APPROACHES IN THE SEMANTIC FIELD OF QUANTITY

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Abstract*: There have been different approaches of interpreting the semantic field of quantity. Whether it is small quantity, large quantity or approximators, they all contribute to a better understanding of the above-mentioned field. The present study aims to analyze different quantifying structures and what they communicate in various contexts, in a contrastive approach both in Romanian and English. The two languages have been chosen due to the richness of quantifying constructions and their interpretation integrated into a grammatical and semantic theory. The topic of this paper in meant to determine what a speaker intends to express when using a quantifying entity.*

Key words: *approximator, quantifying, structures, richness.*

The semantic category of quantity has been approached from different perspectives with a view to better describe the elements that fall under this category. The topic represents an older preoccupation of mine, following the course of my doctoral thesis, where I tried to highlight the various possibilities of expressing quantity, both morphologically and syntactically.

The present study is meant to extend the analysis of quantifying constructions to a more pragmatic level of the language where they manifest more clearly and involve more stylistic nuances. To be more exact, I shall try to make a thorough classification of those quantity related words in order to better understand their prevalence in the language. Approaching the expressiveness of quantifying structures through stylistic means expressed by figures of speech, approximators and quantifiers has been intentionally chosen to emphasize the complexity of the message transmitted. There has been selected a corpus of quantity related words, whose classification will be made on the basis of two different languages, Romanian and English.

Generally speaking, languages evolve permanently and trigger a series of changes characterized by a great diversity. Ch. Bally stated that „Languages change incessantly, and cannot operate but changing" (BALLY, 1950: 18). The thorough study of nature and language highlighted the speaker's role both in the communication act and in organizing the linguistic system.

The speaker, beneficiary or creator of language participates voluntarily or involuntarily in the evolving process of the language, under the influence of certain factors inside or outside the linguistic phenomenon. The evolution and state of the language are directly related to anthropological reality which aims at aptitudes, skills, level of thinking and knowlwdge, psychic predispositions, and the sum of spiritual accomplishments of the speaking community.

Eugen Coseriu's change theory clearly emphasizes the adequate manner in which changes occur in language. According to this theory, the existence of a language implies its permanent creation, in the sense that it always adds new elements to the already existing ones.

Cultural values and human achievements generally have a linguistic reflex, according to which they exist, perpetuate, circulate and are transmitted with language

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acts. Therefore, cultural communication is always linguistic and related to the language functions, among which the communicative function is the most relevant.

I found it necessary to introduce a few aspects regarding the inevitable changes occurring in language as well as the importance of communication which is meant to shape the idioms and constructions so they they may be well understood by the receiver of the information. The interference of the subjective factor, the penetration into the unrecommandable areas of the language, the abundance of ironic constructions in different forms of expression vary from one context to another.

The quantitative semantic class makes frequent use of colloquial forms whose role is to highlight the taunting intention, sometimes in opposition with the importance of the communicated information. The men of letters' style is usually determined by their need to discover new elements and create various stylistic nuances, with a view to accomplish an efficient communication.

The general tendency to exaggerate leads sometimes to the groundless usage of hyperbolic terms that adorn the communicative act. Words are not selected or used randomly, but they produce various meanings as J. Goebbels stated „We do not talk to say something, but to obtain an effect."

The same word, used in different contexts is enriched with an array of semantic nuances, marking either the positive or negative character of the language or its vagueness. The phenomenon of approximation incorporates a series of phrases whose role is not only to highlight the lack of precise information, but also the author's irony towards different situations or characters operating in political, social or cultural fields.

Phrases such as: *un soi de, cât de cât, niscai, parcă* etc, mostly imply negative meanings, inaccurate infomation or lack of confidence in a person's position: *Traian Băsescu vrea un soi de comunism cu față umană împotriva democrației (News Bucovina,* 24.04.2010*)*

The frequent use of the figurative meaning of words creates a strong impact on the reader or listener. The penetration of new words, lexical and stylistic diversity describe an "energetic" language open to innovation and to the existent linguistic reality.

The most frequent stylistic means to express the quantitative include the figures of speech, starting from their common point, namely the definite nominal groups and the collective nouns. These figures of speech are efficient in the discourse, being described according to the transmitter / receiver relationship and the receiver's knowledge.

The analysis of the figures of speech is related to the representation of the discourse objects in the context, which implies a comparison with the nominal group close to the designated reader. The communicative act involving the journalist and the reader, determines a relationship of truthfulness which is not present in the literature or advertising. The language code is not necessarily meant to establish true or false terms but to produce a value of truthfulness or falseness.

The classes of words expressing quantity are quite incongruous and include: collective entities (*army, family, jury, committee, team* etc), approximators (*some, approximately, a sort of, a type of* etc), quantifiers (*a lot of, a crowd of, a heap of, a torrent of* etc), hyperbolic clauses of result (*plentiful – din belşug, abundantly- cu nemiluita, in plenty – cu carul, in heaps –în neştire* etc). All these classes have been subdivided into more particular ones according to specific coordinates.

Small quantity-related words*: atom, bit, blob* (o picătură, un strop de), *chip* (a fărâmă, un fragment de), *clutch* (o mână de), *crumb* (o fărâmă / firimitură de), *dash* (un

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pic, ceva), *dose, dram, drop, fragment, paucity* (număr mic, cantitate mică), *pinch* (un vârf de), *scintilla* (o scânteie de, un strop de, o umbră de), *scrap* (o bucățică / fărâmă de), *sliver* (o așchie / țandără de), *smattering* (o brumă de, o spoială de), *spot, tad* (o cantitate mică de), *trace, whit* (o iotă de). Both Romanian and English make frequent use of such nouns to express a small number or quantity: *Denisa Jebeleanu aduce o fărâmă de artă în locuințele timişorenilor* (*Adevărul.ro Timişoara*, 5 ianuarie, 2010), *At present there is a paucity of such data.*

The above-mentioned words are adjectival phrases, some of which are used to quantify countable entities being followed by a noun in the plural. Others combine with uncountable entities when used with a noun in the singular. They can accompany both concrete and abstract nouns: *a bit of cheese* (o fărâmă de brânză), *a bit of luck* (un strop de noroc), *a bit of advice* (puțină consiliere), *a crumb of bread* but *a crumb of confort* (o firimitură de pâine – puțin confort).

Nouns like *fragment, scintilla, scrap, smattering, trace* are usually combined with abstract entities: *a scintilla of racism* (un strop de rasism), *a scrap of truth* (o fărâmă de adevăr), *a smattering of French / knowledge* (o brumă de franceză / știință), unlike nouns of the type *blob, chip, drop* which generally prefer concrete entities: *a blob of ink /colour /bood* (un strop de cerneală /culoare / sânge), *a drop of water /oil* (o picătură de apă / ulei), *a chip of glass* (un ciob de sticlă) etc.: *We are seeing chains being made on a whim without a scintilla of evidence. (Star Banner*, 28 octombrie 2000), *France is our nearest neighbor and most of us already have at least a smattering of the language*.

Large quantity-related words: *abundance, block, body* (grup, mulțime organizată)*, bulk* (mulțime, grămadă, vraf), *bumper* (neobișnuit de mare /mult), *bushels* (cantitate mare), *dollop* (halcă), *droves* (un număr mare de), *heaps* (teancuri), *influx, legion, myriad* (imensitate, număr vast) *plenty, plethora, profuse* (bogat, abundent), *scads* (mormane, grămezi), *stack, swarm*, *volume, wealth, wodge* (halcă, bucată mare), *zillion* (mii şi mii).

Some of these words combine with abstract and concrete nouns and are usually analyzed to express a large quantity: *a bumper crop* but a *bumper edition, a dollop of cream an influx of visitors, a legion of admirers* etc. This category comprises both nouns in the singular and in the plural or fixed idioms: *in heaps, in droves, plenty of* etc.

The noun *plethora*, for instance, has undergone a few interesting changes in the language. From its initial meaning of „quantity of blood exceeding the normal values in organism", the term extended to the idea of a large number of objects or beings. The word has no plural form and it comes from the Greek 'plethora', 'fullness': *There is not enough room to metion the plethora of events that the company does to raise money for charity; All goverments exercise a vast plethora of controls over market forces in the public interest.*

The idea of large quantity is equally expressed by the Romanian hyperbolic clauses of result: *din belşug*, *cu carul, cu nemiluita, în demență, în disperare, în prostie* which represent a productive pattern in the language being relevant either for their expressive value or the negative character of the information: *Anul trecut nu apăruse fenomenul importului de ziarişti cu toptanul* (*EZ,* Nr. 4942, 21 noiembrie 2006); *Bucureştenii cumpără şi repară arme în neştire* (*EZ*, Nr. 4942, 15 august 2007).

In the majority of contexts, these phrases remove from their original meaning creating an expressive contrast and marking various stylistic nuances.

Money-related words: *bomb, bundle, hoard, influx, pile, scads, stacks* etc. Such words are rather used in informal English and are usually translated into

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Romanian as: *o grămadă de / un munte de / un purcoi de / un teanc de bani*. The tendency to express opulence or illegal money laundering is marked by the press in eloquent examples: *If you wish to license these trademarks for scads of money, let me know; De generozitatea „Cenuşăresei bugetului", cum i se spune Sănătății, s-a bucurat o firmă din Austria, care a încasat dintr-un foc un purcoi de bani.* (*Săptămâna financiară*, 5 septembrie, 2008).

Religion-related words: *college, congregation, chapter, communion, community* etc. They are all related to the act of worship, to the assembly of people gathered for religious purposes and have English, French or Latin origin. Among these, *chapter* has deviated from its original meaning, getting an ecclesiastical significance, denoting "an assembly of the canons of the church or of the members of a religious residence:" *Both forms of baptism shall be made available in the life of every worshipping congregation. However, there is no turning back in our journey toward full ecclesial communion.*

Army-related words: *army, batallion, battery, brigade, contingent, cadre, column, corps, drive, flotilla, fussilade, legion, panoply, regiment, troop* etc. Such nouns denote either a group of soldiers or a large number of guns, but they can also associate with other concrete or abstract entities: *the press corps, a flotilla of destroyers, a fussilade of questions* etc.

Panoply is an international cliché that kept its basic meaning of "collection of arms arranged on a panel." Speaking about a writer's *panoply of arguments* means to emphasize his "weapons" meant to penetrate the reader's universe, thus marking a positive connotation.

On the other hand, *panoply* is a stereotype term, frequently used in the present journalistic style: *The reader is given a panoply of moral values which are essential for his life; Avea o panoplie întreagă de moduri de represiune fizică şi încă o dată spus, spirituală, de gândire* (*Jurnalul.ro*, 20 aprilie 2010).

Nature-related words: *avalanche, cascade, cloud, flood, flow, ocean, rain, sea, stream, torrent, wave* etc. Such terms describe natural phenomena and are equally associated with countable concrete and abstract nouns: *an avalanche of letters, a cloud of locusts, a flood of anger / abuse / refugees, an ocean of food, a torrent of bad language* etc. Their role is to express an exaggeratedly large quantity, being called "metaphors of multitude" in the grammar studies.

The *wave* associated with the idea of „undulating movement of the water" has extended its semantics, designating metaphorically a large quantity of concrete ar abstract matter or an impressive number of beings: *a wave of heat / cold / immigrants*. The Romanian press aboudns in nature-related phrases such as: *un val de scumpiri* (*Un nou val de scumpiri ne aşteaptă la 1 iulie – Realitatea.net*, 22 iunie 2008), *o avalanşa de cereri / reclamații*, *un ocean de iubire / înțelepciune / lacrimi / datorii* etc., whose role is to create exaggeration or concern among readers.

Nouns like: *flood, torrent, shower* etc., whose initial meaning is that of „huge flow of waters", sometimes get a figurative interpretation, denoting a large quantity of objects or beings. *Flood,* for instance, involves a temporal dimension specifying a rapid succession of events: *a flood of abuse / words / applications*.

The analysis of the figures of speech, whose role is to highlight the press tendency to slide into exaggeration, the approximation operators, and quantifying phrases reveal a rich repertoire of expressive means designated to introduce the reader into a diversified communicative framework in which he can retrieve and interpret

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information according to his language skills. All these elements aim to specify the complexity of the semantic class of quantity.

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