THE PRINCIPLE OF ECONOMY IN LANGUAGE

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Abstract: *The present paper describes how the principle of economy in language deals with the devices of communication process, establishing an inverse ratio between the sentence structure and the complexity of the message.*

Key words: *economy of language, semantic level, lexical level.*

The linguists after Saussure have been preoccupied either to establish new principles or to overthrow the old ones. Thus, Benveniste said: "linguists' assertion about the arbitrary of the designations does not manage to destroy the speaker's totally opposed intuition (…) So, the domain of the arbitrary will be excluded from understanding the linguistic sign." (BENVENISTE, 2000, I: 52)

The test which may prove that a certain characteristic of language is a principle that should research whether it is implied in each linguistic level (Ch. Morris – N. Chomsky).

This way there have been described such principles as similarity and difference (Saussure: in language everything consists in differences as everything consists in groups), which, in fact, relate the language structure to the way reason functions (classes of units' formation).

The arbitrary of linguistic sign is not a principle, but a characteristic which is really important (the conventional character is simultaneously manifest). A sign such as *tree* is arbitrary, but a sentence such as *It is raining* is validated/motivated by its truth value.

One of the language principles which have been unavoidably formulated by linguists is the principle of economy in language (information theory: the quantitative proportion between information and symbols); during communicating, the higher speed of thought continuously presents a phase difference from the linear development of the significant elements.

It has been described especially at the phonological level by A. Martinet (*Économies des changements phonétique*) and it has been considered „responsible, eventually, for the phonological articulation (1964: 94).

This principle is sure to be applied at the phonological level. Martinet, Zipf, Troubetzkoy describe the configuration and the asymmetry of the organs which represent the articulator basis, the correlation between them and the distinctive features that generate the system harmony.

However, none of them searches the starting point, the physiological determinism of the system (still, Zipf called it *the principle of the minimal effort*).

Could we imagine a language formed only of vowels?

The main economy factors of the phonetic stream, those which regulate the articulator energy, are the consonants, having three means to control the vowels aperture (occlusive, fricative and affricate).

A principle of language must be manifest at every level.

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At the semantic level it appears by the phenomenon of semantic investiture: there could be formed an almost infinite number of combinations with the phonemes in a language. However, not all of them are signs of that language, but only those which, by means of a convention, get semantic investiture. This situation was discussed by Benveniste: "For a sign to exist it must and it is sufficient that it should be accepted and correlated somehow with the other signs. Is the entity formed this way significant? The answer is <Yes> or <No>. If it is, we stop the inquiry and register it. If it is not, we reject it and this is over." (BENVENISTE, 2000, II: 191, *Forma şi sensul în limbaj*).

In his study *The Economy of Language,* Sextil Puscariu offers examples of this principle without being focused on systematizing them at every level. It is true that he begins with extra-lexical elements; he refers to breviloquence, ellipsis, morpheme, derivation and, in a questionable manner, to grammatical instruments, empty words, repetition, internal inflexion which is not specific to Romanian and analytical inflexion which requires more than the minimal effort.

At the lexical level, the role of mobile derivation can be noticed if it is compared to heteronyms (*father – mother, brother – sister*...); the mobile suffixes reduce the two words to only one: *elev,-ă; mire,-mireasă,- lup,-lipoaică*…

Sometimes the compression is evident: *soție de preot – preoteasă* (but not *soție de doctor – doctoriță*); *schoolboy - schoolgirl* (*şcolar –şcoliriță*).

The same role is accomplished by derivation from a phrase (*a pune în cerc – a încercui; a pune în lanțuri – a înlănțui; a pune în evidență – a evidenția*…), regressive derivation (*a cânta – cânt -cântare, cântec; a auzi – auz, auzire; a vedea – văz, vedere*…) and de-phrasing, meaning verbal phrases reducing (*a da telefon – a telefona; a da ordin - a ordona; a aduce mulțumiri – a mulțumi*…).

Conversion is rarer, but in consistent structures: *Omul leneş – leneşul…, Omul mincinos –mincinosul*…

With noun morphology there can be noticed the a few examples. With certain proper nouns some elements can be skipped: *Elisaveta – Saveta -Veta; Alexandru – Sandu*…

There can also be noticed that the synthetic inflexion is preferred to analytical structures: *mijloc de cetate – mijlocul cetății; dau apă la cai – dau apă cailor; cumpăr pentru mama flori – cumpăr mamei flori*…

The atomistic declension of the Latin phrase is abandoned: *discipuli seduli – elevului harnic,* not *elevului harnicului*; still: *băiatului acestuia*.

The determiner morphemes can express both generic values (*Omul este o ființă socială – Toți oamenii…; Un copil trebuie să-şi asculte părinții – Toți copii*…) and individual ones (*De unde ai luat ziarul? – ziarul acesta*); on the contrary, implicit values may be suggested (*Mă cheamă mama, Mă doare capul*).

With the adjective, there are other characteristics that must be focused on: a high frequency of *ca*, which competes with *decât*, when the comparison object is expressed; a regression of the inferiority comparative degree, while the superiority comparative degree of the antonym is preferred.

The most interesting assertion which belongs to S. Puscariu and is to be found in the quoted study shows that "another typical situation of economy is the pronoun" (p.469).

In fact, all the substitutes (the qualitative ones – pronouns and the quantitative ones – the numerals), but not only these, have been generated to set up again the compressive information in the sentence. Due to this fact, the pronoun substitutes function as trans-phrasal connectors in the text.

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We have to remark that the role of economy factors is accomplished not only by the *substitute* pronouns (which replace the name of the object), but also by the *institute* pronouns (which introduce the speaker and the receiver in communication). If the pronoun *eu* did not exist, a sentence like *Eu vă spun* should be reformulated as: *Găitănaru Ştefan vă spune…*

In fact, the pronoun belongs to the wider category of pro-forms and it has often been approached this way: "the pronouns are pro-forms (substitutes) that get their reference out of the communication frame (those pronouns which are used deictically), or the sentence context (pronouns which are used as anaphoric), or they get any value out of the discourse domain (pronouns with variable reference)" (PANĂ DINDELEGAN, 2010: 155).

The so-called pronominal adverbials range in the category of pro-forms, too. The substitute adverbials are usually those in the correlative adverbial structures such as *acolo…unde, aşa…cum, atunci…când* (*Am ajuns la gară la ora 8 fără un sfert. La ora 8 fără un sfert a plecat trenul – atunci a plecat trenul…*).

The correlative structures have a double function: the demonstrative dominates the substitution class of the adverbial phrase and the relative is the prototypical correlative of its development as an adverbial clause. Other structures have been compressed throughout time: *Acum 3 ani - Acum (se împlinesc) 3 ani…*

Pro-forms are to be found in other morphological categories, too: *Mi-au plăcut multe tablouri, dar am cumpărat* ***cinci****; A avut o viaţă plină de succese şi de bucurii. O* ***asemenea*** *viaţă i-a marcat comportamentul.*

At the verb level, for example, inside the subcategories, there can be noticed causative or factitive verbs. These are two-argument verbs (the cause that determines the action and its beneficiary) and only one of them is usually expressed: *Mă tund în oraş (Pun frizerul să mă tundă)*. At morphological level, the existence of the reflexive passive voice instead of analytic passive voice represent another piece of evidence (*Cărţile se citesc – sunt citite*).

The fact that the infinitive, the gerund and the participle preserved both their noun value and their verbal value like the Latin verb lead to keeping gerundial and infinitival groups, because they are considered clause- contractions, subordinate clauses substitutions (cf. POMIAN, 2008: 60), implying the relative deletion and the absence of the verbal agreement inflection (DRAŞOVEANU, 1997: 248): *Coborând temperatura, apa a îngheţat - Din cauză că a coborât temperatura, apa a îngheţat.*

With the prepositions, the most interesting phenomenon is their deletion (lack of repetition) in coordination: "in coordinating some words preceded by the same preposition, this must be repeated before each coordinated item, in order to have the syntactic function established. However, there are a lot of situations where the deletion of the preposition in coordination is allowed, along with another series where the deletion is unadvisable" (AVRAM, 1987: 179)

The conjunction deletion is made by juxtaposition, as this is largely represented both with coordination and with subordination: *Au venit copii, femei, bătrâni… ; Ai carte, ai parte; Plec acasă, mă doare capul.*

In fact, coordination is almost generally the result of a change which implies the head deletion: *Merg la munte – Merg la mare = Merg la munte şi la mare.*

The largest extension and the greatest mobility of the principle of economy in language can be noticed in syntax, because it controls the reversible terms change, both in simple sentences and in complex ones: *Muncitorul are bani – Cine munceşte are bani.*

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The contraction is, in fact, a shortening, a reducing (AVRAM, 1987: 183). At this point of the syntactic structure the principle requires a fundamental marked difference between the predicate and all the other syntactic elements. These can extend to the corresponding subordinate clauses by predicate formation phenomenon. Predicate, by its nature, can not become a predicate, as it is already one. As it does not impose its position at the complex sentence level, it does not resemble to the subject clause, so the latter remains a subordinate, although it represents the extension of a subject, a main part of sentence.

All these language elements are to be found at pragmatic level, in a form or another. Expressions or phrases (structures made out of proper linguistic signs) transmit not only the referential meaning of the language items, but an illocutionary message which eventually proves to be decisive for discourse orienting and a perlocutionary one which, in fact, represents the message efficiency in communication. While at vocabulary level polysemy seems to be placed far from the ideal of a unique meaning of a perfect communication, at pragmatic level the sentence meaning is determined by the extralinguistic context which generates it and by the expectations configuration which surround even the speaker. But all these are rarely explicit, they are implied by the basic locutionary support, according to the inverse ratio between efficiency and effort.

The principle of economy in language is a device which regulates the infrastructure of the message and its externalization forms during communication, so it may be found in every micro-system of language.

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