THE SEMANTIC FIELD OF QUANTITY IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE PRESS – THE PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACT OF THE WRITTEN WORD[1]

Abstract*: The semantic field of quantity is a relevant coordinate both in the lexical-grammatical classes of the noun, pronoun, numeral and adverb, and the language of the written press. As a dynamic agent for the direction of lexical innovation, the written press, along with other means of mass communication, enjoys a significant reputation as compared to oral communication. In its complexity, the word encompasses a huge amount of emotions and information, with a strong psychological impact on the receiver. It has been chosen the language of the written press, since it best renders the tendencies of present language, the frequent changes, thus representing an inexhaustible source of new terms, phrases and meanings. Hasty and superficial, obsessed with novelty, the mass-media have generated an ethics of authenticity by which the transmitter or receiver of the message excludes self-control, with obvious repercussions on the way of expressing himself. The language of contemporary press, especially the political discourse abounds in quantifying structures, usually perceived as deplorable forms of false humour and irony. Today's politicians ramble and twaddle, creating a river of sterile words, lacking logical consistency. The present study illustrates the wealth of quantifying terms, as well as their semantic and stylistic nuances. In order to better emphasize the role and nature of these structures, we have selected a few reference journals in the Romanian press: Jurnalul National, Evenimentul Zilei, Dilema Veche, Revista 22, and other sources relevant for the semantic field of quantity.*

Key words: *quantity, lexical innovation, logical consistency*

The semantic field of quantity is a relevant coordinate both in the lexical-grammatical classes of the noun, pronoun, numeral and adverb, and the language of the written press. A series of characteristics of the mass-media are influenced by the journalists' need to discover new elements, to create new stylistic nuances, with a view to fulfill an efficient communication. The written word has an unimaginable force to manipulate the public opinion. This idea in strengthened by Tatiana Slama-Cazacu, who stated that "I consider corruption of the communicative act by the misuse of words, communication diversion by changing the meanings of certain words, by using seduction of certain words, in order to deflect or confuse the receivers' thinking."[2]

General framework

The globalization phenomenon has generated stylistic diversity of the Romanian language by creating unique communication situations. Following this diversity, the mass-media, particularly journalism and television have given rise to new directions and discourses with strong public manifestation. Familiar phrases and slang have replaced the impersonal style, generating a linguistic register rich in clichés and expressive methods, designed to refine or to convey a negative connotation. Complexity of stylistic effects is in strict compliance with social and cultural factors. Any statement becomes subversive, the assertion is perceived as a hint, whereas praise turns into irony. The language of the press is the most eloquent through the complexity of the word which carries a huge amount of emotions and information. Mass-media stand for an inexhaustible source of new terms and phrases and help to expand the already existing

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[2] The author's translation according to Tatiana Slama-Cazacu, *SC*, 1999: 577-578

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terms, by creating new meanings. Being in a permanent search to decipher the messages, people tend to embellish interpersonal communication with a number of expressive words and phrases in order to reveal the speaker's meaningful intention. As actors of social communication, the journalists have the key role to choose a high-sounding *signifier*, so that the *signified* should render the communicative act authentically. Transgression of border between formal and informal language is felt in numerous periodicals, making use of vulgar expressions, in the account of serious information of high importance.

In terms of this transgression, the acts of language are shallow and inappropriate semantically or stylistically. The written text must be based on a spatial or temporal circumstance and emphatic language must match in a concise or rich form with a certain degree of culture, which in turn, can create seriousness or humour. In the absence of such circumstance, the lack of responsibility towards the printed word leads to "corruption of language" or the reader's inability to distinguish between the literary and non-literary version of the language. The frequently employed concept of *wooden language* gradually turns communication into a ritual devoid of meaning, in which the form becomes confused and the exchange of information is random and arbitrary. In actual conversation, large categories of speakers tend to exhibit certain lexical preferences, interpreted as *fashionable words*, which, in spite of their ephemeral nature, create by their frequency an important impact in a certain context or language stage. The phenomenon, known as *linguistic trend* is used more or less imitatively and consists in the obsessive use of words and phrases that ornate the communicated message.

Quantifying constructions and humour

Humour as a typically cultural element, comprises four specific aspects: irony, comedy, burlesque and wordplay and is advisable to those practicing linguistic exchange. From humorous adverts or funny remarks in opinion articles to sitcoms or Internet gags, the written press highlights a wide range of linguistic manifestations of humour. Whether it is conceived as a marketing strategy, a playful distraction or a device to emphasize a point of view, humour is worth mentioning both as a discourse device and a sociolinguistic phenomenon. It conveys an optimistic state by which the transmitter and receiver's spirit survives social and cultural challenges. Humour plays various roles in mass-media, by the forms it takes, the purpose it serves, the outcomes it conveys or the differences it triggers across cultures.

In general, humour and politics are closely linked, therefore, the language of the press is strewn with humorous quantifying structures specific to the political stage. Politicians' inabilities and the lack of consistency in their discourses disclose useful humorous contexts and contribute to the wealth of theoretical angles which help analyzing the phenomenon of humorous language in the written press. Words and phrases of the type *un soi de, oarece, cât de cât, cât, niscai* etc., are frequently used in the political discourse with a view to render negative connotations, inaccuracy of information or even distrust in a position occupied by a politician. The Romanian president's speech is the one leading the fashion of such phrases: *Ăla e un soi de caricatură. Şi de partid şi de politician* (Jurnalul Național, 31 mai 2012), *UE e un soi de nouă religie* (Capital, 9 noiembrie 2011), *O face, repet, legal, lăsându-i în urma lui pe procurorii DIICOT cu buza umflată şi un scandal cât casa* (Revista 22, 27 martie 2012). The tendency to exaggerate is eloquent in the last example and suggests an intensive semantic value with a huge impact on the target audience. Instead of using a

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neutral adjective *un scandal mare*, the editor chooses a more emphatic style to render the intended message.

Quantifying expressions and figures of speech

The field of quantity can also be explored from the perspective of figures of speech or other neutral quantity- related constructions, which determine a semantic – informative concentration of the text. Studies of classical rhetoric usually approach the figures of speech outside the context. However, understanding tropes in a situational framework is not simply the processes of speech, but must also take into account the concrete conditions of their apprehension. These are defined depending on the type of text, lecturer and his representation in front of the audience.

Analysis of figures of speech does not necessarily require an individual approach, but they are incorporated into a discourse having its own rules and objectives. By the mission and economy of language, specialized media must reach a wide audience, two of its objectives being to inform and to capture public attention. The first objective has in view the idea of credibility, while the second aims to impress the public. In the rhetoric tradition, figures of speech have a special importance for the linguist, giving the impression of exaggeration of grammatical or lexical facts, in the sense of their transgression.

For example, syllepsis favors encountering of two meanings of a polisemantic term (literal and figurative) in the same occurrence *Ea vinde săptămânalele* ***Capital*** *şi* ***Magazin*** *şi anunţă evenimentele cele mai importante*. In this construction, the term *săptămânalele* designates both the finished product and the abstract meaning aiming at the editorial activity. The effect of tropes can be focused on the stylistic or ludic dimension of the message, but can be equally directed to the speaker fulfilling a perlocutionary purpose.

The figures of speech based on a plural reference render distributive and collective understanding of this reference. Assemblies denoted by nominal groups of plural or collective nouns can be understood distributively (reference to the group members) or collectively (reference to the group itself). The utterance *The association was set up in 2006* (Asociaţia a fost înfiinţată in 2006) makes reference to *association* as a whole, in contrast to *The association got together on Thursday* (Asociaţia s-a întrunit joi) which refers to the the members of the association.

There are cases which show the figurative exploitation of the the distributive / collective opposition. They are expressed together and put in a close syntactic relation. Such is the example *Ne putem imagina calvarul Kosovarilor…privind feţele nenumărate ale acestui popor în lacrimi* (Internet). *Feţele nenumărate* sends to the elements of the assembly expressed collectively by the noun *popor*. Showing the whole (*popor*) and the individuals (*feţele*) has a strong evocative power, when dramatization of the situation is required.

In terms of hyperbole, it can be stated that the perception of its limits cannot be based on an objective analysis. The importance of a trope lies in the receiver's intuitive perception and the speaker's desire to exaggerate. Emphasis starting from plural references is a frequently used technique, the figurative effect creating the impression of an agreement between transmitter and receiver. Collective nouns, rather than definite nominal groups in the plural, are the privileged place of hyperbole, because the distinction distributive / collective is usually canceled.

The quantitative aspect of plurality and the abstract character of the collective entity act together to produce the appropriate figurative meaning. In the statement

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Occidentul descoperă că nu este la adăpost de umbrele trecutului, the hyperbolic role is played by the collective noun *occidentul*, the dramatic effect being enhanced by the figurative phrase *umbrele trecutului*. The hyperbole can be seen in qualification and quantification, expressing a feeling or perception in various grammatical classes: noun, verb, adjective, adverb, etc. This variety of instances leads to the idea that hyperbole is to be understood beyond the language. It assimilates the speaker's intention and its acknowledgment by the receiver, the only capable to capture the specific nature of the trope.

One can also notice the hyperbolic use of quantifying structures in the following utterance: *Ştia că nu sunt bani pentru a respecta nicio fărâmă din delirul de promisiuni* (Evenimentul Zilei, 4 mai 2012). The pathological disorder of consciousness expressed by *delir* can also grasp a figurative meaning, suggestive for irrational excess or abundance.

Other hyperbolic phrases comprise such elements as: *fluviu - Uneori avem de-a face cu ziceri fluviu, lipsite de textură logică, voit aglomerate şi care nu spun nimic* (Revista 22, 24 octombrie 2007), *munte – Demiterea lui Sorin Blejnar de la conducerea ANAF lasă nerezolvate un munte de acuzaţii, de suspiciuni, de situaţii* (Jurnalul Național, 13 mai 2012), *cascadă – Emisiunile au fost întrerupte de breaking news-uri în cascadă, urmate de supoziţii şi speculaţii* (Revista 22, 18 august 2011).

There are also hyperbolic constructions showing a high degree of intensity and include: *în neştire, cu nemiluita, cu toptanul, cu ghiotura, în disperare, în prostie, într-o veselie* etc. They represent a productive pattern in Romanian and are used mostly for their expressive value and to highlight the negative character of information or action. By associating these words with the idea of quantity, the journalist indicates exceeding of the normal limit, or the unimaginable. Most contexts in which these phrases occur deviate from their original meaning, creating a striking contrast and marking various stylistic nuances.

La vrac is a widespread phrase that has extended its meaning to the cultural events. Its role is to ironize the alleged cultural activities and emphasize the shallowness of the artistic phenomenon. The term *vrac* generally denotes the disordered arrangement of unpackaged goods. Following the same semantic direction, the journalist mentions the chaotic organization of certain cultural events as expressed in *Cultură la vrac* (Evenimentul Zilei, 26 octombrie 2007).

It has been asserted that people's need to communicate is felt increasingly in their desire to use a suggestive language, whose role is to clearly express the writer's intention. For instance, the repetitive use of *nişte* suggests the futility and irrationality of the application of things as well as the ironic tone of the author: *Ce a lăsat în urma lui în ultimii ani se vede: niste asfaltări în care îţi rupi maşina…nişte zdrenţe de plastic delimitând axul arterelor, nişte paşi verzi ducând spre nicăieri, nişte ceasuri aurite şi promisiunea altor şi altor proiecte megalomane* (Revista 22, 6 martie 2012). The same ironic attitude results from the suggestive title *Baronii, cancerul partidelor*, in which the author highlights a politician's lack of loyalty to the party whose ideology he used to strongly support: *Plecarea lui Sorin Frunzăverde din PDL, însoţit de un alai de parlamentari de Caraş-Severin, aminteşte de practica medievală a seniorului…*(Revista 22, 3 aprilie 2012).

The journalistic discourse also works with a number of quotes or well-worn tropes designed to enliven the language or to create "echo" messages that capture the readers' attention. Many of these clichés express general, unspecific ideas, being in an oppositional relationship: much / little, significant / insignificant, increase / decrease.

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They are rather general conceptual frameworks, analogies and associations in everyday life and in everyday language. These figures of speech are already common, or become so within journalistic style. They become irritating due to frequent repetition, but have the advantage of accessibility in receiving the text.

Journalistic clichés and metaphors may also include: *pleiadă, panoplie, pletoră* etc., which are occurrences of the same kind, and are part of a series of metaphors employed to express a very general idea of quantity and variety. Other terms have gained abstract meaning: *evantai, gamă, cascadă, val* etc.; they are metaphors of multitude, occurring most often in a syntactical pattern with prepositional determiner: *un evantai de, o cascadă de, un val de* etc.: *Dă bine în faţa şefilor să te duci la trening, să ieşi în lume…şi să-ţi treci în CV panoplia de diplome adunate la cursuri* (Adevarul, 3 mai 2012).

Panoplie is an international cliché, which is hard to say whether or not it was taken from one language into another or developed independently. The basic meaning of the word "collection of weapons arranged on a panel", according to *DULR* has preserved the idea of *crowd* or *large number*. Speaking of a writer's *panoplia de idei / argumente* is to emphasize the "weapons" (devices) by which he enters the reader's world, thus marking a positive connotation. The frequent use of the word denotes an elaborate style, characterized by preciosity. In the current press, it has lost its original meaning, being transferred in the quantifying field, which shows the frequency of the cliché, even if sometimes it generates derogatory tones: *Cititorului îi este prezentată o panoplie a valorilor etice şi morale pe care Obama le consideră esenţiale în viaţa sa.* (Dilema Veche, Anul IV, Nr. 157, Februarie 2007)

Valul, associated with the idea of water movement, has extended its semantics, denoting metaphorically a large amount of concrete or abstract matter, the forward movement of a large number of persons and things: *Valul de plecări din PDL la USL stârneşte comentarii acide…*(Revista 22, 24 aprilie 2012), *…insula Cipru a fost şi ea lovită de un puternic val de căldură*. (Jurnalul Naţional, 3 august 2010)

Other suggestive quantifying phrases include nouns (*învălmăşeala, bulibăşeală, forfotă, noian, urgie* etc.), verbs (*a roi, a invada, a se revărsa, a împânzi, a inunda* etc.), constructions with prepositional determiner (*o revărsare de, o umbră de, o groază de, un grăunte de* etc.) and fixed phrases (*vrute şi nevrute, câte şi mai câte, verzi şi uscate, câte-n lună şi-n stele, alte şi alte* etc.)

Concluding remarks

The analysis of tropes depicting the journalists' tendency to exaggerate, and the phrases with quantifying role, highlight a rich inventory of expressive means, aiming to introduce the reader into a diversified communicative framework from which he can take and interpret information according to his language skills. Excessive use of terms should be in accordance with a certain historical stage of the language or the demands of the respective society.

Far from being an exhaustive analysis of quantifying construction, the study remains open to further research aimed to highlight the complexity of this semantic class.

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