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Construction of favorable national identity through political discourse

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The aim of the present paper is to uncover how the use of language by the Romanian former king, Michael I, in his political speeches helps to construct a favourable national identity on the basis of a collection of discourses. The implications for the concept of national identity were discovered using a thematic analysis on five New Year's Eve messages of the Romanian former king, broadcasted from 1960 to 1989, via the radio channels Free Europe and The Voice of America, the Romanian editions. The choice of the political figure was motivated by the fact that the former king impersonates the Agent who "displays attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and wishes" (Duranti 2004, 452).
The study adopts an approach which derives from the "Constructive Strategies" of Wodak et al. (1999) and a number of sub-strategies, further enhanced by employing the techniques from Corpus Linguistics. I decided to focus on the one concerning the linguistic construction of a common political present and future. It is centred on citizenship, political achievements, current problems, dangers and future aspirations. The linguistic features under study comprise the use of relational values of words, rhetoric devices, and cultural aspects.
The results show that the role of the concept of national identity, as it was depicted in king Michael I speeches, was to facilitate the diffusion of the nationalistic messages and to motivate people coming together towards a common goal, namely fighting against the communist oppression.

Key-words*: national identity, King Michael, political speech, construction of national identity*

1. Introduction

When researching the concept of *nation*, the first impression one gets is that this is a fluctuating occurrence. Over the years it has known numerous definitions and it was linked to a series of other concepts depending on the perspective it was analysed from. The same is true of *national identity*, simply because nations do not

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have natural identities – the identities of nations are "incessantly negotiated through discourse" (Bruner 2002).

Wodak et al. (1999) have also identified *language* and *discourse* as the essential means through which the uniqueness and distinctness of a community and its particular values are presented, underlining the fact that national identity "is the product of discourse". Therefore, it is considered that discourse and language influence our sense of belonging and who we think we are.

This article investigates how national identity is constructed and defined through discourse during a time of political turmoil (the oppression of the communist regime 1946-1989) and whether there is a purpose for doing that. These years of dictatorship have significantly challenged everything related to the Romanian identity (values, customs, traditions, etc.) which made the people look for "beacons in the darkness", role models who could give them hope to carry on and also help them remember where they come from and who they really are. In this respect, I propose a hypothesis of constructing a favorable national identity through political discourse to determine a certain course of action.

2. Purpose and research questions

Based on the above, the purpose of this article is two-fold: to investigate whether or not the chosen speaker is constructing a favorable national identity and to identify the speaker's purpose in doing that. As mentioned before, the material comprises King Michael's Christmas and New Year's Eve messages, broadcasted from 1960 to 1989, via the radio channels *Free Europe* and *The Voice of America*, the Romanian editions. The essence of all these speeches is emphasising the importance of great historical events in order to serve as an inspiration for the Romanian people in their attempt to regain freedom.

Investigating national identity is interesting from both a linguistic and a political perspective. As for the latter, one could ask many questions such as what importance the topics brought up in this speech actually had.

What I intend to investigate is the following:

a) Is the king emphasising and linguistically constructing a favourable national identity for our people in his speech?

b) If yes, how is this achieved?What was the purpose for that?

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3. Background

To legitimate the choice of King Michel as a representative figure for the present paper, I chose not to dwell on his biography, but to quote a great Romanian personality, the writer, Ion Vianu (2018), who stated:

> *For us in exile, Michael was a reference, we had the knowledge that he was the greatest Romanian in exile, but at the same time he also tied us to the country. And it was important what the king said, why he chose, and its mere existence was important. If a disaster had happened and Michael would have disappeared, I had the feeling that something of our unit would have broken up. In this context, the King was very important to us.*

The way the writer chose to describe the former king is exactly what Alessandro Duranti, defines in his work, as an *agent*: a person who "displays attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and wishes" (Duranti 2004, 452). Thus, one may best understand that King Michael was a model and a landmark of morality for Romanians, a human example to be followed, through kindness and belief, will and hope, because before being king, Romania's King Michael was a MAN.

4. Theoretical framework

I started from Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl and Liebhart's (1999) theory on what constitutes national identity, and how this identity is created and upheld. The aim was to discover the representation and reconstruction processes of national identity within the discourse and to examine the various practices employed to mobilise listeners around certain national imaginings.

Wodak et al. (1999) present their own five aspect scheme, their adapted version of the theories presented by Hall (1996) and Kolakowski (1995) (cited in Wodak *et al.* 1999, 25-26) and the initial findings of their study. They identify major thematic areas of national identity construction:

1) The linguistic construction of the homo nationalis
2) The narration and confabulation of a common political past
3) The linguistic construction of a common culture
4) The linguistic construction of a common political present and future
5) The linguistic construction of a "national body"

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For my aim, I considered that focusing on the linguistic construction of a common political present and future will help me find a conclusive answer to the research questions. This principle mainly concerns citizenship, political achievements, current problems, dangers and future aspirations. Here, the speaker will attempt to create a common political present and future using linguistic means. According to the study carried out by Wodak et al., there are a number of strategies employed in order to create a national identity, called "Constructive Strategies" (Wodak et al. 1999,33), each category having a number of sub-strategies. I shall try to present them briefly.

The "Assimilation, Inclusion & Continuation Strategy" aims to emphasise intra-national sameness and positive political continuity, and a speaker performing this strategy will try, among other things, to unite his audience through the use of "we", spatial reference and temporal references indicating continuity, such as "since" or "always". The "Singularisation Strategy" establishes a nation's identity by accentuating its uniqueness, and the "Autonomisation Strategy" focuses its emphasis on the nation's independence and sovereignty. The "Unification & Cohesivation Strategy" emphasises shared common features and the will to co-operate and unify, through appeals for co-operation and "lexemes with semantic components creating unification". (Wodak *et al*. 1999, 38). The "Dissimilation / Exclusion & Discontinuation Strategy" tries to emphasise inter-national differences and difference between present and past, by excluding other groups through the use of "they" and "them". A "Strategy of Avoidance" aims to suppress/background intra-national differences and inter-national sameness, and the "Vitalisation Strategy" uses personifications and anthropomorphisms in order to vitalise features of a nation (Wodak *et al*. 1999, 37-39). Being aware of these strategies will undoubtedly facilitate my search for linguistic construction of a common political present and future.

5. Method

After performing a thematic analysis of the speeches, I shall present examples in the analysis section of this article. In the analysis I shall apply the theoretical framework presented above, and examine whether or not the instruments outlined are being used. Succeeding in this will require a bit of methodological assistance, i.e. defining what I am looking for in relation to each component of the theoretical framework.

When examining whether or not a linguistic construction of a common political present and future is being used, I shall examine whether or not the

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speaker is using linguistic means in order to emphasise present or future political unity, starting from the strategies presented under this category in "Theory".

As I discussed while presenting my theoretical framework, national identity construction can take many shapes. Bearing this in mind, one realises that a speaker may emphasise and/or linguistically construct a national identity for his country without necessarily using all of the three instruments outlined in the theoretical framework. After having analysed the speeches, I will hopefully be able to see if and how the speaker approaches to the issue of national identity, and thus be able to answer my second research question.

The paragraphs will be presented in Romanian, followed by my own translation into English. After having analysed the speeches, I will discuss the general results of my analysis.

6. Analysis

The focus of this study is on interpreting the former Romanian king's messages, adressed to his countrymen while in exile, the chosen extracts dating from 1960 to 1989. Hence, a narrative form of analysis was considered to be most suitable, because in order to answer the research questions I needed to grasp the meaning of the speeches. Therefore, in order to interpret the data, I considered as most appropriate a thematic analysis. As the name suggests, thematic analysis enables extraction of key themes from the researched material. Thus, thematic analysis allows to evidentiate the patterns of interaction between the topics and subtopics of selected data. These are the reasons why this analysis method fits the paradigm I chose and also the empirical assumptions. Five speeches of the former Romanians king were used for this thematic analysis.

6.1. Examples:

(1) *În cursul unei lungi şi dureroase istorii, poporul român a suferit, a răbdat, dar a învins. Căci nimeni nu a putut doborî voinţa sa de viaţă naţională şi nimeni nu a putut înfrânge vocaţia sa pentru libertate şi civilizaţie. El a rămas credincios datinilor şi idealurilor sale, prietenilor şi ocrotitorilor săi. Aşa va fi şi de acum înainte! (M.S. Regele Mihai către ţară, de Anul Nou 1951)*

"(…) during a long and painful history, the Romanian people suffered, endured, but came out victorious. For no one could bring down his will for

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national life and no one could defeat his desire for freedom and civilization. He remained faithful to his customs and ideals, to his friends and protectors. It will be like this from now on, too!" (H.M. King Michael to the country, New Year 1951)

The King employs the "Unification & Cohesivation Strategy" presented by Wodak *et al*. (1999, 38) as he emphasises common unifying features of all Romanians when passing through difficult times (e.g. patience and loyalty). Recalling that the Romanian people raised against everything and everyone who threatened their freedom, the king hints at a brighter future, with this strong sentence: *It will be like this from now on, too!* Moreover, making use of repetition as a pragmatic device (the negative pronoun *nimeni/no one*) he underlines the fact that the Romanians are the only ones responsible for turning their faith for the better.

(2) *Români! Intrăm într-un an nou. Suntem mereu despărţiţi – dar numai geografic: deoarece aceleaşi gânduri şi doruri ne unesc. Şi aceleaşi speranţe. (…) urarea noastră cea mai fierbinte, pentru anul care începe, este să avem sufletul tare. Să binecuvântăm amintirea înaintaşilor noştri care au ţinut, mai presus de toate, la libertatea lor personală, care nu poate să fie delegată nimănui. Libertatea individuală nu-şi poate găsi o alternativă în nici o libertate colectivă: liber să trăieşti, să gândeşti, să simţi, să te rogi, să te bucuri, să te duci unde vrei (…) Împreună cu Regina şi cu fiicele noastre, cu scumpa mea Mamă, vă urăm, la toţi, un an nou mai bun… Trăiască România! Trăiască neamul românesc! (M.S. Regele Mihai către ţară, de Anul Nou 1972).*

"Romanians! We're entering a new year. We are always separated – but only geographically: because the same thoughts and desires unite us. And the same hopes. (…) our biggest wish for the year that starts is to have a strong soul. Let us bless the memory of our forefathers who have, above all, kept their personal freedom, which cannot be delegated to anyone. Individual freedom cannot find an alternative in any collective freedom: free to live, think, feel, pray, enjoy, go where you like (…). Together with the Queen and our daughters, together with my dear Mother, we wish you all a better new year… Long live Romania! Long live the Romanian nation!" (H.M. King Michael to the country, New Year 1972)

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Here, appealing to cultural aspects, i.e. the national pride, glorifying the heroic actions of our ancestors, the king uses the "Assimilation, Inclusion & Continuation Strategy", trying to identify with his audience but, at the same time, he wants to encourage people to keep their optimism for a better future. This idea is also supported by the use of various forms of the 1st person pronoun *(e.g. we, us, our)* and by the repetition of the adverb *împreună "*together". At the same time he employs the "Autonomisation Strategy", raising awareness upon the fact that the people have a duty of fighting for its freedom, which is a priceless asset.

(3) *Au trecut treizeci şi doi de ani de când n-am mai călcat pământul patriei şi suntem încă despărţiţi unii de alţii; voi, cei din ţară şi ţinuturile cotropite sau deportaţi în Răsărit, de noi, cei din surghiunul răzleţit prin lumea liberă. În tot acest prelung răstimp, n-am încetat să mă frământ şi să mă zbat pe seama soartei voastre crunte, de nemaipomenite încercări, nenorociri şi suferinţe mari şi grele, pe care le-am urmărit mereu cu sârguinţă şi le cunosc cu de-amănuntul, străduindu-mă deopotrivă să şi sprijin, să şi înlesnesc unirea şi închegarea într-un singur mănunchi a tuturor românilor din pribegie, fără deosebire cu privire la ideologia şi cetăţenia lor din urmă (…) Trebuie de asemenea să vă exprim nemărginita mea recunoştinţă şi admiraţie pentru curajul şi dârzenia cu care aţi ştiut să rezistaţi necontenit de atâta vreme constrângerilor şi neajunsurilor de tot felul, păstrându-vă neatinse credinţa, datinile şi virtuţile noastre strămoşeşti. (M.S. Regele Mihai către ţară, de Anul Nou 1979)*

*"*It's been thirty-two years since I last set foot on the land of the country, and we are still separated from each other; you, those in the country and the invaded lands or deported to the East are separated from us, the exiles scattered all over the free world. In all this long period I have not ceased to think of your cruel fate, of the incredible trials, misfortunes and great and heavy sufferings, which I have always pursued and know in detail, striving, at the same time, to support, to facilitate the unification of all the Romanians in exile, irrespective of their ideology or their citizenship (…). I must also express my endless gratitude and admiration for the courage and perseverance with which you have been able to resist all kinds of constraints and shortcomings for so long, while keeping untouched our faith, our ancestors' customs and virtues. (…)" (H.M. King Michael to the country, New Year 1979)

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With this example, the king brings back into discusion the "Unification & Cohesivation Strategy". He starts by adressing all Romanians left within the country's borders and the ones in exile, praising them for their resilience against a harsh fate, but at the same time calling for co-operation towards unifying the country once more. His words are chosen carefully, nouns such as *închegare* "coagulation/unification"*, mănunchi* "bundle"*,* which are meant to underline unity*,* verbs like *frământ* "worries"*, zbat* "struggle" implicate a continuous battle for the country's wellbeing and which have a more intense emotional tone in Romanian than in English, are meant to give the audience a strong sense of belonging.

(4) *În vâltoarea prin care trecem, cu veşti când minunate, când înspăimântătoare, gândul mă duce la voi toţi, dragii mei compatrioţi. Voi înfruntaţi bestiale violenţe, dar prin aceasta pregătiţi viitorul liber şi democratic al patriei noastre. Gândul mă duce mai cu seamă la cei tineri. Din avântul vostru, al tinerilor, a pornit lupta pentru descătuşarea neamului, cătuşe pe care tiranii le credeau pe veci. Prin voi, cu voi şi pentru voi, ţara noastră va fi din nou liberă, din nou democratică, din nou respectată în lume (…) Deviza noastră: "Nihil sine Deo", nimic fără Dumnezeu, să ne călăuzească pe toţi! Dumnezeu să vă binecuvânteze! În această zi de Crăciun, acest nou început, voi sunteţi inspiraţia întregii lumi prin lupta voastră contra unei tiranii monstruoase. Sunt cu voi cum am fost totdeauna, chiar când nu m-aţi putut auzi, ca să vă ajut cu toată puterea mea. Trăiască România liberă! România pe care o făuriţi! (M.S. Regele Mihai ,Mesajul de Crăciun către români, decembrie 1989).*

"In the turmoil we experience, with sometimes wonderful and sometimes frightening news, the thought takes me to all of you, my fellow countrymen. You face beastly violence, but in doing so you prepare the free and democratic future of our homeland. The thought takes me especially to the young people. Your youthful zeal started the fight against oppression, which the tyrants imagined would last forever. Through you, with you and for you, our country will be free again, democratic again, respected again in the world (…). May our motto *Nihil sine Deo*, "nothing without God," guide us all! God bless you! On this Christmas day, this new beginning, you are the inspiration of the whole world through your fight against a monstrous tyranny. I am with you as I have always been, even when you could not hear me, to help you with all my power. Long live free Romania! The Romania you are building!" (H.M. King Michael, Christmas message to Romanians, December 1989)

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The choice of words is again remarkable, the noun *vâltoare* "turmoil" and the expression *bestiale violenţe* "beastly violence" create a strong opposition with the noun phrase: *viitorul liber şi democratic* "free and democratic future*",* with the clear intention of raising the people's confidence in their inner power. Using the quotation "Nihil sine Deo" as a rhetorical device, the speaker emphasizes that the people's power will always be doubled by that of the divinity, which has always been a strong pillar of the Romanian nation. By mentioning the young people's fight, the King employs the "Autonomisation Strategy", praising the people's efforts to regain their independence and sovereignty. To show his constant support for the people, the king gets involved in their actions, using the 1st person pronoun: *Sunt cu voi cum am fost totdeauna, chiar când nu m-aţi putut auzi, ca să vă ajut cu toată puterea mea.* "I am with you as I have always been, even when you could not hear me, to help you with all my power", thus, making use once more of the "Unification & Cohesivation Strategy".

(5) *Români, române! Niciodată în preajma Sfintelor Sărbători şi a sfârşitului de an n-am avut inima atât de adânc îndurerată ca azi, când, cunoscând tragica situaţie actuală din ţară, mă adresez vouă. Distrugerea sistematică, impusă de o dictatură nebunească în toate sectoarele vieţii, a tradiţiei şi culturii româneşti, a zguduit puternic conştiinţa universală: voci autorizate venind de pretutindeni s-au ridicat ca să înfiereze procedeele antiumane ale regimului din România. A sosit, deci, momentul ca ţările democratice care au denunţat această tiranie distrugătoare să afirme realitatea şi unitatea Europei în jurul drepturilor individului şi ale naţiilor, tocmai în anul care comemorează cea de a patruzecea aniversare a proclamării "Drepturilor Omului. Este urgent să se treacă la fapte.(…)" (M.S. Regele Mihai către ţară, de Anul Nou 1989)*

"Romanian men and women! Never before the Holy Holidays and the end of the year have I had such a sorrowful heart as today, when knowing the tragic current situation in the country, I am addressing you. The systematic destruction, imposed by a crazy dictatorship in all sectors of Romanian life, tradition, and culture, has strongly shaken the universal consciousness: authorized voices coming from everywhere rose to denounce the anti-human procedures of the Romanian regime. It is therefore time for the democratic countries that have denounced this destructive tyranny to assert Europe's reality and unity concerning the rights of individuals and nations, precisely in the year commemorating the fourteenth anniversary of the

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> proclamation of "Human Rights". It is urgent to take action (…)." (H.M. King Michael to the country, New Year 1989)

With this speech he is calling for everyone to mobilise behind an initiative, motivating people and countries to take actions against those who opressed the Romanian people for so long. As it has been mentioned earlier, calling for mobilisation and co-operation is a characteristic of the "Unification & Cohesivation Strategy" presented by Wodak *et al.* (1999). Furthermore, the King is setting a common and unifying future goal for his countrymen and not only, in this way creating both a common political present in which all Romanians need to work together and a common political future for the next generations.

Besides, from among all the strategies mentioned, in the examples above the king used extensively the "Singularisation Strategy", everytime listing a set of qualities that defined the Romanian people (e.g. courage, love for the country, unshakable faith in God, determination, hope, resilience, etc), and by doing so he intended keep his fellow countrymen optimistic but also to raise awareness upon the fact that the power to change things lies within every individual.

7. Conclusions

The article concentrates upon official discourses transmitted by this country's former king to all Romanians, within or outside the country's borders. More specifically, the data collection consisted of 5 Christmas and New Year`s Eve messages addressed to the Romanian nation from 1960 to 1989. Underestimated by the existing literature, these messages are short summaries of the atrocities suffered by the Romanian people under the communist regime, transmitted by the former chief of state to the nation. Each of these messages represented for this study a great snapshot of the Romanian oppressive conditions. The main events of the year were summarized and ferociously blamed by the speaker. The expectations for the future were every time presented as an appeal to unity, to rise against the oppressive regime, as the Romanians' ancestors had always risen against all forms of oppression.

Accordingly, considering the research area and the research problem, the following main research questions were addressed:

a) Is the king emphasising and linguistically constructing a favourable national identity for our people in his speech?

b) If yes, how is this achieved?What was the purpose for that?

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In his speeches, King Michael is definitely constructing a favourable national identity for his people with a clear intention, that of encouaging people to be optimistic, empowering them to fight for regaining their long desired independence and sovereignity. The strategies he is using while constructing a common political present are the "Assimilation, Inclusion & Continuation", "Singularisation" and "Unification & Cohesivation". What is interesting is that even when creating a common political present, the King constantly, draws on history. While using the "Assimilation, Inclusion & Continuation Strategy", he is strongly emphasizing the idea of continuity.

In addition to using most of the instruments outlined in the theoretical framework, the king is using a nationalistic vocabulary in general. The 1st person singular and plural ("I" and "we" and the verb conjugation) are employed in all examples, along with powerful adjective forms meant to increase the emotional tone (*beastly violence, monstrous tyrany, tragical situation, systematical distruction,* etc). Thus, with a well thought choice of words and an accurate strategy, King Michael manages to favourably construct a national identity. His intention for doing that is clear, i.e. that of bringing all Romanians together to make Romania independent and sovereign again. To strenghten his action, the King often appeals to a number of positive values and habbits, common to all Romanians, depicted throughout their entire history as a nation, with the same intention: to empower people towards their common goal!

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