

Book Review

Tendencies in the Journalese of the Third Millennium

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The subject of this book² belongs to a larger field that used to be known in Romania as the study of MCM (*mijloace de comunicare în masă*). The Latin-Anglo-American phrase *mass media* has rather recently imposed itself on the territory of the Romanian language. Given the general importance of the subject of this book, it does not come as a surprise that the author starts precisely with an introductory chapter into the MCM “universe”.

The book consists of six chapters, beginning with the already mentioned introduction and ending with the concluding one. Each component is divided into subchapters and paragraphs minutely numbered. Besides these, it is worth mentioning the illustrations (many of which are included in the two appendices) as well as the footnotes and the bibliography. Most footnotes indicate the sources of some opinions taken from other authors but there are also notes by means of which the researcher makes interesting comments and expresses personal opinion (see, for instance, note 9, Chapter 4 or note 14, Chapter 15)

The above mentioned bibliography has three compartments: A. “books and articles” (103 titles); B. “dictionaries and encyclopaedias” (12 titles); C. “Internet sources” (8 sites). As expected, given the author’s professional background, most authors, older or more recent, come from the Anglo-American world (Baron 1986, Bell 1991, Boyce 1978, Cohen 1973, Gans 1974, Mencher 1991 etc.), some of whom are received through translations (Hartley 1999, Fiske/Hartley 2002, Lull 1999, McQuail 1999). In addition to these, there is an important number of Romanian specialists (Coman 1997, Irimia 1986, Levițchi 1993, Miclău 1977,

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² Velică, Marius (2010). *Tendencies in the Journalese of the Third Millennium*. Galati: Galati University Press, 221 pages, ISBN 978-606-8008-56-1.

Vianu 1968, Slama-Cazacu 2000 etc.). Along the book, the linguist processes, in a constructive and selective manner, ideas from authors belonging to quite different ages and currents (from St. Augustine to Ullman, Vianu, Eco, Toffler, or Leech). Even if the bibliographic basis seems somehow eclectic, the author's approach displays cohesion and coherence as I shall try to demonstrate in the following analysis of each section of the book.

In the already mentioned introductory chapter, the analyst defines his basic notions (*mass, media, communication* etc.) remarkably simply and efficiently, including by resorting to definitions in prestigious dictionaries, such *OED* and *American Heritage* (see pp. 9-10). The final part of this section, using very recent sources, presents a short history of newspapers (starting in the China of the 7th century), as well as a very interesting classification of the respective "media" (pp. 12-13). The author uses the last paragraph to modestly (and cautiously) declare that the solutions and interpretations suggested in this book are not meant to be treated as "immutable and universally true" as they stand "under the shadow of subjectivity and personal experience" (p. 14).

In the next chapter, the investigator suggests a *stylistic* perspective on the language of MCM. From the very beginning, a deficiency of the English language gives rise to a difficulty: while French has created a pretty clear distinction between *langue* and *langage* (rendered into Romanian by means of the *limbă-limbaj* pair), English has no such matching between *language* and another term directly related but with its own semantic sphere. If in Romanian a phrase like *limbaj gazetăresc/jurnalistic* (journalistic language) is precise enough to designate the MCM register, in English (in the absence of a term for *limbaj*) they felt more acutely the need to create derivatives of the *journalese* or even *headlinesese* type (copying the pattern of some known glossonyms like *Chinese* and *Japanese*). Phrases such as "language that is typical of newspapers", or "style of language", or "variety of language" (p. 15) are either too long, or too vague, whilst *journalese* has both brevity and concision. The writer of this book chooses to illustrate the main features of the journalistic style (grammatical specifics, figures of speech, page layout, etc.) through a "case study"; i.e. through comments made on articles of a known American journalist (Richard Cohen from *Washington Post*). This richly illustrated presentation allows the author to firmly state, in the end (p. 44), that "journalese can no longer be denied the status of individual variety in spite of its heterogeneity and overlaps with other registers specific to other varieties of language".

The succeeding section of the book approaches metaphor in journalism from a cognitive perspective. As in other parts of his work, the research starts from theoretical landmarks that are to be found in the works of authorities in the field (Lakoff/Johnson, Goatley, Crystal, etc.), but also directly from corpora coherently gathered and efficiently analysed. A case in point is the admirable collection of headlines extracted by the analyst from newspapers such as *USA Today*, *The Guardian Weekly*, *International Herald Tribune*, etc., all chosen examples emphasising the highly frequent use of metaphor by journalists. The researcher often resorts to statistic arguments, as on p. 94, where (as a conclusion to a particular case study) one notices that “in a text of only 90 words, there are 14 instances of metaphors belonging to 11 conceptual patterns”. A general conclusion here is that, from a conceptual-cognitive perspective, “the language of journalism is not different from the language of literature which has been long considered the sole rightful owner and user of metaphor” (p. 95).

The analysis goes on with *A semiotic approach to journalism* which shifts to the theoretical field of semiotics. The most interesting pages of this chapter are those dedicated to the verbal – non-verbal balance, the illustrative part being represented especially by front pages of well-known newspapers of English language. The researcher knows how to go into details, as in the case when comments on the association of the globe to *USA TODAY*; along the entire chapter, he kept in mind the fact that we live in a world dominated by “visual signs” and that these have “ideological functions” (p. 158).

Next, *A sociolinguistic perspective on the discourse of news*, transfers the focus on the field of sociolinguistics, a theoretical source indicated from the start being Hudson’s *Sociolinguistics* (1991). The analyst is not concerned with the mere relation between language and society but, as the diagram on p. 161 shows, with an entire network of relations among entities such as language, society, population, individual, personality, etc. Also worth mentioning here is the diachronic view (pp. 162-163) upon the appearance and evolution of the term *news* in the English speaking world. A large part of this section is dedicated to the phenomenon of manipulation, whether it is about euphemisms (religious, moral, medical, or parliamentary ones), *double talk* or *weasel words*. Attention should be paid to the final paragraphs as well where, again with statistic arguments, the author demonstrates the dominance of masculine voices in the media of English expression and one of the conclusions is that a situation such as this implies the further perpetuation of some unwanted stereotypical attitudes (p. 189).

The final part of the book comprises the general conclusions, displayed in accordance with the two main goals of the present work: (1) to expand the extension of the term **journalese** from referring to the style of tabloids – as it is traditionally used – to a more general category of “journalistic texts”; (2) to identify any possible indicators of future developments of the functional language variety labeled as **journalese** (in the larger perception suggested by the analyst). Cautiously (and in a meiotic and manipulatory formula), the author considers that “the precocity of the study does not constitute reason enough for not conducting such an investigation.” I agree with this opinion as well as with the statement in the last paragraph where the researcher presents the evolution of journalism as a “fascinating and definitely worth watching process.”