JOURNALISTIC STYLE AND POLITICAL LANGUAGE IN ROMANIAN

Sorin Cristian Semeniuc[1]

Abstract

In royalist France, one had to be Catholic in order to have city rights. Today, to claim the throne of the democratic city, one has to be telegenic. Regis Debray's analogy reaffirms the close connection between the field of politics and that of journalism, which materialize mainly through language. Moreover, both fields are similar by the attempt to trick reality, either to prove the existence of a reaction, even if irrational, to any event and to stop the doubts regarding the politician's incompetence, or due to the pressure of the market or of sensational news, in the mass-media.

Keywords: style, journalistic language, political language, features.

[1] Mr. Sorin Cristian Semeniuc is a PhD student at „Al.I.Cuza"University in Iasi, Romania
Contact: Tel. +40 723 744143; semeniuc@yahoo.com

BDD-A10146 © 2011 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:00 UTC)

Style-language.

The first definitions of the concept of "style", with the meaning of "functional styles" or "language styles" pursued in this research, were formulated starting from the middle of last century and belong to the Prague Linguistic School. Later on, the concept was taken over by the Soviet colleagues of the linguists from Prague (Andriescu 1977, 239, Gheţie 1982, 149).

One of the linguists-founders explained, later on, the motivation of such a pursuit: "the notions of system and function made some of the members of the Prague School see language as a complex formation, with differentiated strata. In the literary language they distinguished special languages or functional styles, i.e.: technical style, poetic style, familial style, etc." (Vachek *apud* Coteanu 1973, 46).

The label of founders attributed to this School has not always been agreed upon and was amended, for example, by Alexandru Andriescu, who mentioned "two stages, widely separated in time and with no apparent connection, but equally important in the crystallisation of the concept of language style: the contribution of Ancient thinkers, especially Aristotle's, and then Charles Bally's." (1977, 240) Aristotle sketched a first division of language into its fundamental styles: the deliberative genre (field of political life), the judicial genre and the epidictic style (the private or public style of common people or personalities). This standpoint is also shared by Stelian Dumistrăcel, who invokes "the Ancient tradition referring to «styles»." (2006, 39) In his turn, starting from Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics*, Bally distinguished between: "modes of expression", "by which we cannot but understand the styles or the functional varieties of languages, the diversification imposed by the social environment to which the speaker belongs, and by the communication purpose in order to completely satisfy the interlocutor, whom we not only inform but must also seduce, at the same time, with the most suited means." (Andriescu 1977, 240) Andriescu goes even further and also attributes the paternity of a style classification to Ion Heliade Rădulescu, under the influence of rhetoric (1977, 242): "limba ştiinţei sau a duhului"/"the language of science or spirit", "limba inimii sau a simtimentului"/"the language of the heart or feeling" and "limba politicii"/"the language of politics".

Nowadays, many researchers have defined the style of literary language that Ion Coteanu saw as "a linguistic system more or less specialised in rendering the content of ideas specific to a professional activity, to one or more fields of social-cultural life, such as the art of literature, science or technology, philosophy, literary and artistic criticism, history, family life, etc., which all have, or tend to have, their own words, expressions and rules of organisation resulting from various restrictions imposed on language." (1973, 45). Ion Gheţie finds the following definition: "the collection of linguistic (morphological, phonetic, syntactic, and lexical) and expressive particularities needed to express a message in a given field of culture." (1982, 150)

Alexandru Andriescu presents styles as "language varieties and aspects which have come out of the historical process of differentiation of verbal communication means based on the choice and combination of language facts according to the purpose followed, which implies the transmitter's intentions and supposes, compulsorily, satisfying to a maximum degree the addressee's information needs." (1977, 247)

The concept of "language" (*langage*) has a much more prosperous tradition in linguistics, especially in connection with that of *langue.* The most common distinction between the two could be summarised: "By language we should therefore understand an intrinsic human quality, a characteristic of the human species as a whole and a special faculty specific to each human being - that of producing specific vocal signs, endowed with meaning, with the purpose of interpersonal communication, within a social framework. Therefore, the existence of language is not real but potential. People do not «speak the language», but a given *langue*, only one at a given moment, be it Romanian, French, Latin, Esperanto or else. Thus, by *langue* we should understand the historical concretisation of the universal human faculty of language. While *languages* are multiple, natural human language (*langage*) is unique and has general or universal features." (Munteanu E. 2005, 12) Another dividing line refers to "native language" and "language". The former is used both by writers and the other speakers, the former being different from the latter only "by the special way of using its lexical materials, its forms and grammatical constructions, a

BDD-A10146 © 2011 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:00 UTC)

way imposed by the nature of the ideas and feelings specific to literary works. So, we are dealing with a variant or an aspect of the language of an entire people, the same for all the members of the linguistic community." (Iordan 1977, 205). On the other hand, "language" would refer only to "special aspects required by special contents of the language seen as a whole." (Iordan 1977, 205)

The concept of "style" has been oftentimes analysed in relation to that of "language", a thing that has led to vivid debates between researchers during recent decades. The ideas expressed in this respect allow us to include specific standpoints in two categories:

a) Style and language represent the same linguistic reality.

Even the founders, the members of the School of Prague, supported this synonymy, perpetuated after 1955, when style was identified with specialised language. This position was criticised by Gheorghe Ivănescu who labelled it as "confusion", the result of an obvious theoretical error (Gheție 1982, 149). If initially, in order to express this language reality, Iorgu Iordan favoured style, defining language as ambiguous when it was not accompanied by a determiner, later on, he reconsidered his position saying that "We should prefer the term «language» in this case because by «style» we usually understand the strictly personal way in which a writer expresses his/hers ideas and feelings" (1977, 205). From a terminological standpoint, Ion Coteanu passed through the same change from "style" to "languages", by the former term he understands "individual style" and by the other "functional styles". (Gheție 1982, 149-150). A more nuanced position supports that the identification of the two concepts may happen if we see them just as "a collection of procedures that characterise the speaking of a group of individuals."(Baciu Got 2006, 15)

b) Style is a different/super-ordinate structure to language.

These viewpoints are the most numerous and they seem to have won the theoretical dispute with the abovementioned position. "In our view, it is absolutely necessary to strictly delimit the language styles per se, which are determined by the nature of language itself, from the linguistic phenomena which are not directly determined by the nature of language but are rather dependent on the specificity of other social phenomena" (R.A. Budagov *apud* Coteanu 1973, 46) is one of the first style/language distinctions.

Dumitru Irimia considers that "language is a system of linguistic or poetic signs (in the case of poetic language), organised and functioning according to given internal laws. The style is actualisation in the practice of speech, conditioned by various factors and for this reason, in various ways, of this system. Language communicates through its two stances (language and speech). Style highlights what happens in speech, by diversifying its relations with norm." (1984, 33)

A similarly backed point of view is offered by Ioan Milică who nevertheless agrees that we may accept the identity between the two concepts if the expressive potential of signs gets an absolute value: "Defining *language* as the *capacity to communicate through signs*, it can be noted that *style* is represented by the *expressive potential of signs*, that is, by «the strength» or value attributed to signs while exercising the faculty to communicate. More precisely, if language refers to the organisation of meanings, style points to the spontaneous or deliberate valorisation of these meanings" (2009, 32-33) Other arguments to support the differentiation between the two concepts claim that "the term *style* finds the motivation of its use in literary stylistics, which we see as the stylistics of artistic expression means. The other styles of literary language (non-artistic): administrative, scientific, journalistic, are functional variants of literary language and could be labelled by the older name of *languages*; the same happens with popular, familiar and argotic styles – whose research remains the linguist's and not the stylist's task." (Munteanu Şt. 1972, 86-87)

Stelian Dumistrăcel also considers style a super-ordinate category, reflecting the fields of "technical-scientific" , "fictional" and "public and private literary communication", the last one having as levels of manifestation some communication genres called discourses, species (or languages) and registers of messages, according to texts. (2006, 46-48)

BDD-A10146 © 2011 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:00 UTC)

Journalistic style. Arguments.

If in literary Romanian we have or not a journalistic style or language has always been a theme for discussion which seems to be decided in favour of the first version. One of the first who expressed an idea on this topic was Alexandru Andriescu who said that "The journalistic style of literary Romanian was born in the 19th century (...) it was agreed that the process through which its elements were differentiated ended around 1860." (1979, 7). Fundamentally, the same opinion was shared by Iorgu Iordan, Gheorghe Bolocan, Paula Diaconescu, Nicolae Mihăiescu, N. Dragoş, Maria Popescu-Marin or Alexandru Graur, the last one argued that "the fact itself that newspapers comprise elements from all the other styles is enough to speak of a media style. A unit that shows that it shares common points with all the other units proves precisely by this fact that it is different from all of them." (1970).

On the other hand, Lidia Sfârlea, Constantin Maneca and Ion Coteanu contested the existence of this style: the last one considered that "we do not have a journalistic style as the press borrows means of expression from the three fundamental styles (artistic, scientific, administrative), according to the messages conveyed." (*apud* Gheție 1982, 163)

One of the most recent partisans of the sphere of journalism as language is Stelian Dumistrăcel, who subordinates it to a third style (besides fictional and scientific: that of public and private literary communication. (2006, 43-46)

Political language. Arguments.

Dumistrăcel includes "the language of political organisations" as a division of the style of public and private literary communication, as a means of "discourse" realisation – a linguistic activity, "a way of using language" (2006, 47-48), while Irimia states that "The legal-administrative style evolves as an autonomous style within the framework created by writing. In modern and contemporary Romania, it also has an oral variant as a political discourse and as a legal discourse" (1999, 75), situating the political sub-style near the border of collective styles.

Political language seems to correspond to one of the divisions made by Coteanu in "*Stilistica funcțională a limbii române*" (The Functional Stylistics of Romanian Language): "Artistic cultivated language can be divided into prose and poetry and those cultivated and non-artistic in standard, familial, official conversation, scientific conversation language, etc. Their number can be very high, providing that each corresponds to a very clear destination and that it presents a minimum of structural differences from the others" (1973, 50)

Before 1989, political language, "just as religious language, was excluded as a separate entity because it had a less stressed individuality, being confused in part either with literary language, either with legal or scientific language. Actually, the causes of exclusion had a political nature. The absence of specific studies was preferred to defective descriptions of extra-linguistic descriptions which would have dedicated unjustified praises to the political language of the regime". (Zafiu 2001, 8)

The spheres of journalism and politics in the Romanian language.

The relationship between the two linguistic manifestations begins the moment they become to have a simultaneous existence in the Romanian area, that is, when the first publications emerged in two Romanian regions, Țara Românească and Moldova: Curierul Românesc (8 April 1829), and, respectively, Albina (1 June 1829). Referring to this period, Andriescu makes a "special mention" regarding to the "rich political terminology that the mass of Romanian readers encounters for the first time in the pages of these publications. Political terminology, more than that of other sectors of activity, impresses a particular character onto journalistic style." (1979, 91) The researcher also offers a list of political terms that imposed themselves in Romanian through these first publications: *aboliționist* (abolitionist), *capitalist* (capitalist), *comunism* (communism), *congres* (congress), *constituțional* (constitutional), *democrație* (democracy), *dictatură* (dictatorship), *libertate* (liberty), *opponent* (opponent), *parlament*

BDD-A10146 © 2011 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:00 UTC)

(parliament), *partid* (party), *republică democratică* (democratic republic), *revoluție* (revolution), *terorism* (terrorism) (1979, 92-93). Later, Irimia confirmed the fact that social-political terminology transformed into the core of the main lexical fund of journalistic style. (1984, 252)

More recently, from the standpoint of construction and purpose, the communist regime imposed the enclosure of journalistic style within political language. "The reality described by the theoretical studies of that time was atypical for journalism: subject to censorship, vehicles of propaganda, periodical publications (as well as audiovisual means) contained to a great extent political and administrative language, in their rigid, cliché-based variant that we label today with the expression *wooden language*." (Zafiu, 2007)

Features of journalistic style.

One of the first attempts to delimit such features belongs to Alexandru Andriescu:

- synonymic derivation, by which we understand enumerations of words from the same semantic sphere and with an obvious preference for neologisms;
- the great number of set combinations between given nouns and adjectives;
- the tendency to replace the implicit superlative with the explicit or pleonastic superlative;
- the use of stereotype phrasal units with a metaphorical value, whose core is formed by a neologism borrowed from other styles;
- images wherein the mechanism of analogy is predictable;
- rhetoric constructions through the accumulation of repetitions in some journalistic species and during given historical stages. (1979, 9)

More profound delimitations were made by Dumitru Irimia, who established some specific peculiarities related to the structure, organisation and functioning of linguistic signs. (1984, 221-253)

1.a. The communication function bases its specificity on the referential function of language, in its enunciating-informational variant, and on the expressive one.

1.b. The interweaving of the referential-informational function with the expressive-rhetorical one.

1.c. The existence of an interdependency relation between the specificity of the linguistic signs' internal dynamics and the peculiarities of their organisation in utterances.

2.a. The utterance-message relationship swings between two poles: minimum concentration when the persuasive component is dominant in the text and maximum concentration from a semantic standpoint in strictly informative materials or in "advertorials".

2.b. Relationship with the language system: in rough lines, this style remains within national language, but it oftentimes relates with various elements of graphic language: photographs, schemes, etc.

2.c. Relationship with literary language: mediator between the two variants of national language, written and oral, but tending to impose the written literary variant over the oral one.

2.d. Relationship with speech: between its generic framework, of a functional autonomous variant, and individual stylistic profiles, a series of more general stylistic variants develop according to the basic characteristics of texts (i.e. the journalistic variant of interpretative texts – news coverage, pamphlets, and of debate texts – dialogues, interviews, round tables).

3. Organisation by levels.

a. phonologic: intrusion of non-Romanian phonetic aspects determined by the presence of foreign terms: *Canberra*, *N'Djamena road*.

b. morphological: preference for nouns, which, contrary to scientific style, are predominantly concrete.

c. syntactic: predominance of nominal constructions, elliptic organisation of utterances, stereotypy of some syntactic structures, non-functional breach of the norms related to the combination of linguistic signs in utterances, specific to literary language.

BDD-A10146 © 2011 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:00 UTC)

d. lexical: situation of words between semantic unambiguousness and polysemy, a specific interior dynamics between lexical concentration and dispersing, lexical heterogeneity, its mobility, specificity of new-word building, specific internal structure of the vocabulary.
Stelian Dumistrăcel finds as representative for "journalistic language" some features that bring it closer to conversation and letter styles (from those of "trivia" from those of "great politics"); "from the standpoint of mental expressions, it is characterised by utterances with a conjectural emergence, forged on the spot, heuristic and cognitive." (2006, 54)

Features of political language.

Eugeniu Coşeriu makes a distinction between the meanings wherein "the language of politics" can be analysed: as "political" lexis, as a way to use linguistic signs in politics and as a collection of procedures specific to political discourses (1996, 10-28). In none of these situations the language of politics does not present particular features.

a. as "political" lexis this language has a terminology (*democraţie* - democracy*, liberalism* - liberalism*, constituţie* - constitution*, partid* - party) which, "from a linguistic viewpoint (...) does not present anything that would be specific to it".
b. with the second meaning, we are dealing with a linguistic usage determined by political attitudes and ideologies, by the special values and nuances that the words of politics acquire. In this case we are dealing neither with a special language nor with linguistic changes, but only with conjectural usage.
c. also, the use of this language in political "speeches" or "texts" does not represent a fact of linguistic demarcation, being a *fact of discourse* or *text* that corresponds to the finality of persuading the addressee or the listeners to do something, to act in a given way.

Far from being seen as fundamental features of political language, we could nevertheless list:
- Syntactic structure can influence the argumentative orientation of discourse either by the intensification of agency (assumption by political agents) or by the depersonalisation of decisions and by removing the guilt of political actors. For example: "circumstanţele dictează creşterea taxelor" – circumstances impose us to increase taxes (Rovenţa Frumuşani 2008, 129-130).
- Deliberate ambiguity – efficient instrument of persuasion. The receiver is given the impression that s/he is considered, all of a sudden, a co-participant in the instauration of meanings.
- Dissimulation – invites the receiver to see something different beyond what is directly said (allusions, euphemisms). Sometimes, i.e. in electoral discourses, this dissimulation is commissioned by the audience (they do not want to hear that the future is going to be worse).
- Imperative – calls for action through various stages: the description of reality, evaluation, prescription.
- Polemic character – a permanent attack against opposed ideas. (Sălăvăstru 2009, 76-94)

Conclusions.

The two topics of this research have held a distinct place in the local studies developed in recent decades. If the press's manifestation in the public space has caused controversies related to the configuration into a style or language – the dispute being won, seemingly, by the supporters of the first view, political language was less studied because of the restraints imposed by the totalitarian regime before 1989. Nevertheless, the two aspects of language have always been interconnected, as they were at the beginning of their coexistence in the Romanian area, but the period after 1989 has added new values to this connection, a bidirectional one.

Acknowledgements

BDD-A10146 © 2011 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:00 UTC)

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].

REFERENCES

1. Andriescu, Alexandru. *Stil şi limbaj*. Iaşi: Editura Junimea, 1977.
2. Andriescu, Alexandru. *Limba presei româneşti în secolul al XIX-lea*. Iaşi: Editura Junimea, 1979.
3. Baciu Got, Miorița. *Argoul românesc: expresivitate şi abatere de la normă*. Bucureşti: Editura Corint, 2006.
4. Coşeriu, Eugeniu. "*Limbaj şi politică*". Revista de lingvistică şi ştiinţă literară. Chişinău: nr. 5 (1996), p. 10-28.
5. Coteanu, Ion. *Stilistica funcțională a limbii române*. Bucureşti: Ed. Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1973.
6. Dumistrăcel, Stelian. *Limbajul publicistic din perspectiva stilurilor funcționale*. Iaşi: Institutul European, 2006.
7. Gheție, Ion. *Introducere în studiul limbii române literare*. Bucureşti: Ed. Ştiințifică şi Enciclopedică, 1982.
8. Graur, Alexandru. "*Vocabularul presei*". Presa noastră. Bucureşti: nr. 12, 1970.
9. Iordan, Iorgu. *Limba literară: studii şi articole*. Craiova: Ed. Scrisul Românesc, 1977.
10. Irimia, Dumitru. *Structura stilistică a limbii române contemporane (pentru uzul studenților)*. Iaşi: 1984.
11. Milică, Ioan. *Expresivitatea argoului*. Iaşi: Ed. Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza", 2009.
12. Munteanu, Eugen. *Introducere în lingvistică*. Iaşi: Ed. Polirom, 2005.
13. Munteanu, Ştefan. "*De la retorică la stilistica lingvistică şi la stilistica literară*.", cap. Orientări actuale, Stil şi expresivitate poetică. Bucureşti: Editura Ştiințifică, 1972, p. 77-99.
13. Rovența Frumuşani, Daniela. *Analiza discursului. Ipoteze şi ipostaze*. Bucureşti: Ed. Tritonic, 2008.
14. Sălăvăstru, Constantin. *Discursul puterii*. Bucureşti: Ed. Tritonic, 2009.
15. Vachek, Iosif. "***Ré**ponses aux questions linguistiques au* **IVème** *Congr**è**s International des slavistes*", Moscou, 1958, reproduced from the Dictionnaire de linguistique de l'***École*** de Prague, 1960, Utrecht-Anvers, the article Styles fonctionnels, in Ion Coteanu, *Stilistica funcțională a limbii române*. Bucureşti: Ed. Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1973.
16. Zafiu. Rodica. *Diversitate stilistică în româna actuală*. Bucureşti: Ed. Universității, 2001.
17. Zafiu, Rodica. "*Interpretarea limbajului jurnalistic*." Revista Limba Română. Chişinău: nr. 7-9, anul XVII.

BDD-A10146 © 2011 Editura Cugetarea
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.42 (2026-11-15 20:43:00 UTC)