THE ARGUMENTATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE IN COMMUNISM:A CASE STUDY FROM ROMANIA

Adrian Toader, PhD Student, "Transilvania" University of Braşov

Abstract: The study focuses on identifying instances of wooden language in publicly delivered Romanian political speeches. The aim of the paper is to present, through the aid of discourse analysis, pragmatic categories in which typical forms of address specific to the communist regime are found within public discourse. I analyze the linguistic constituents through which instances of wooden language are present and define their pragmatic roles and functions by looking at eight speeches belonging to Nicolae Ceaușescu, the former president of the Socialist Republic of Romania. The purpose of the study is to observe the extent to which such forms of communication are present in the communist discourse and to identify patterns and typologies that contribute to ill-constructed argumentative structures found in public forms of address.

Keywords: wooden language, argumentation, political discourse, clichés, pragmatics

1. Introduction:

The paper examines the presence of wooden language in political forms of discourse. Through the use of discourse analysis, the work will identify instances of wooden language found at syntactic, lexical and stylistic levels. The purpose of this study is to observe the extent to which these forms of communication are subject to specific linguistic typologies and patterns which create a form of communication that lacks consistency and credibility in the argumentative constructions of such discourses.

The first chapter introduces the concept of wooden language through a socio-historical contextualization of the term. It is followed by a description of the methodological framework used for the study and the discoursive analysis of the afore-mentioned political speeches.

2. Defining the wooden language :

Wooden language is a linguistic phenomenon characterized by a "number of grammatical, lexical and stylistic features." (Thom, 2005:39). The term comes from the French expression *langue de bois* used to criticize the discursive practices of the Bolshevik regime. It can be argued that the public forms of communication delivered in the Romanian communist period are subject to pragmatic particularities of language (i.e. impersonality, ambiguousness of arguments, repetitions, abundance of adjectives) and well define a communication pattern that

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was specific to the political discourses of the afore-mentioned socio-historical era. Wooden language lacks content and coherent argumentative constructions which are often replaced by an abundance of adverbs used to denote impersonality and offer imprecise information to mass audiences. Cernicova (199:128) argues that the structure of this linguistic phenomenon that manifested in the Romanian political discourse after the end of the Second World War degrades language and transforms it into syntactic, semantic and lexical patterns that significantly restrict the communicative processes.

The oversimplification of the political lexicon is viewed differently by Tatiana Slama-Cazacu who defines wooden language as a "subsystem of a language" (1999: 584-585) in her field of specialty known as psycholinguistics. This pragmatic approach deals with the relation between messages and the psychological traits of humans who interpret the information that they receive through political speeches. In other words, psycholinguistics studies "the processes through which the intentions of the speakers are transformed into the interpretations of the listeners."(Cazacu, 1980:128). The use of lexical, syntactic and semantic patterns becomes an instrument of power, a strategy of imposing ideological beliefs that are propagated through this medium to mass audiences. The political discourses crafted through the wooden language "lose their senses and are instrumented as to create a false image of a universal competency." (Mărcușan, 2011: 215)

3. Methodology:

Wooden language creates communicative patterns that are specific to socialist ideology. According to Thom (2005) the intrinsic features of the communist discourse associated with wooden language are identified at syntactic, lexical and stylistic levels. The study is conducted on eight speeches belonging to former Romanian communist leader Nicolae Ceaușescu (between 1962 and 1989) held on different occasions and delivered within the institutional settings of the communist party or in the forms of public addresses.

These speeches were given on different ocassions and focused on various socio-economic aspects that were publically delivered to mass audiences and to the members of the Great National Assembly. The analysis looks at the extent in which instances of wooden language can be identified in the pragmatic construction of language employed in the dialogical communication process.

4. **Wooden language in the speeches of Nicolae Ceaușescu**:

The public discourses of former Head of State and leader of the Socialist Republic of Romania provide strong evidence that instances of wooden language are an integral linguistic category of his public speech.

On a lexical level, different typologies can be identified. The impersonality of a political address is given by phrases and expressions through which the speaker constructs argumentative structures with imprecise temporal information. An abundance of passive expressions are identified within Ceaușescu's speeches:

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(1) *a. În tot* ***ce s-a înfăptuit*** *în acești ani este incorporată munca generațiilor tinere.*
‘ **Everything that has been accomplished** during this time incorporates the work of young generations.’
b. Din datele de care ***se dispune*** *până în prezent* ***se poate declara*** *cu deplină certitudine că aceste acțiuni (..) au fost organizate și declanșate în strânsă legătură cu serviciile de spionaj din diferite țări străine.*
’From the data currently available **it can be declared** with undeniable certainty that these actions were orchestrated and initiated in close cooperation with the espionage agencies of various foreign countries’.

These impersonal constructions contribute to an ineffective communication process where factual information is being replaced with the ambiguousness of temporal, social, political, cultural and economic data presented to mass audiences. As a result, the political speeches of Nicolae Ceaușescu often take a formal rather than informative role. These instances are also identified in the use of third person pronouns:

(2) *a. În această piață au avut loc mai multe adunări ale* ***poporului nostru.***
‘Many of **our people’s gatherings** have taken place in this square.’
b. *De la această tribună a celui mai înalt forum democratic al țării adresez cele mai vii multumiri Comitetului Central al partidului, Consiliului National al Frontului Democratiei și Unității Socialiste, Marii Adunări Naționale, care, în consens cu voința oamenilor muncii,* ***a întregului nostru popor****, au hotărât realegerea mea ca președinte al Republicii Socialiste România.*
‘From the tribune of the country’s highest democractic forum I extend my gratitude to the Central Comitee of the party, the National Council of the Democratic Front and Socialist Unity, The National Assembly, who, in general consensus with the will of the working people, **the entirety of our people**, decided upon my re-election as the president of the Socialist Republic of Romania.’
c. *Iată de ce, și în aceste momente solemne, primele mele gînduri se îndreaptă spre* ***minunatul nostru popor*** *- adevaratul făuritor al noii istorii a Romaniei socialiste.*
’This is why, in these solemn moments, my first thoughs go out to **our wonderful people**- the true forgerof the new history of socialist Romania.’
d. ***Patria noastră*** *a strabatut un drum glorios de înfăptuiri, parcurgînd, într-o perioadă scurtă, mai multe etape istorice în înaintarea sa neabătută spre înaltele piscuri ale societății comuniste.*
‘**Our nation** has crossed a glorious path of accomplishments, treading, in a short amount of time, many historical stages in its relentless progress towarsds the highest peaks of communist society.’

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From a rhetorical standpoint, these forms of public communication are used as a strategy of relating to the audiences, of creating strong cohesion between the addresser and the addressee, of trying to promote "the unity of the people the party and the government" (Thom, 2005:43). Ceaușescu's speeches are also dominated by an authorial presence observed in the often use of imperative structures:

(3) a. *(..)* ***trebuie*** *să fim pe deplin conștienți că, dacă nu am fi înfăptuit industrializarea și dezvoltarea socialistă a agriculturii (..)poporul nostru ar fi rămas în vechea stare de înapoiere.*

'**We must** fully be aware that if we had not accomplished the industrialization and socialist development of agriculture (..) our people will have remained in the old state of underdevelopment.

b. ***Trebuie*** *să înțelegeți cu toții, tovarăși studenți că vă pregătiți pentru munca practică, pentru activitatea creatoare și locul acesteia este producția bunurilor materiale și spirituale pentru întregul popor.*

'You **must** all understand, comrade students, that you are preparing yourselves for practical work, for creating activity and its place is in the production of spiritual and material goods made for our entire people.'

c. "**Trebuie** să demonstrăm cu toată puterea, forța și unitatea în apărarea independenței, integrității și suveranității Romaniei.

'We have to prove with all our power, the strength and unity in our defense of independence, integrity and the sovereignty of Romania.'

d. ***Doresc*** *in primul rand sa ma adresez dumneavoastra participant ai marii adunari generale.*

'I wish to first of all address you as a participant of the Great National Assembly.'

Another integral characteristic identified in the lexical construction of Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches is the constant use of maniheism. The concept categorizes the world as being created in a binary opposition.Ceaușescu's political doctrines glorify the same principles by underlining the idea that Socialism (incorporating the forces of progress and evolution) is in a constant battle against capitalism (which is perceived as an ineffective socio-economic system that abuses its citizens). Different expressions are used by Ceausescu to refer to Communism as a progressive movement that improves the wellbeing of its people through different accomplishments:

a. dacă nu am fi înfăptuit ***industrializarea și dezvoltarea socialistă a agriculturii****, dacă nu am fi așezat la baza acestor* ***mărețe realizări*** *cele mai* ***noi cuceriri ale științei, învățământului și culturii, ale cunoașterii umane în general****, poporul nostru ar fi rămas în vechea stare de înapoiere.*

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'If we had not accomplished the industrialization and socialist development of agriculture, if we had not built these grand achievements upon the newest conquests of science, education and culture, of human knowledge in general, our people would have remained in the old state of underdevelopment.'

b. asigurăm întregul partid, întregul popor că vom face totul pentru realizarea în cele mai bune condiţii a programului de dezvoltare economico-socială, că întreaga activitate a partidului, a poporului nostru va avea ca ţel suprem ***dezvoltarea continuă a patriei, ridicarea bunăstării generale a poporului, întărirea continuă a independenţei şi suveranităţii.***

'We assure the entire party, our entire people that we will do everytjhing in our power to establish the best conditions for the socio-economic development programme, that the party's, our people' entire activity will have the continuous development of the country, enhancing the general wellbeing of the people, the continuous independence and sovereignty as its supreme goal.'

It can be observed that in wooden language, the factual information of nouns is diluted by the overuse of adjectives and adverbs that convey opinions rather than 'proof' to suport argumentative constructions: "înflorirea științei, învățământului și culturii" (= the flourishment of science, education and culture), "dezvoltarea continuă a industriei" (= the continuous development of industry), "ridicarea bunăstării generale a poporului" (=improving the general wellbeing of the people), "dezvoltarea socialistă" (= socialist development).

Through his discourses, the political leader uses an abundance of adjectives and adverbs that are associated to the communist doctrine or to the relentless actions that the political leaders does to improve the wellbeing of the country:

Expressions such as: "istorice hotărâri" (= historical decisions), "vibrantă expresie" (=vibrant expression), "glorios partid" (=glorious party), "remarcabile realizări" (=remarcable achievments), "muncă entuziastă" (=entuziastic work) replace the use of factual information and are used to define the socio-economic evolution of the country under the political regime.

Stylistic instances of wooden language in Ceaușescu's speeches can also be indentified in the use of clichés and repetitions. Through their excessive presence within political discourses, these perlocutionary acts lose their original meaning and become a pattern in the dialogical construction of socialist discourse. Forms of addressing the audiences such as "dragi tovarăși" (dear comrades) transforms itself in a typical way of initiating a speech thus losing its affective function and its rhetorical purposes. Expressions used to define the unity of the party and its people lose their content informational level through excessive repetitions: "societate multilateral dezvoltată" (=multilaterally developed society), minunatul nostru popor (our wonderful people), deplină unitate (united front).

Ceaușescu's speeches are dominated by instances of wooden language. His discourse makes constant positive references to Socialism through the excessive use of adjectives and adverbs that praises and promotes this political system as an efficient ideology far superior to the

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ideologies of other political systems in what regards the improvement of the general wellbeing of the country and the lives of its citizens. The political discourses of Nicolae Ceaușescu do not offer clear, precise informations. The speaker does not construct argumentative structures but rather ambigous, formal forms of address meant to glorify the relentless actions and results of the activity conducted by him and his political party.

The public discourses, often crafted in such a way as to leave room for applause inbetween statements has the purpose of strenghtening the relation between the addresser and the addressee by underlining the general idea that the everyone is fighting for a common goal. From a stylistic standpoint, Ceaușescu's speeches are dominated by clichés and repetition that lose their value becoming typologies of wooden language.

5. Conclusions:

The most important thing worth mentioning in regard to wooden language is its undeniable presence within the political discourse of the former Socialist Republic of Romania. This form of public communication creates communicative typologies identified on different pragmatic levels. In what regards the speeches of Nicolae Ceaușescu we can observe the lack of arguments supported by verbs and instances of first person pronouns which are replaced with a rather descriptive dialogue domminated by adverbs, adjectives, repetitions and cliches. Every public address becomes a formal practice of the political leaders, with diluted content and empty phrases which only serve to glorify a regime, an ideolgy and a leader. While the rhetorical purposes of wooden language, manifested through different modalities (i.e. intonation, use of imperative structure, emphatics, pauses for applause during a political speech) contribute to the effect propagated by the political speech it can be argued that this rather typicized form of communication loses its rhetorical function by being overused and as a result does not achieve its desired effects on mass audiences.

Wooden language must be regarded as the highlight of the communist power, a part of the Romanian political history and as such deserves further investigation in the field of pragmatics and political science.

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