'BABEŞ-BOLYAI' UNIVERSITY

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PH.D. THESIS – SUMMARY

NEWSPAPER EDITORIAL DISCOURSE.

THE ROMANIAN EDITORIAL AT TIMES OF CONFLICT

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Key words and expressions: opinion discourse, newspaper editorial discourse, Romanian press, times of conflict, pragmatics, critical discourse analysis, persuasion, ideology, rhetorical structure, linguistic choices, intensifying strategies.

Context of the study

Newspapers still matter.

People of all proffesions still read them on a regular basis. There is a great variety of news sources nowadays: newspapers and magazines in print press, radio, television and Internet in electronic media; neither the advent of television, nor the Internet led to the 'death' of the newspaper.

There are voices which regard the newspaper as 'a thing of the past'. It is, indeed, one of the oldest forms of mass media, which does not mean that it needs replacement. Due to the recent economic recession, the media business started to stagger. A large number of newspaper companies have been forced either to close their doors, or to modernize by keeping up with the technological developments. This has meant providing their readers with a modern, online version of the traditional print form.

Still, newspapers are relevant and essential to society. They give us news and views. In print or online version, they cannot be easily replaced by another 'product', as complex as this one. As the term 'newspaper' suggests, the content of any newspaper consists of the news of the day, but also of analysis and comment on this news. However, surprisingly enough, a large part of the newspapers nowadays contain many other items, other than those previously mentioned, such as advertising, TV listings, sport and entertainment.

There is a wide variety of texts we come across daily and many different ways to approach them. For the present study we have chosen a particular type of text to analyze, the editorial, whose function is not to inform but to influence public opinion to share the same views as its author's. Broadly speaking, a clear distiction is drawn in journalism between news writing or reporting and opinion writing. While the first category has to mirror the reality, 'just the facts',

the editorials are restricted to expressing opinion, either of the editorial writer's or of the newspaper's editorial board (the governing body of the newspaper).

Newspaper editorial articles belong to the large class of 'opinion discourse', largely considered a newspaper sub-genre nowadays (van Dijk, 1995). The systematic and explicit study of editorials has been of interest in the past years because they reflect not personal, but mainly institutional opinions, in line with the editorial policy and ideology of the newspaper. Consequently, readers who need explicit guidance on how to approach events and participants are expected to turn towards editorials rather than towards news reports. Therefore, it is not surprising that they are referred to as 'leaders' or 'leading articles'.

It is well known that the language of the press is never neutral (Fowler, 1991) and that articles within a newspaper's pages are constructed versions of reality from a certain viewpoint based on the editorial line of the publication and its political orientation. At times of social conflict and political tension, it is stirring to examine the different ways in which newspapers represent the same issues and participants involved, which is part of our thesis' subject. The role of the journalists in general and of editorial writers in particular at times of unrest is significant. Consciously or unconsciously, journalists promote conflicts to a certain extent because any conflict within the political or social sector takes place in the media as well.

Conflict journalism tends to be dichotomized considering the fact that any opposition generally involves two sides: 'Our' side which is always seen as the 'good' one and 'Their' side which is regarded as 'bad' or 'evil'. Media work with such models of conflict and such oppositions are overt in opinion articles.

Whereas in the news reports journalists attempt to be as objective as possible, the newspapers' editorials in their position of opinion articles represent the official voice of the publication. Therefore, they are persuasive and biased types of writing which encode the respective newspaper's ideology. Editorials can be written on a variety of subjects and reality can be represented in a number of various ways, thus the editorial writer chooses the topic and the perspective from which to view it in such a way that it serves the institutional (ideological) interests.

We need to look both into and beyond the text because under such circumstances a wide range of exterior factors influence editorial production. Broadly speaking, the same arguments are likely to operate on different levels for each reader. But in the particular case of social conflicts, even though people are not individually involved, they are definitely collectively part of them.

Research objectives

Our study examines the distinct ways in which the conflicts at the beginning of 2012 are represented in the editorial discourse of three most representative Romanian broadsheet publications, namely in *Adevărul*, *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Jurnalul Național*. Therefore, our study endeavours to:

> ➢ examine the editorial discourse of three quality newspapers published within the same cultural environment, but with distinct editorial policies and ideologies;
>
> ➢ investigate the manner in which the same conflict and main participants are approached and represented in editorial (opinion) discourse;
>
> ➢ reveal the similarities as well as the differences in standpoints in the newspapers under study, also underlining the specific grounds from which they arise;
>
> ➢ investigate the specific utilisation of structure and language strategies each of the publication under study employ in order to promote a specific viewpoint;
>
> ➢ identify whether editorials, as samples of highly-opinionated and persuasive types of articles, appeal more to judgement or emotions during times of tension and conflict.

Comparison between newspaper editorials as the official voices of various media institutions can unveil the importance each publication gives to a matter at a particular time by approaching it from a particular ideological angle. Therefore, we will consider:

> ➢ first of all, the rhetorical structure of this type of opinion articles
>
> ➢ secondly, the ways in which editorial writers attempt to guide the reading process towards a desired interpretation by appealing to a series of choices

➢ and lastly, the intensifying structural strategies such as the opening and closing segments.

The importance of the study

As compared to other media genres, the editorial discourse has been understudied despite its importance and unique position within a newspaper. Moreover, it displays a specific rhetoric and the way in which persuasion is conceived and embodied within the newspaper editorial discourse is of wide interest.

The discourse analysis of Romanian editorials represents a region of discourse analysis which has not been fully explored. In fact, given the limited studies on newspaper editorials in many countries (despite their significance among public genres) this category is often referred to as the 'Cinderella' genre. Analysing a number of 28 editorials selected from three national dailies, we were able to reach relevant conclusions regarding their characteristics at times of social conflict and political tension and shed more light on this rather neglected genre. Most of the studies conducted on editorials focus on typology or functions as compared to other journalistic text-types. Our main area of research is the rhetorical structure and linguistic strategies editorial writers employ in order to organize, develop and present their texts, or to put it broadly, how Romanian editorial writers conceive a newspaper editorial to impact the readers.

Another key aspect is related to the comparative examination of editorials selected from three broadsheet newspapers during times of social conflict and political tension. Special attention is paid to the representation of the same conflict and main participants within the same socio-political and cultural setting, to the ways in which various strategies are employed to gain the maximum effect, which are likely to represent a further distinct aspect of this research.

Considering the importance editorials play in shaping (even changing) public opinion, we hope that our study will contribute to enriching the quality of understanding when reading newspaper editorials by shedding more light on their specific, persuasive rhetoric. It is nothing but a modest effort.

Scope and methodology

The discourse analysis accomplished in the current thesis involves editorials culled from three most representative national dailies: *Adevărul*, *Evenimentul Zilei* and *Jurnalul Național*. The coverage and selection of editorials was conducted both in the public library and on the Internet. We compared the electronic and print versions to make sure that the online newspapers contain the original content of the editorials from the daily printed form beginning with January 9th 2012 (when the conflict outbroke in the press) to the end of the month. We compared the linguistic approach of the conflict and the participants involved in terms of rhetorical structure, choices which manipulate interpretation as well as intensifying structural strategies, all of which appear to function on rhetorical grounds.

It is stirring to observe the discrepancy in viewpoint and approach of the same event in the press within the same country. This is the reason why we selected the newspapers not only based on their popularity, but on their ideological orientation and editorial policy. Such an approach is likely to prove the way in which the same objective fact can be inevitably judged from various subjective perspectives. We consider that the number of editorials (28) analysed in this paper is relevant enough for our purpose since it allows a relatively thorough analysis of newspaper editorial discourse at times of conflict.

In our research we have appealed to an interdisciplinary approach as we have combined elements and theories from fields such as rhetoric and linguistics (rhetoric, discourse and critical discourse analysis, semantics, pragmatics). Moreover, such an approach proves that language becomes a tool in the hands of editorial writers' who conceive their discourse in such a way that it serves institutional purpose. Thus, the power of words in the public space is undeniable.

Our intention is not at all to distinguish between 'good' or 'bad' language employed in newspaper editorial discourse, or between better or worse publications, but to unveil the persuasive strategies utilized by journalists at times of conflict to gain readers' approval and thus manipulate them to respond in certain ways to the events and the participants involved. Our focus is also on the disparity in viewpoints when portraying the sides in a conflict and the existence of a similar (apparently universal) framework built on dichotomies when covering it. Editorials represent just another example of how means justify the ends in language.

An outline of the study

The current thesis is organized in eight chapters (inclusive of the introduction and conclusion), a bibliography and an annexes unit. The last unit contains the integral form of the editorials selected from the online editions of the Romanian newspapers under study.

The INTRODUCTION describes the general context of studying newspaper editorial discourse, introduces the theoretical assumptions our research rely on and states its main objectives. Moreover, the significance of the study is highlighted. The scope and methodology employed in conducting such a research are broadly outlined. Last but not least, this chapter also provides a synopsis of the thesis.

Chapter 1: APPROACHES TO LANGUAGE STUDY AND MEDIA DISCOURSE is an illustration of different approaches to discourse analysis and to media discourse especially, with a focus on critical language study and on the connection between media and the concept of 'power'. The relationship between pragmatics and critical discourse analysis is also taken into discussion. In the final part of the chapter, a brief presentation of the most prominent studies conducted on editorials in the past years is provided. Without such details, our further study may seem incoherent or incomplete.

Chapter 2: THE POWER OF THE PRINT MEDIA provides a brief overview on the development of mass-media mainly considering the historical background of the earliest newspapers. The main focus is on the Romanian print press, on its beginnings and further evolution in the last two decades; a description of the three chosen dailies in terms of history, ownership, control and characteristics is also included.

Chapter 3: THE FUNDAMENTALS OF EDITORIAL WRITING focuses on essential aspects such as: definition of the term, a brief history of the editorial as a representative newspaper article, its purposes and forms, basic principles and practices. All in all, the chapter attempts to draw together the main aspects regarding editorials and editorial writers.

Chapter 4: OPINION DISCOURSE AT TIMES OF CONFLICT introduces the details of the conflict which broke out at the beginning of 2012 in Romania and the research problem

statement. During times of conflict editorials aim more than ever to manipulate readers to respond in a particular way to the ongoing events and to the participants involved. They prove to be intentionally-driven journalistic products which carry ideological significance. The relevance of the study and its scope are also highlighted.

Chapter 5: METHODOLOGY AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK presents, as the title suggests, the methodology and the theoretical framework of our research. Firstly, we take into discussion two of the most significant linguistic methods of analysis: qualitative and quantitative analysis, and consider that a qualitative, comparative approach of editorial discourse will best serve our purpose. Then, the three main parameters of the framework (the rhetorical structure of editorials, aspects of manipulating interpretation and intensifying structural strategies) are introduced and briefly described for a better understanding of the following chapters.

Chapter 6: RHETORICAL STRUCTURE OF EDITORIAL DISCOURSE highlights the fact that there are a number of factors which influence the production of a newspaper editorial. Their rhetorical structure is shaped by constraints and requirement imposed not only by the genre, but also by the orientation of the newspaper. Professional, institutional and sometimes personal constraints make the editorial writers' job a difficult one and the analysis of their work challenging. The structure proposed for the editorial discourse consists of five rhetorical levels, namely: Headline, Addressing the Issue, Background Information, Argumentation of the Addressed Issue (including Evaluation and Evidence), and Articulating a Position or Solution. These levels are coherently linked to form a meaningful and rhetorical whole, though certain elements of the proposed structure may not always be present in every editorial.

Chapter 7: ASPECTS OF MANIPULATING INTERPRETATION starts from the hypothesis that every linguistic choice is strategic especially in the case of public opinion discourse because they can influence readers towards an intended interpretation. There are a series of choices editorial writers employ such as: choices about the representation of actions, actors and events; choices about the representation of knowledge status; choices about naming and wording; choices about incorporating and representing other voices. At times of tension or conflict, the language in editorials becomes an interesting object of study and it is stirring to examine how the same event or people can be represented or labeled totally different, how

certain attitudes and viewpoints are constructed and foregrounded with the clear purpose of influencing people to embrace the same stance.

Chapter 8: INTENSIFYING STRUCTURAL STRATEGIES: THE OPENING AND CLOSING SEGMENTS offers a detailed approach of the role the propositions clustered in the first and last paragraphs play in amplifying a particular viewpoint. Even though they may appear redundant from an informative point of view or even irrelevant, they are employed with the clear purpose of producing powerful persuasive effects by enforcing the text's central message.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSIONS reviews the progress of our research and highlights the most relevant findings regarding the editorial discourse in the Romanian broadsheet publications at times of civil unrest and political tension.

A list with the complete BIBLIOGRAPHY (including the Internet resources) is provided at the end of the thesis, followed by an annexes unit which comprises the integral editorial texts considered for the present study. The last unit, APPENDICES, is divided into three parts, namely: Appendix A (editorials culled from *Adevărul*), Appendix B (editorials culled from *Evenimentul Zilei*), Appendix C (editorials culled from *Jurnalul Național*).

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