are lost because some notions disappear; semantic changes take place according to the speakers' current circle of ideas". (Ivănescu, 2000: 4) The main effects of such a period are visible at the level of the vocabulary, because "political factors may also lead to the creation and stressing of emotional states that would have a major role in language changes". (Ivănescu, *ibidem*: 7)

We consider that, from the standpoint of the evolution of Romanian language, several factors, including the interference between journalistic and political language, have produced over this period a lexical transformation phenomenon, a moment similar in strength to that of 1828-1829 (as Ivănescu said), when, as a result of the Adrianople Peace Treaty and of Western capital entering the Romanian kingdoms, the sources of Romanian neologisms favoured Romance languages (French, Italian) and Latin, over Greek, German and Hungarian languages. Bearing in mind the peculiarities of each period it is worth mentioning the ongoing and intensive broadcast of the "new language" through the mass-media as a determining factor for the current period.

The Role of Wooden Language in the Interference between the Two Types of Language

The aggressive mixture of the two types of languages in the reality imposed by the ante-1989 totalitarian regime had effects on their manifestation at the moment when language was "set free" and on the explosion of linguistic innovations after 1989. As a result, we could say that the interfering couple *post-1989 political language – post-1989 journalistic language* frequently transforms into the three-term equation *ante-1989 political language – post-1989 political language – post 1989 journalistic language*, remembering Rodica Zafiu's specification referring to the fact that, before 1989, journalistic language was included into political language.

BDD-A5888 © 2011 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 17:03:38 UTC)

An example which illustrates this relationship, favoured by both the existence of linguistic and thought stereotypes, is the metaphor of the "erected edifice", encountered at all the three above mentioned levels:

ante-1989 political language: the process of *erecting* the new order (Scînteia, July 1,1989, 1/3), successfully *erecting* the socialist society (Scînteia, July 1, 1989, 1/3), the overall *edifice* (Scînteia, July 2, 1989, 1/4)

post-1989 political language: *destroying*, in only a few hours, the entire *edifice* of totalitarian power (Iliescu, 1995: 92), we reconstructed from scrap the political *edifice* (Iliescu, 1994: 112)

post-1989 journalistic language: to defend with utmost courage the bricks of the sublime national *edifice* (România Liberă, December 24, 1989, 1/1, Dragomir Horomnea), The PNL-PC-PSD political *edifice* gains consistency. After the PNL-PC Alliance was officially registered, in a few days, PSD will follow the same path. (Petru Calapodescu, columnist/journalist http://stiri.rol.ro/vis-si-cosmar-677513.html, accessed on Sunday, June 12, 2011, 16.45 hours), The political *edifice* built by them was shattered by Stănescu last week when he distributed the budget of Olt county exclusively according to the criteria delimiting the relationship between PNL and PSD ("Cum a distrus Paul Stănescu speranța pesediștilor slătineni"/*How Paul Stănescu destroyed the hope of PSD Slatina,* editorial by Alin Dorobanțu, Ziarul de Olt, no. 278, March 5-11, 2010).

Types of Interference

1. Technical terms/structures naming realities, concepts.

the market economy (Năstase, 1996: 21)/20 years of *market economy,* 20 years of cameral system (Radio France International, May 20, 2010)
reform (Năstase, 1996:35)/ Romania wants German investment. Berlin encourages *reforms* (Evenimentul Zilei, June 26, 2010)

2. Technical terms/structures naming realities, concepts. Initially, these terms had a connotative meaning but over time they were "grammaticalized" or they shifted to denotative meanings.

As for its programme, the Front sets forth the following: [...] 2. To organise *free elections* during the month of April (Communiqué to the country of the National Salvation Front Council, December 22, 1989) / Thus, 20 years since the fall of communism, most (65%) of those who were 18+ at that time consider today that the main good changes brought by democracy are: *free elections* (say 21% of the respondents), the right to travel abroad, including to work, (say about 18%) and the development of the mass media (the emergence of a great number of newspapers, journals, TV stations, radio stations, etc.) claim about 16% of them (Jurnalul Național, November 4, 2009)/ Guineea: The first *free elections* since 1958 (Hotnews, June 28, 2010)

3. Innovations that tend to become clichés, if they haven't already become, due to their abusive usage. Often, these forms undergo transformations.

A. Absolute (the maker's identity is easy to determine)

„*Tonomat*" / *Jukebox* – The first attestation of this meaning is dated March 14, 2008, when, just after he returned from Brussels, Traian Băsescu made a press statement

BDD-A5888 © 2011 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 17:03:38 UTC)

referring to the publication, on that same day, in a national newspaper, of an incriminating material related to his daughter:
A child who's still too shy and who was subject to *jukebox-type analyses*, he said. The president claimed that analysts are *Euro-fed jukeboxes - feed them with coins and they'll say whatever their owner wants them to say* (Evz, March 14, 2008).
In the mass-media, "jukebox" developed new forms:
(1) *Doctor of jukeboxitis* (Cotidianul, March 24, 2008)
(2) *Jukebox-candidates* (România Liberă, 21 aprilie 2008)

„Să trăiți bine!" / *May you live well!*
A fruit of Traian Băsescu's campaign team imagination, before the presidential elections of 2004, the phrase became a label for the terms in office of Romania's current President, the symbol of a future that aims to be better. In Parliament or in the mass-media the expression was frequently modified, sometimes resulting in involuntary humour: *May you die well!* (four times in statements made in the Chamber of Deputies), *May you vote well!*, *May you cut well!* or *May you eat well!*.

„Băieți deștepți" / *Smart boys*
First used by Traian Băsescu in 2005 to unmask the practices of some businessmen who gained illegal money doing business with the Romanian State in the field of energy, the expression has also been fashionable in the Chamber, where it has been employed 25 times since that moment.

"sinergia faptelor" / *the synergy of facts*, "meandrele concretului" / *the meanders of the concrete*, "capitalism de cumetrie" / *capitalism of in-laws* (Ion Iliescu)/"Pescuitul prin sinergia faptelor, eludând meandrele concretului" / *Fishing through the synergy of facts, eluding the meanders of the concrete* (Obiectiv de Tulcea, March 26, 2008)

"luminița de la capătul tunelului" /*the flickering light at the end of the tunnel*: was uttered for the first time by the politician Victor Ciorbea and it illustrated the hope that after the 1996 elections Romania would save itself from the difficult situation in which it found itself at that moment; the phrase, originating in the mining industry or in the railway field, had already been employed in the Western world by the beginning of the last century, when, for instance, the writer Middleton Murry wrote to his wife, who was very ill, about "the dawn at the end of the tunnel" (Freedman, 1996: 151).

B) Taken over (the Sender who used the phrase for the first time is unknown, but in order to become fashionable the expression needed to be used by a prestigious individual)
"mogul"
The attestation imposed in the vocabulary of recent years is dated February 19, 2007 and belongs to President Traian Băsescu. On that day, in an interview for Radio Romania Actualități, Traian Băsescu repeated it several times.
Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes. I liked it when I've found it in an analysis in one of today's newspapers, regarding the three *moguls*, Vântu, Patriciu and Voiculescu; but the analysis of that paper hasn't gone up to the end: it should've talked about their connection with politics. It acknowledged their capacity to destroy someone's image, to create virtual images about people, but it didn't make the next step: to discover, through journalistic investigation, the political influence of these people.

BDD-A5888 © 2011 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 17:03:38 UTC)

Despite the President's claims, he had made contact with the word before, for instance, in an interview for BBC Radio which took place two months before, when the word was pronounced by the host. The press in general had used the term before with the meaning given to it by the President later on.

The Grivco *mogul* did not prevail in politics by making his television people praise him and his polymorphic party but by the things, good or bad, that they told about others (Cotidianul, June 18, 2006)

Frequency of use led to various forms in the mass-media:

(1) „Mogulache" / *Mogulet* (Gândul, February 12, 2009)

(2) Băsescu accuses the TVR board of *mogulisation* and of having favoured the PSD candidate, Mircea Geoană (România Liberă, 18 noiembrie 2009)

"Baron local"/*local baron*: The expression gained notoriety after having been mentioned in a speech delivered by the PSD prime-minister in office, Adrian Năstase, an event described as follows in the press of that time: Less than a week after the PSD leader, Adrian Năstase, told young party members not to use the *local barons* as role models (...) At the Snagov meeting with young PSD members, the PM clearly said that the expression «*local baron*» sanctions a set of blamed attitudes and must not «become a model» (Adevărul, November 14, 2002). The word had been present in the press for a long time.

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 its modification:

PNL candidates promise to *de-baronise* the country (Evz, May 1, 2004)

On Monday, May 24, the PNL-PD Alliance decided to sign "*anti-baron*" protocols at the local level. (Observator Cultural, issue 223, June 2004)

The cloning of *piggy-bank barons* (România Liberă, March 12, 2007)

4. Easy metaphors, inspired mainly by the fields of geography, health and human activities.

ante-1989 political language: the *construction* of socialism (Scînteia, July 1,1989, 1/2)

[...] we could say that we've walked a long *road,* climbed the highest *peaks*, overcome many *obstacles* and won wonderful victories. From the *heights* we've reached is easy to see clearly the high *tops* and the magnificent, bright *horizons* of humanity's springtime – the horizons of communism (Scînteia, July 1, 1989, 5/3)

post-1989 political language: the *construction* of the market economy system (Năstase, 1996: 5), the *construction* of a new political edifice (Iliescu, 1994: 57), getting *anchored* in immediate reality (Năstase, 1996: 5), is not *anchored* in an objective analysis (Iliescu, 1995: 109)

Romania has the chance to pass through many *straits* of history and to *sail the high seas*, avoiding any other straits that might be even harder. It's up to it to ponder on its *progression, direction and destination*, on its pace, efforts and outcomes (Iliescu, 1994: 256), no *island* of stability has many chances of surviving in an *ocean* of turbulence (Iliescu, 1994: 272)

Totalitarianism, so vast and sophisticated a while back, articulated through doctrinarian fictions and breaches of trust supported by all means and on all occasions, true *ramparts* of power that seemed to be *untouchable*, has *crumbled to pieces*. Its *ruins* are present in various places on the planet, but most of them lie here, in our area of belonging to Europe. And these *ruins* are still smoky, are still *fresh and hot*, even if they're in the mist. They are *radioactive ruins.* (Iliescu, 1994: 274)

BDD-A5888 © 2011 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 17:03:38 UTC)

Anyway, the planet gets balanced: a part of it, eroded, *chocked* up to now by totalitarianism, in practice and ideology, seems to be *getting well*. Just as after a long and painful *illness, it breathes* the desire for freedom and democracy. It breaks, has *convulsions* and stops, but it's still breathing. *Convalescence* is not easy. (Iliescu, 1994: 274)

We are on the verge of sailing an unknown *ocean*, of discovering a new world. In order to *get to smooth waters* we have to invent a new political *continent*. (Iliescu, 1994: 275)

post-1989 journalistic language: Lăzăroiu, willing to get involved in the *construction* of the Snow-White party (Adevărul, May 5, 2011)

There's no doubt, the Romanian economy goes through a period of *convalescence*. It has been *sick* for a long time, eroded by inefficiency and by the fact that the companies with high profile connections have been allowed not to pay their taxes, fees and utility bills. For too long, it has been marked by forged privatisations or by privatisations which have masked statism. (Ada Ştefan, România Liberă, October 14, 2006)

Is it possible to rebuild our *ship* on the *ocean*? Could we pass from certitude to doubt without falling into anarchy or nihilism? This is the great challenge of transition and, I believe, of mind set change. (România Liberă, June 27, 2009)

5. Deviations from the norm, taken over and used in order to persuade.

"care este", "succesuri", "almanahe" / *"that is", "successes", "almanacs"* (*wrong Romanian grammatical forms*). For instance, after it was first uttered by Elena Băsescu, "succesuri" (wrong plural form of the Romanian word *success*), has emerged over 30 times in the statements of MPs and over 50 times in the articles of the "Evenimentul Zilei" newspaper).

6. Names, nicknames, monikers.

And it seems he is not ready for a defeat, especially because they are dealing with *Bă-Zeus* (Political statement by Ioan Chelaru, MP, September 22, 2008) / And so *Bă-Zeus* descended to Radu Moraru's show and gave warning signs to the nation (Andreea Duțulescu's blog, accessed on Monday, June 13, 12.11 o'clock, http://www.realitateamea.ro/2010/04/bazeus-da-bip-la-tot-pdl-u-de-ce.html)

In fact, the so-called political leaders have the wrong belief that, if they're blessed by the *Granny*, Năstase and Patriciu, they can do whatever they please in the Romanian Parliament, as if they were on their playing field (Political statement - Daniel Buda, MP, March 22, 2011)/ *Granny* Iliescu about the bad wolf Băsescu and the PSD little red riding hood: Who's afraid of the wolf shouldn't enter the woods! What's important is how one enters... and, above all, how one leaves the woods (www.gandul.info, December 10, 2008)

Thus, Vadim will share the foreground with *Sweetie* and the young lad of politics, Victor Ponta, on his left and Crin Antonescu on his right. (Political statement by Iulian Vladu, MP, February 22, 2011)/Or Adrian Năstase, a.k.a. *Sweetie*, who gorged up while he was the party leader more than Britain's royal family in five hundred years of ruling (Marius Cilibia's blog, accessed on June 13, 12.20 o'clock http://www.mariuscilibia.ro/tag/adrian-nastase/)

BDD-A5888 © 2011 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 17:03:38 UTC)

Conclusions

Just as the specialists in the field of sociology, linguists have assumed the thesis of the "unfortunate heritage" in a specific framework, talking about the fact that "besides the existence and the peculiarities of wooden language during the age of the 'communist dictatorship', this language has also emerged in the new regime, either by maintaining the exact forms and clichés of the old society or by introducing new strategies (such as foreign, unknown terms) or new forms-clichés into the old strategies". (Slama Cazacu, 2000: 95).

Rodica Zafiu adds a new motivation to the use of predetermined expressions:

> "It wouldn't be wrong to assume that, for the most part, we might talk in clichés: it might be that the fixed formulae, acquired progressively and involuntarily, and various automatisms fill a larger place in the utterances we are usually producing than we would like to admit. In theory, the infinite creativity of speech is perfectly true – but there are also visible stereotypes, clichés that regulate daily communication, with minimum effort" (2001: 68).

Journalistic cliché is used due to the frequency of the old psychological, linguistic and political patterns (Pârvu, 2008: 70) and takes over the "way of thinking of the political stakeholders of the moment, who are active people but are uncultivated or love convenient verbal stereotypes". (Pârvu, *ibidem*: 74)

One of the most viable explanations for the use of these formulae is that the Sender tries to show that s/he has a given luggage, a part of the socio-cultural competence of the community and that s/he is member of the same group. (Dascălu Jinga, 2009: 431-458) Clichés help avoid the moments of embarrassing silence during discussions and lead to feelings of "sympathy, solidarity and good will", similar to a "warm and familiar ring". (Gramley Patzold, 2004: 50) Using clichés is easier because they were built based on social determinations, on "models accepted by a community and intelligible in that community." (Coşeriu, 1999: 56) Mental structures with a role in selecting and assessing information, mechanisms unifying in nature, stereotypes contribute to the achievement of group solidarity and to the shaping of public opinion. (Lippmann *apud* Stoichițoiu Ichim, 2006: 360) Conciseness, simplicity and the lack of ambiguity are factors that give positive value to clichés, which "fix in the collective mindset simplified images of reality that do not necessarily reflect the collective truth" (Stoichițoiu Ichim, 2006: 360); with the help of clichés some aspects of political life are labelled in an ironic or pejorative manner. These words, phrases or utterances become part of the common knowledge fund, made up by something known by all those who take part in communication, and which is based on verbal interaction. (Săftoiu, 2007: 97-114) On the other hand, verbal stereotypes, frequently associated with "wooden language" are a cause of the depreciation of political discourse[1].

Bibliography

Alexandru Andriescu, *Stil şi limbaj*, Iaşi, Editura Junimea, 1977.
Alexandru Andriescu, *Limba presei româneşti în secolul al XIX-lea*, Iaşi, Editura Junimea, 1979.
Charles Bally, *Traité de stylistique française*, vol. I, Heidelberg, Carl Winters Universitatsbuchhandlung, 1919-1921.

[1] George Orwell defines clichés as "ready-made phrases" and assigns the same negative role to "dying metaphors".

BDD-A5888 © 2011 Universitatea din Pitești
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 17:03:38 UTC)

Gheorghe Bulgăr, “Despre limba şi stilul primelor periodice romîneşti”, în *Contribuţii la istoria limbii romîne literare în secolul al XIX-lea*, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei Republicii Populare române, 1958, 75-113.
Eugeniu Coşeriu, *Introducere în lingvistică,* Cluj-Napoca, Ed. Echinox, 1999.
Laurenţia Dascălu-Jinga, “Structuri clişeizate în româna actuală”, în Gabriela Pană Dindelegan (coord.), *Dinamica limbii române actuale. Aspecte gramaticale şi discursive*, Bucureşti, Ed. Academiei Române, 2009.
Stelian Dumistrăcel, *Limbajul publicistic din perspectiva stilurilor funcţionale*, Iaşi, Ed. Institutul European, 2006.
Terry and David Freedman, *Dictionary of Cliché*, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1996.
Stephan Gramley, Kurt Michael Patzold, *A survey of modern English*, second edition, London, Routledge, 2004.
Valeria, Guţu-Romalo, Stilul “relaxat” în uzul limbii române actuale, în *LL*, 3-4, 1994, 20-30.
Ion Iliescu, *Revoluţie şi reformă*, Bucureşti, Ed. Enciclopedică, 1994.
Ion Iliescu, *Revoluţia trăită*, Bucureşti, Ed. Redacţiei Publicaţiilor pentru Străinătate, 1995.
Dumitru Irimia, *Structura stilistică a limbii române contemporane (pentru uzul studenţilor)*, Iaşi, 1984.
Dumitru Irimia, *Introducere în stilistică*, Iaşi, Ed. Polirom, 1999.
Gheorghe Ivănescu, *Istoria limbii române*, ed. a II-a, Iaşi, Ed. Junimea, 2000.
Maria Manoliu-Manea, “Maximele conversaţionale ale lui Grice şi discursul politic românesc”, în *Gramatica pragmasemantică şi discurs*, Bucureşti, Ed. Litera, 1993, 241-247.
Adrian Năstase, *Ideea politică a schimbării*, Bucureşti, R.A. Monitorul Oficial, 1996.
Ioana Cristina Pârvu, *Arhitectura textului jurnalistic actual*, Bucureşti, Ed. Universităţii, 2008.
Irina, Preda, “Îmbogăţirea lexico-semantică a limbii române actuale (cu privire specială la perioada post-decembristă)”, în *LR*, XLI, 9, 1992, 483-490.
Răzvan Săftoiu, “Strategii de constituire a fondului comun de cunoştinţe”, în Liliana Ionescu Ruxăndoiu (coord.), *Interacţiunea verbală (IV II), Aspecte teoretice şi aplicative. Corpus*, Bucureşti, Ed. Universităţii, 2007, 97-114.
Tatiana Slama-Cazacu, *Stratageme comunicaţionale şi manipularea*, Iaşi, Ed. Polirom, 2000.
Adrian Stoichiţoiu Ichim, *Creativitate lexicală în româna actuală*, Bucureşti, Ed. Universităţii, 2006.
Rodica Zafiu, *Diversitate stilistică în româna actuală*, Bucureşti, Ed. Universităţii, 2001.
Rodica Zafiu, “Interpretarea limbajului jurnalistic”, în *Revista Limba Română*, nr. 7-9, anul XVII, Chişinău, 2007.
Site-ul Camerei Deputaţilor www.cdep.ro şi cel al Administraţiei Prezidenţiale www.presidency.ro
Site-urile publicaţiilor Evenimentul Zilei, Cotidianul, Adevărul, Jurnalul Naţional, Gândul şi România Liberă.

BDD-A5888 © 2011 Universitatea din Piteşti
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.75 (2026-10-30 17:03:38 UTC)