

FORMS OF REPEATED DISCOURSE (DOUBLESPEAK) IN ROMANIAN MILITARY MASS MEDIA

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The main objective of this paper is to present a thorough analysis of forms of repeated interviews present in the Romanian military mass media. Starting from the particularities of the repeated discourse, expressed through langue de bois during the communist era and from its concealed forms displayed within the current Romanian written journals, we debated over the linguistic patterns used for the accomplishment of two permanent sections of the weekly "Military Observer". The current paper, part of an ampler research focused on the achievement of a comparative study realized by means of the contents analysis of two sections of the journal, aims at investigating elements of discursive nature that reveal a form of the unconcealed usage of the langue de bois within the "Interview" section of the military publication.

Key words: repeated discourse, doublespeak, langue de bois, mass media, military journals, "Military Observer".

1. INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that the Romanian people came out from the domination of the communist regime more than 20 years ago, many "wounds" have not yet been able to fully heal. Socialism of Russian inspiration discovered in Romania a favorable territory for its development, and some of its crucial aspects spread in every field, be it social, political or economic.

The communist regime is known as one of the most categorical regime with regard to the complete monopolization of society. One of the most important aspects, subject to the present analysis, is language. Communism succeeded to take possession of words and use them for its purposes better than any other forms of government, either for manipulative intentions or for generating prolix situations, lacking substance.

The Soviet press is well known for the skill of concealing facts and for its customary filling of newspapers and magazines with whole articles that are poor in information, but at a very large scale. The purpose of this type of press is to confer a particularized shape to the language of power, known as langue

de bois or, for some French linguists, langue soviétique [1], characterized by magic, mystery, maximum opacity, that is able to create clichés and avant la lettre arguments for future actions. This langue de bois constituted the monopoly of the Soviet state, which played the role of the creator of meanings in words (the semantic dimension of language) and of their use (the pragmatic dimension), as Heller said [2].

Given the many years spent under the totalitarian leadership, Romanian media and by extension, the country's population, experienced a deformation of its own public language. For many decades, Romanians were subjected to a sort of Soviet speech logocide and, involuntarily, the „langue de bois” has become an automatism difficult to remove from everyday life of people found in generic situations and formal relationships. Apparently, the typical Romanian took, subliminally or not, the phrases of the langue de bois and assigned them to a dialect of higher order, meant to be used in contact with high officials. The reaction is not incorrect if we consider the fact that most citizens of a totalitarian state are prone to develop a particular discursive competence, regarding precisely this type of contact.

2. FORMS OF REPEATED DISCOURSE IN MASS MEDIA. SHAPING OF THE *LANGUE DE BOIS* WITHIN THE ROMANIAN PRESS

The *langue de bois* phenomenon is due to the totalitarian regimes and it becomes manifest by assimilating everyday linguistic formulas of formal communication, especially in group communication: public, mass etc., respectively in political language. But if we analyze the functions of *langue de bois*, we distinguish that it is meant for only a single purpose. *Langue de bois* has the role of spreading “a Gnostic type of thinking that establishes a doctrine of salvation on scientific claims” [3], thus, an ideology. This is made possible once the language suffers a mutation, based on the lack of content, of message, mainly for its use in the press. Press is considered a “power” in the state (“the fourth power” in the hierarchy of Montesquieu, even the second power, in I. Ramonet’s acceptance) [4], holding the position of “advocate” of the public, the “watchdog of democracy”, but especially the legitimacy of power [5].

Romanian press is very often overloaded with formulas close to the *langue de bois*. In a study dedicated to this phenomenon, Constantin Mărcușan [6] identified some ways of the *langue de bois*’ manifestation in the Romanian press, such as: interference of styles in advertising discourse, changes in the structure of the lexicon leading to different relationships between the transmitter and receiver, the use of stereotypes, templates, lexical and syntactic and lexical automatism, slipping into the peripheral, marginal, slang, satire, violence in language etc., all of which leading to a hidden form of *langue de bois*, often confused for standard language: “*The new traits of the press style, in their positive aspect, can be said to be overlapping the standard language. Still, opposing linguistic tendencies also launch signals of renewing the langue de bois that can also be promoted within democratic regimes.*” (Tatiana Slama-Cazacu) [7].

A feature of the new forms of “concealing” the *langue de bois* is the use, lacking content, of standardized phrases in repeated discourse. Unfortunately, the expression *langue de bois* is often incorrectly used to stigmatize different political speeches, that are not necessarily linked to the traits identified by Patrick Sériot and later taken over by the Sovietologist linguist Françoise Thom. Furthermore, the vision of the French linguist is that the term is compromised, its use increasingly moving away from the original meaning.

Apart from the special syntax and lexis of the “*langue de bois*”, that can be recognized from the very beginning of any text written in this manner, it presents another special feature, namely, manichaeism. Considering the radical vision of communism, which involved the use of an existential dualism, divided between two adverse camps found in a permanent state of conflict, and the new forms, more subversive, of the “*langue de bois*”, the *langue de bois* is characterized by “Manichaean” tendencies, radical in relation with the division of the world based on two terms and principles: good and evil.

In the Communist press we used to find the Orwellian picture of a society forever mobilized, always prepared for conflict. From everyday activities to the diplomatic and political ones, either national or international, the communist press outlined the fierce struggle for freedom and prosperity of the population. For this reason, countless socialist terms used in the text are borrowed from the military register. But the lexical and syntactic sharing of structures was achieved in two-way meanings, which led to the preservation of certain features of the “*langue de bois*” in the military discourse.

3. *LANGUE DE BOIS* IN THE MILITARY DISCOURSE

3.1. Projection of the research

Given the frequent use of military terms, it is normal that the “*langue de bois*” to find a comfortable refuge in the speeches, interviews and allocutions of those who most often use this register, namely the military people. Moreover,

these manifestations of the *langue de bois*, including its hidden forms that it meets in the Romanian press, reunite in the military press.

Returning to the current issue of the *langue de bois* used in everyday language of the army, at a first impression, military personnel can be assumed to be using mainly the *langue de bois* because of the strict lifestyle and because of discursive practices driven by the military regulations. Starting from the imperative commands and the simplicity of formal communication, the "*langue de bois*" should be theoretically part of everyday communication. Fortunately this assumption is far from reality. In these circumstances, the question naturally arising in the projection of our research is as follows: Why do we find in most military publications formulations of the repeated discourse, in explicit or disguised forms of the "*langue de bois*"? These forms of the *langue de bois* are the result of ideological intentions or only a "*langue de bois*" reminiscence in a reformed incomplete sector, the Romanian military press?

Starting from these research questions, we analyzed the statements of repeated speech belonging to two categories of interviews hosted by the "Military Observer" publication from 2014 (52 issues), specifically the Interview section, dedicated to military personalities, which was usually allocated the fifth page of the publication, and respectively the Personalities section, assuming a less conventional interview in relation to the format of the publication, foregrounding leading cultural figures, which was allocated invariably the last page (page 24). We considered, therefore, a total of 26 interviews with military personalities and a total of 27 interviews with civil personalities, located in the 52 editions of the publication. The research method used was contents analysis, consisting of collecting and coding data obtained and its analysis: frequency analysis (occurrences), correlations (co-occurrences), tendencies and contingencies. With regard to the current paper, we focused only on debating over the repeated discourse elements present

in the section 'Interview' of the weekly publication "Military Observer", more specifically, we examined such elements within 27 texts, included in a similar number of the publication's issues, throughout the year of 2014.

3.2. Research results

Looking back further than half a century ago, we can notice that, out of the desire of a quasi-transparency and promotion of a genuine dialogue between the military and the civilian society, there was founded the Military Observer, in 1859. The publication appeared in an era characterized by the Soviet military thinking monopoly, by a "military science" culturally connoted, practically, by a Soviet doctrine extended up to the level of the entire Communist bloc, which constituted the foundation of the Romanian doctrines. Basically, the "Military Observer" appeared due to a "scarcity of original works in the field of military theory" [8], and it was an expression of the false openness toward the civilian world, one decade before the appearance of the "Vietnam effect" and before the genuine openness within the civilian-military dialogue.

Within the current media landscape, the Military Observer is the main press product of the Ministry of Defense, issued weekly in a tabloid layout, counting 24 pages, and being dedicated to military phenomena and aiming to inform the military personnel "on the main concerns of the ministry leadership" (<http://www.presamil.ro/om.php>) – an objective with obvious ideological nuance, so long as the press should target the multidirectional reflection of reality, both from bottom to top and from top to bottom of the military hierarchy-, respectively the reflection of a positive image of the army, the promotion of a real army - civilian society dialogue etc.

Regarding our study, the different personalities who were interviewed by the journalists of the Military Observer actually managed to stay within a standardized language, belonging to a form of repeated discourse, projecting elements of a classical, unconcealed "*langue de bois*". From the first words,

the incredibly cumbersome nature of the language emerges through different semantic and syntactic features that give the impression that in many cases it is a „parody of a different discourse” [9]. Other specific features of the interview rubric are the excessive transformation of other parts of speech into nouns, verbs are sacrificed in favor of nominal phrases that replace the temporal values of past tense, the abuse of participles and gerunds suggesting the accomplishment of the mission, the artificial and incorrect use of borrowings resulting from an incorrect translation of terms from military English into the Romanian doctrine etc., for example:

A devenit imediat evident că prin demararea unei analize pertinente Operația Joint Endeavour impunea asocierea capacități specializate [...]. (MO, no.1/2014: page 5) [It was soon obvious that through the start of a pertinent analysis, operation Joint Endeavor requested the association of specialized capabilities]

Când lucrezi pentru oameni trebuie să ai o disponibilitate maximă. (MO, no.27/2014: page 5) [When one works for people, one needs to display maximum availability]

Capabilitățile structurilor din componerea bazei sunt date de [...]. (MO, no. 26/2014: page 5) [The capabilities of structures within the base are given by...].

Through the excessive transformation of other parts of speech into nouns we can somehow infer a desire to keep the information in a timeless realm, able to keep a note of the lack of future engagement and of relativity in the reality to which it refers. Another feature of the interviews with military personalities is strictly related to the previous one, and consists of the quasi-absence of deictics/demonstratives.

It is interesting to observe some restraint in using them within various interviews. The pronoun "I" is used

relatively often in interviews, but for the purpose of describing or explaining actions clearly delimited as individual (professional training, for example), the remaining actions bearing the mark of the generalized and irresponsible "us". The personal pronoun in the first person plural is very commonly used, thus building a feeling of false belonging to something and solidarity through its inclusion in an undefined category:

Oriunde ne-am afla, [noi] suntem și rămânem militari români aflați în misiune [...]. (MO, no.1/2014:page 5) [Wherever we might be, we are and will be Romanian soldiers in mission ...].

[Noi] nu facem niciun fel de deosebire între unitățile de nave de la fluviu și cele de la mare. (MO, no.2/2014:page 5) [We do not make any difference between naval military facilities on rivers or at sea.]

[Noi] avem în vedere revitalizarea submarinului Delfinul. (MO, no.2/2014:page 5) [We take into consideration the revitalization of Delfinul submarine].

[Noi] Urmărim asigurarea condițiilor de viață decentă [...], avem și alte obiective care ne onorează. (MO, no. 20/2014:page 7) [We seek to assure decent living conditions [...], we also have other objectives in which we take pride].

Because the military is a very dynamic world, the focus is largely set on the process. Hence an interest of the military personalities in a reality actively reflected. Considering the "langue de bois" as a product of an exclusively collective society, in which thinking was not seen as some individual good, but a collective one, in which the citizens are active in relation with the physical work, it is hence understood where the interest for covering by means of the uniforming formula "we" comes from and by emphasizing the completion of tasks and missions.

Continuing the analysis of tendencies, we discovered that the presence of comparatives, from which complements are curiously missing, out of the desire for setting on a distinct level tier, abstract, lacking any personal commitment:

Fiecare își dorește să fie cel mai bun. (MO, no.7/2015: page 5) [Each person aims at being the best.]

Cu rezistența psihică este mai greu, trebuie să fii foarte bine motivat. (MO, no.7/2015: page 5) [In case of physical strength, it is harder, you need to be highly motivated]

Necesarul este mult mai mare, dar vrem să folosim ce avem [...] (MO, no.17/2014: page 7)

[The necessity is much bigger, yet, we want to use the stuff we have ...]

Omitting factual information, the reader runs out of clear benchmarks in the depicted reality, a state of induced confusion (specific for the „langue de bois”), the only landmark being the discourse itself. He is obliged to believe what he is told, in the absence of specific references, in a discourse characterized by the decrease of the referential function of communication.

Last but not least we found, in the discourses of military personalities, a predisposition toward commands, either written or oral. The discourse, lacking references, substitutes the link with the concrete reality through the open, manifest imperative, a tendency resulting from the analysis of occurrences. The imperative takes the form of orders from the title or pseudo-engagement through the impersonal must, that compels the receptors/readers, not the transmitters / speakers:

Da, e adevărat, dar trebuie să nu uităm cu cine ne batem. (MO, no.3/2014: page 6) [Yes, it is true, but we must not forget who we are fighting against.]

Muzica militară trebuie să strălucească. (MO, no.25/2014: page 5) [The military bands must be brilliant.]

Trebuie recunoscută o realitate: suntem un spital regional [...] (MO, no. 6/2014: page 7) [A specific reality must be admitted: we are but a regional hospital ...]

Presa militară trebuie să fie un sprijin moral [...]. (MO, no.2./2014:page 5) [The military press must be a moral support.]

In the interviews with military personalities, mental and moral wear caused by work, the routine of actions specific to the military and the frequent formal situations lead to a repeated discourse specific to the totalitarian "langue de bois", lacking content, while engaging ideology.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Viewed from a historical perspective, the “langue de bois” is a written and oral expression of an ideology, both a subliminal and a direct exhortation to passivity and unresponsiveness. No one can say that the „langue de bois” is present in military discourses of the publications, but that elements of repeated discourse exist. These elements contribute to setting up a "subsystem language" characterized by explicit semantic forms and implicit syntactic elements able to highlight the fundamental characteristic of the language used in the meaning given by Tatiana Slama-Cazacu [10], namely the lack of substance. Reduced to a concise definition "langue de bois" is nothing but a sequence of hard to decipher terms derived from various languages and neologisms most often borrowed and misused in order to induce a state of confusion and disorientation in the reader, by omitting important information. In the analyzed interviews language functions are often ignored and communication loses its referential quality that is absolutely necessary in this field.

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