



The Discourse Analysis of a Newspaper Article

Elena BUJA

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures
'Transilvania' University of Braşov
elena_buja@yahoo.com

Abstract. This paper is meant as an attempt to show the way in which by analysing the discourse of a newspaper article, we may uncover a certain culture in a specific period of its historical development. In order to do that, I have chosen an article from a Romanian satirical newspaper, *Academia Caţavencu*¹, which I found particularly interesting as it poses a number of problems for the analysis. The analysis is based on Widdowson's (1979) view of discourse-as-process, the focus being on three main aspects, namely the role of context, topic and the representation of discourse content, and the nature of reference in text. Hopefully, by investigating these aspects I could bring further evidence in support of the idea that a text can be regarded as an interaction between the writer and the reader.

Keywords: sentence topic, discourse topic, discourse-as-process, context, reference

1. Introduction

Discourse can be approached from a number of perspectives, each of them addressing some important issues bearing on the production and interpretation of utterances as both linguistic and social practice. Schiffrin (1994) presents in details six such approaches, namely the speech act theory, interactional linguistics, the ethnography of communication, pragmatics, conversational analysis and variation analysis. Though apparently there are clear-cut borders among these approaches,

¹ The article is to be found in the appendix, both in the original and in the English translation.

they all, nevertheless, share a number of issues, such as “the relationship between structure and function, text and context, utterances and communication” (Schiffrin 1994: 337).

My attempt at analysing the discourse of a newspaper article could be classified as a pragmatic approach, which focuses on the speaker meaning at the level of utterances situated in a context. In certain circumstances, there seems to be a lack of obvious connection between the utterances/sentences of a text which nevertheless will not prevent the receiver from understanding the message. The speaker’s intended meaning is understood by the receiver due to the fact that the latter is willing to cooperate in the process of communication by supplementing “the missing link” and also by supplementing the literal meaning of the utterances/sentences “with an assumption of human rationality and cooperation” (Schiffrin 1994: 9). Thus, what the pragmatic approach to discourse analysis suggests is that human beings work with very minimal assumptions about one another and that they use these assumptions as a basis from which to draw specific inferences about one another’s intended meanings.

In what follows I shall adopt Widdowson’s (1979) (quoted in Brown & Yule 1989: 24) view of **discourse-as-process**, in that I will consider the words, phrases and sentences that appear in a text to be the elements necessary for a producer to communicate his message to a recipient. I am particularly interested in the interaction between producer and the recipient, more exactly in the way in which the recipient understands the producer’s intended message in a particular circumstance, and in the way the requirements of the particular recipients determine the organization of the producer’s discourse. The analysis will focus on three key elements of discourse, namely the role of the text, topic and the representation of discourse content, and reference. Hopefully, some cultural issues will emerge from the analysis.

2. The role of context

In order to be able to properly analyse the piece of discourse under consideration, we need to take account of the **context** in which this occurs. “Context” is a term referring to the features of the non-linguistic world in relation to which linguistic units are systematically used. In discourse analysis, we encounter the situational context, which, in its broadest sense, covers the total non-linguistic background to a text/utterance, including the immediate situation in which it is used, and the awareness of the producer and recipient of what has been said earlier and of any relevant external beliefs. We need to know something about the **producer** (in our particular case, the WRITER), and about the **recipient** (the READER/AUDIENCE). Hymes (1964) calls the persons participating in a speech event **addressor** and **addressee**. According to him, “knowledge of the addressor in a given

communicative event makes it possible for the analyst to imagine what a particular person is likely to say. Knowledge of his addressee constrains the analyst's expectations even further" (Hymes 1986, quoted in Brown & Yule 1989: 38).

The *producer (addressor)*, in our case, is a weekly satirical newspaper called *Academia Cațavencu. Săptămînal de moravuri grele* (The Catavencu Academy: A weekly newspaper of heavy morals), which tries to bring to light the abuses, corruption and ignorance of Romanian politicians, especially of the ones holding the power. The way in which facts and events are presented in the article varies from very straightforward to very hermetic (including even riddles, idiomatic expressions). The language forms and the lexis used vary according to the style. Thus, within a paragraph the lexical items may range from extremely sophisticated to very vulgar ones, as illustrated below:

- (1) Conflict de principii – intrigi – lucrături – urlete – four.letter.word
'Conflict of principles – intrigues – pulling strings – shouting – swearing'

We may assert that, although this particular newspaper is meant to be read by any person, it can be really enjoyed by *recipients (addressees)* with a certain intellectual and cultural background, since the articles are so full of hints to historical events, sociological aspects, psychological, literary and even linguistic facts, that an ordinary person with little education will not be able to go deeper than the level of the text, and consequently will miss a lot of the excitement of fully comprehending the meaning intended by the writer. Thus, a person whose knowledge of history leaves much to be desired cannot possibly grasp the idea behind "**the war of the three mimosas of RTV**" (encountered in the article) which is an analogy to the War of the Two Roses (The Red Rose of Lancaster and the White Rose of York) that took place in Britain some centuries ago. We will come to analyze such aspects in more details when we pursue the analysis proper.

Another element of context which constrains the interpretation of the event by the analyst refers to the **setting**, i.e. information in terms of where the event is situated in **place** and **time**. If we take a look at the title of the newspaper article under consideration: *Azi și mîine: Alina Toader-Longin* ("Today and Tomorrow: Alina Toader-Longin"), we need to analyze it along two lines:

a) First, we have to identify the *time-coordinate* along which we can interpret the deictic elements "today" and "tomorrow". A simple solution would be to look at the date when the newspaper appeared, and say that "today" corresponds to that particular day, whereas "tomorrow" would correspond to the following day. But this is not possible in our situation because we are dealing with a weekly newspaper which, indeed, appears on a certain day (Wednesday), but which covers the events of a whole week (13–19 October, 1998). Another, more plausible possibility would be to somehow equate 'today' with the week within the 13th and

the 19th of October, and “tomorrow” with the following week (i.e. the week between the 20th and the 27th of October). Yet, the best option would be to **expand the context** (in keeping in line with Brown and Yule): the time span of the deictic expressions “today” and “tomorrow” must be determined with respect to the content of the text, i.e. they can be enlarged to cover the present and the future, although they may retain the standard deictic centre on the writer.

There is a further point that has to be mentioned with respect to the first part of the title, namely that by using the deictic expressions “today” and “tomorrow” the writer somehow constrains the reader to focus his/her attention only on what happens at present and on the future consequences of the present event(s). But actually, the past events have an important role in properly understanding the hatred between the two “parties”.

b) If we analyze the second half of the title, “*Alina Toader-Longin*”, we will be able to grasp the writer’s intended meaning behind this hybrid name only if we place it on a specific *place co-ordinate*, namely that of the Department of Informative Programmes within the Romanian Television, where the three persons mentioned in the hybrid name **Alina** Mungiu-Pipidi, Anca **Toader** and Lucia Hossu-**Longin** work (in all the possible senses of the lexical item “work”). Since two of the persons mentioned have a double family name, the writer of the article produced one such name by picking an element from each of the names of the three persons (first name of one and surnames of the other two, i.e. the elements highlighted above), creating a hybrid whose spelling is relevant in that the hyphen could be interpreted as the “border” between the two parties. Thus, **Alina** Mungiu-Pipidi and Anca **Toader** will be members of one “party”, whereas Lucia Hossu-**Longin** would be the representative of the second one. Another interesting thing related to the hybrid name is that it is illustrative of a new trend among certain Romanian women of keeping their maiden surnames together with those of their husbands’, indicating thus a certain status they enjoy in society.

A brief description of the “source of inspiration” of the newspaper article would be in order here so as to make the analysis more comprehensible. The scenario is the following: the three ladies mentioned in the article, Anca Toader, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Lucia Hossu-Longin all worked in the Department of Informative Programmes. Close to the period when the Head of the Department was to be elected, knowing that the latter had the highest chances to get the job and also that she was supported by the leading party in Romania in 1998, the first two ladies tried to find some compromising evidence against Lucia Hossu-Longin. Thus, they came up with some TV programmes that L.H.-Longin had presumably signed for the late leader of Romania, Nicolae Ceausescu. The nasty thing was that they broadcast this on the national TV station, making a whole nation witness the political and private dissensions between the two women parties in the DIP.

In brief, we can say that the more the analyst knows about the features of context (i.e. addressor, addressee, time and place of the communicative event), the more capable s/he is to predict what is likely to be said.

3. Topic and the representation of discourse content

Among **addressor**, **addressee**, **setting** (time and place of the communicative event), **code** (what language, or dialect, or style of language is used), **message-form** and **event**, Hymes (1986, quoted in Brown and Yule 1989) identified another feature/category of context, namely **topic**, which is defined as *what is being talked about*. “The notion of ‘topic’ is clearly an intuitively satisfactory way of describing the unifying principle which makes one stretch of discourse ‘about’ something and the next stretch ‘about’ something else (...)” (Brown & Yule 1989: 70).

Analysts make the distinction between **sentence topic**² and **discourse topics**. The latter term has been introduced by Keenan & Schieffelin (1976) (quoted in Brown and Yule 1989: 71) and is defined as follows: “discourse topic is not a simple NP, but a proposition (about which some claim is made or elicited)”.

Some linguists suggest that the topic of a text is equivalent to the title and that, for any text there is a single correct expression that is the topic. This suggestion would not hold for our article, since the title (*Today and Tomorrow: Alina Toader-Longin*) does not even count as a proposition. We cannot possibly say that the article is (only) about the present and future situation of three persons. There is more to it than that. We could, for instance, say that the article is about the dissensions between the small parties within Romanian Television, or about the impact of these dissensions on the audience of this TV station, or about the evil inherent in people, which is the cause of so many disasters in the world (the war in Kosovo, the War of the Two Roses, etc.). Each of these different ways of expressing the topic would stand for a different judgment of what is being written about in the article. Out of this number of ways of expressing the topic, we need to determine the correct expression of the topic for the text.

Consequently, we shall adopt the point of view of Tyler (1978) (quoted in Brown and Yule 1989: 75), according to whom “the ‘topic’ can only be one possible paraphrase of a sequence of utterances. What is required is a characterisation of ‘topic’ which would allow each of the possible expressions, including titles, to be considered (partially) correct, thus incorporating all reasonable judgments of ‘what is being talked about’. This would be the so-called **topic framework**.”

² In a sentence, the speaker announces a topic and then says something about it (comment); topics are usually subjects and comments are predicates.

The topic framework is assumed to be given by the aspects of the context, which are directly reflected in the text. These aspects of the context can be identified from the content of the text. Thus, if we take a look at our text, we would easily see that the addressor (the writer) is talking about three particular women, about a conflict among these women, about Romanian Television, about one particular mischievous thing that two women did to a third one, about the political support this last person enjoyed from certain political parties, about her excessive sensitivity, about the reform in Romania, and the conflicts in Kosovo. This set of facts, persons and events could be taken as a set of elements which would have to be included in the representation of this writer's topic, i.e. what he is talking (writing) about. But this is not a complete set, since the writer talks about a particular **time** (recent past: *last week*, i.e. the week between 6–12 October 1998) and **place** (the institution of Romanian Television), and about particular **persons** (three employees of the afore-mentioned institution). Thus, the topic framework represents the area of overlap in the knowledge which has been activated in the text and which is shared by the writer and the readers of the article. We can say that the topic of our newspaper article is: *fight for power/high position of three women working in the Department of Informative Programmes of Romanian Television, in the period preceding the election of the Head.*

So far we have discussed the notion of “topic” by mainly concentrating on considerations of **content** of discourse, i.e. *what* the writer is talking about. But sometimes the **form** of the discourse (i.e. *how* the writer structures what he is saying) can give us a clue as to what the topic is. Maynard (1980) (quoted in Brown and Yule, 1989: 94) suggests “that instead of undertaking the difficult task of *what a topic is*, we should concentrate on describing what we recognize as **topic-shift**. Between two contiguous pieces of discourse which are intuitively considered to have different ‘topics’, there should be a point at which the shift from one topic to the next is marked. If we can characterize this marking of topic-shift, then we shall have found a structural basis of dividing up stretches of discourse into a series of smaller units, each on a separate topic.” The problem now lies in identifying the formal markers of topic shift in a discourse.

Some analysts, among whom we can mention Grimes (1975) and Hinds (1977), have come to the idea that the partitioning of discourse into smaller chunks, each on a separate topic, depends on the change of setting (time and place) and on the change of theme (the person or thing that is being talked about). Longacre (1979) stated that the markers that indicate temporal shift, especially in narrative discourse, are adverbial expressions. Thus, adverbs appearing at the beginning of a sentence can represent possible topic-shift markers.

If we take a look at the article under consideration, we will not encounter any such formal markers of topic shift. No sentence begins with an adverbial of time or place, and the theme remains the same, although the persons that are being talked

about are referred to by different expressions (e.g. Anca and Alina, the two little denouncers, the two ladies, the two infantes, the Furies, the Graces, etc). Yet, one can identify some topic shifts, in that the **place** changes gradually: from the **world**, in general, we are introduced into a particular institution, **Romanian Television**, and here into a certain **Department**. From here we move further to the **whole country**, and next to **Kosovo**. The **time** also changes: from **times immemorial** (the time of the three Graces and of the Furies), to the **present**, then it goes back to the recent **past**, to shift back to the **present** again.

On the basis of these topic shifts we can then identify the topic for our discourse, namely the fight for power/high position of three women working within the Department of Informative Programmes of RTV, in the period preceding the election of the Head of the Department.

4. The nature of reference in text and discourse

One of the central issues in discourse analysis is **cohesion**, which refers to the formal links that give a text a sense of unity beyond the sentence. The problem of cohesion was dealt with by the outstanding linguists Halliday and Hassan (1976: 4) who considered that “[c]ohesive relationships within a text are set up where the interpretation of some element in the discourse is dependent on that of another. The one presupposes the other in the sense that it cannot be effectively decoded except by recourse to it”. One particular cohesive relationship that the two linguists dealt with is **reference**. Brown and Yule replaced it by **co-reference**.

The relationship of co-reference can be:

- **exophoric**, when for the interpretation of a certain lexical item the hearer/reader has to look outside the text, in the context of situation.
- **endophoric**, instructing the hearer/reader to look inside the text to find what is being referred to by a particular form. The endophoric co-reference, in its turn, is of two types:
 - *anaphoric*: for the interpretation of a particular form, the hearer/reader has to look back in a text;
 - *cataphoric*: the hearer/reader has to look forward in the text in order to be able to interpret some forms.

The relationship of **anaphoric co-reference** can hold among a number of forms which shall be illustrated on the basis of examples taken from the newspaper article under consideration.

a. a full lexical item and a pronoun:

- (2) (...) **damele** bine (...) tot atâtea sînt. Că-s trei **Grații**, că-s tot atâtea **Furii**, puțin importă. Important este că în Televiziunea Română **le** avem în ordine strict....

“(...) the **good dames** (...) are in an equal number. Whether there are three **Graces** or three **Furies**, is of little importance. What is important is that in the Romanian Television we have them ...”³

- *damele* (S.2) *le*
dames, def. art. pers. pron. (weak), 3rd pers. pl, acc., fem.
- *Grații* ‘Graces’ *le*
- *Furii* ‘Furies’ *le*

In this example, one pronominal form binds back to three full lexical items.

- (3) *Anca și Alina* (...) *i-au organizat coanei Lucica o dare-n gît* (...) *cu gîndul de a bloca alegerea dînsei în fruntea CA...*

‘Anca and Alina have set up a perfect denunciation of **Missis Lucica** aiming at preventing **her** from being elected ...’

- *coanei Lucica* (S.8) *dînsei*
Missis (dat.) Lucica politeness pronoun, 3rd pers., sg., fem., gen.

b. substituted form:

- (4) (...) *Lucia Hossu-Longin, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi & Anca Toader. Ultimele* (...) *doamne n-o înghit deloc pe prima.*

‘The last two ladies do not stand the first one at all.’

c. partially repeated form:

- (5) *Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, Anca Toader Alina & Anca*

d. repeated form:

- (6) (...) *domnia-sa este cunoscută* (...) *pentru excesul de sensibilitate. Un excess...*
‘(...) her highness is known (...) for the **excess** of sensitivity. **An excess** ...’

The relationship of **cataphoric co-reference** is illustrated by the following examples:

- (7) *baniî noştri, ai contribuabililor*
‘money our, poss. art. tax payer’
‘our money, the money of the tax payers’

³ The translations belong to the author.

- (8) *E drept că nici doamna Lucica nu le suportă (...)* *pe*
 ‘Is true that neither Missis Lucica not pers. pron. 3rd pl., fem. Acc. marker
cele două infante.
 dem. art. two Infantas’
 ‘It is true that neither does Missis Lucica stand the two Infantas.’
- (9) *Anca și Alina (...)* *i-au organizat* *coanei Lucica...*
 clitic pron, 3rd, sg., fem., Dat. Ma’am (Dat) Lucia
 ‘Anca and Alina have organized for Madam Lucia...’
- (10) *I-a sedus (...)* *pe niște haidamaci*
 clitic (3rd, pl., masc., Acc) loafers
 ‘she seduced some loafers’

The text of the article is also illustrative of chains of reference:

damele bine – Grații – Furii – Alina, Anca & Lucia
 the good dames – Graces – Furies – Alina, Anca & Lucia

In this co-referential chain, the persons are referred to by means of **proper names** (Anca, Alina, Lucia), of **indefinite noun phrases** (Graces, Furies) and by means of a **definite noun phrase** (the good dames). This last referring expression, though used as the subject of its sentence, is not used “referentially”. In our article, this definite noun-phrase does not refer to some specific individuals. To adopt the distinction drawn by Donnellan (1966) (quoted in Brown and Yule, 1989: 211), we would say that it is used “attributively”, not “referentially”. This attributive use of the referring expression “the dames” may not select particular individuals in the real world, but they will establish specific individuals in the reader’s representation of the discourse.

- (11) *Alina & Anca – ultimele două doamne – infante – sicofante – cele două pîricioase mici – năbădăioasele de la DEI – le*
 A & A - the last two ladies - Infantas – sycophants – the two little denouncers – the peppery women of DIP – them (weak pers. pron.)
- (12) *Lucia – prima – doamna Lucica – coana Lucica – tanti Luci – dînsa – domnia sa*
 Lucia – the first – Mrs. Lucica – Ma’am Lucica – Miss Luci – politeness pers. pron. - her highness

Cohesion within the text can be provided not only by relationships of co-reference, but also by formal markers which relate what is going to be said to what has already been said. In our particular text we have the following examples:

- Additive forms (conjunctions and adverbials): *de asemenea* (also), *pe lângă faptul că* (beside the fact that);
- Causal/temporal: *Iar ce a urmat a fost prăpăd*. ‘**And** what followed was a disaster.’

Another device which ensures the cohesion of a text is the **continuity of tense**. According to this, our newspaper article would consist of two texts: the first part of the article, in which sentences are connected by the present tense (*lucrurile bune sînt...* ‘good things **are**...’; *damele (...) sînt ...* ‘the dames **are** ...’; *Important este...* ‘What **is** important **is**...’; *le avem*, ‘we **have** them’, etc.) would represent one text, while the second part, in which verbs are mainly in the past (Romanian: “perfect compus”⁴), represents the second text. Here are some examples:

(13) *Acest conflict (...) a izbucnit*
‘This conflict **burst out**...’

(14) *I- au organizat...*
pers. pron. 3rd, sg., fem. D - have organized
‘Anca and Alina **organized** (for her)...’

If we take a closer look at the cohesive structuring of our text we will realize that cohesion is not a syntactic relation, but more a semantic one. It is on the basis of the semantic relations that hold between the items in a text (and less due to the explicit expression of these semantic relations) that we perceive a text as a composite complex product.

5. In lieu of conclusions

What I have tried to do in this paper was to identify and analyze, on the basis of a newspaper article, some of the ingredients which are necessary in any account of the way people use language as a means of interaction. Thus, as far as the role of context in analyzing discourse is concerned, we have seen that in order to be able to derive appropriate inferences about the writer’s message, we need to combine linguistic meaning with context. Identifying the communicative content of a sentence is important because it can help us understand coherence relations across

⁴ The Romanian ‘perfect compus’ is a tense formed by the auxiliary ‘a avea’ (have) + the participle of the main verb.

the sentences making up the text of the newspaper article. Context, in our particular case, refers to knowledge of situation.

As topic is a category of context, which contributes to the understanding of a piece of discourse, I have tried to identify it from the point of view of the reader. We have seen that in the case of our article the topic was difficult to pin down, since as the title is not a proposition, it cannot represent the topic. We identified the topic only by expanding the title, paraphrasing the sequence of deictic terms and names contained in it.

Finally, since any text needs to be both coherent and cohesive, I have shown how the various types of reference employed by the writer contribute to the cohesion of the newspaper article.

APPENDIX

Azi și mâine: Alina Toader-Longin/Today and Tomorrow: Alina Toader-Longin

1. Lucrurile bune sînt totdeauna în număr de trei.
Good things always come in a number of three.
2. De asemenea, damele bine – da' bine de tot – ca să vezi, tot atîtea sînt.
The good – the extremely good – dames, happen to be in the same number.
3. Că-s trei Grații, că-s tot atîtea Furii, puțin importă.
Whether there are three Graces or whether there are three Furies, is of little importance.
4. Important este că în Televiziunea Română (cum ar veni, postul național plătit din banii noștri, ai contribuabililor), le avem în ordine strict alfabetică, pe: Lucia Hossu-Longin, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi și Anca Toader.
What is important is that in the Romanian Television (as it were, the national corporation paid for from our money, the tax payers'), we have, in strictly alphabetical order: Lucia Hossu-Longin, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Anca Toader.
5. Ultimele (dar deloc cele din urmă) două doamne n-o înghit deloc pe prima.
The last (but not at all the least) two ladies do not stand the first one at all.
6. E drept că nici doamna Lucica nu le suportă cîtuși de puțin pe cele două infante, ca să nu zicem sicofante, ale coanei Zoe de la Cotroceni.
It is true that neither does Missis Lucica stand in the least the two Infantas, not to call them sycophants, of ma'am Zoe of Cotroceni.
7. Acest conflict de principii – concretizat pînă mai ieri prin mici birfe, intrigi, lucrături, otrăvuri, urlete și pizduieli aruncate pe culoare sau în birouri – vai, a izbucnit plener săptămîna trecută.
This conflict of principles – manifested till recently as little gossip, intrigue, string-pulling, poison, shouting and swearing in the corridors or in offices – dear me, burst out in plenary last week.

8. Anca și Alina, cele două pîrțicioase mici, i-au organizat coanei Lucica o dare-n gît ca la carte (Cursul scurt de demascare, Moscova, 1952), cu gîndul de a bloca alegerea dînzei în fruntea CA al TVR.
Anca and Alina, the two little denouncers, have organized a perfect denunciation of Missis Lucica, according to *The Short Course of Denunciation*, Moscow (1952), meant to hinder her election as Chief of the Administration Council of Romanian Television.
9. Dreptu-i că nici tanti Luci nu-i chiar ușă de biserică.
The truth is that Missis Luci is not exactly innocent, either.
10. Pe lîngă faptul că i-a sedus în mod neașteptat pe niște haidamaci din PDSR, PUNR și PRM, domnia-sa este cunoscută în TVR pentru excesul de – să-i spunem astfel – sensibilitate.
Besides the fact that she surprisingly seduced some loafers of the Social Democratic Party of Romania, the Party of National Union of Romania and The Great Romania Party, her Highness is known among the people of RTV for the excess of - let us call it – sensitivity
11. Un exces care face ca ședințele de consiliu la care dînsa ia parte să se transforme, zău, în mini-ședințe de psihoterapie în grup.
An excess which makes the council meetings she participates in turn into mini-meetings of group psychotherapy.
12. Probabil că tocmai d-ai-a, de groază, cunoscînd-o bine, năbădăioasele de la DEI și-au ridicat poalele-n cap, pe postul public național, de le-a văzut o țară întregă deontologia.
It must have been because of that, out of fear, knowing her too well, that the peppery women of the Information Program Department threw their caps over the windmills on the public national station, so that a whole country could see their deontology.
13. Iar ce-a urmat a fost prăpăd.
And what followed was a complete disaster.
14. Toată mass-media și întreg spectrul politic n-au pregetat să ia atitudine, să comenteze și să dezbată situația.
The entire mass-media and the whole political spectrum have not hesitated to take attitude, to comment on and to discuss the situation.
15. Problemele reformei sau situația din Kosovo au apărut ca insignifiante conflicte locale în comparație cu războiul celor trei mimoze de la TVR. (...) Trei doamne și toate trei!
The problems posed by the reform or the situation in Kosovo seemed unimportant local conflicts in comparison to the war of the three Mimosas of the Romanian Television. (...) Three ladies and all three!

(Academia Cașavencu, 13–19 octombrie 1998)

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