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NEWSPAPER HEADLINES. FROM COMMON LANGUAGE TO JOURNALESE IN THE CONTEMPORARY ROMANIAN JOURNALISM (XXIST CENTURY)

It is well known that „knowledge is power”. Access to quality information by means of journalism may then be considered as empowering people through getting information by means of journalism and thus making democracy possible and functional (as everyone knows that the term *democracy* etymologically means „power of the people”).

Therefore, F. Gaudin (1992) associates journalism to the *democratization* of knowledge or information [1] as people may easier get access to information nowadays through the media. Moreover, common people may even contribute to the flow of information by doing what is called „citizen reporting”, and thus changing places from receiver to emitter of information that circulates like whatever has been called journalism so far.

However, what is of interest to us here is the language used by journalists mostly, not that of citizen reporters. As a matter of fact, in the XXIst century, connecting to the flow in information in the field and permanently refreshing such information is culturally a must in order to cope with the social requirements. And this is true about journalism, as well. Consequently, the approach to journalism jargon in terms of specialized language and of common language is a natural phenomenon which is also desirable to a certain extent. Then, as Wilhelm von Humboldt mentioned, each language draws sort of a cultural circle around its users (in Antohi, 1998, p. 146) that encompasses those users, and that may differ from the cultural areas of other languages. This applies to journalism language, as well. Therefore, it is an interesting phenomenon that we have identified in analyzing headlines in Romanian newspapers. This phenomenon lies in the fact that there has been a strong trend towards brevity in writing headlines in Romanian journalism, though the general previous Romanian cultural trend was that of emphasizing by repetition, by using redundancy, as well. Mihaela Mureşan notices this former trend

towards redundancy for the sake of emphasis and gives solutions in brief linguistic formulas like „policy of discrediting”, instead of „policy of denigration and libeling” (Mureşan, in Rad, 2004, p. 30). As we are analyzing here, nowadays, Romanian newspapers exhibit a strong trend towards a kind of brevity that may be compared to the English language journalism brevity.

And in terms of this language of journalism that is meant to attract readership or audiences towards information that should be relevant (mostly useful) to them, headlines or „heads” are key factors to democratically draw people towards the information they need for both entertainment (also referred to as „infotainment”) and information. According to Spencer Crump (1974, p. 159), headlines perform some most important functions.

„They (1) give readers an idea of what the story concerns; (2) provide variety in the newspaper design and make pages attractive; (3) make a person select the newspaper from a newsstand in preference from a competing publication; (4) create an identity or character for the publication through the use of distinctive types.”

As the most important information that makes the target public of journalism decide to read a newspaper story is the headline of the story, an analysis of a representative corpus of front page story headlines from five high circulation Romanian dailies would allow us to show that the language of story headlines translates specialized language into an intertwining of journalese and common language. The linguistic result is accessible to the audience of media content within a context of a democratization of knowledge.

Thus, we have analyzed a number of 249 headlines from five significant circulation central Romanian dailies (*România liberă*, *Adevărul*, *Jurnalul Național*, *Libertatea*, *Click* – flags/brand names are here capitalized as on the newspaper front cover page) in the time interval 1-5 June 2017 to see whether there is still some tendency towards redundancy in writing headlines, as it used to be in the 1990s in Romanian newspapers right after Communism years. Common language that people use will always exhibit lots of redundancies (in terms of language mannerisms, timeout techniques, idioms, techniques to avoid an answer or standardized redundancies, etc). However, in journalism, in the tight circumstances of little room on the printed page or little time in the newscast, *journalese*, also known as the *jargon of journalism*, cannot afford to leave room for redundancies and therefore resorts to short, strong meaning words and grammar structures, to ellipsis. And the most elliptic jargon of journalism

in English is that of headlines. Headlines are particularly the most elliptic in English as grammar articles (definite or indefinite) are omitted, auxiliaries are omitted or avoided, a comma is used instead of the conjunction „and”, etc.

As compared to the English language journalism with its jargon called *journalese*, Romanian journalism, mostly before the XXIst century, used a language that did not differ much or at all from common language that people would use in daily (written or oral) communication, and it maintained redundancies of this common language. But common language may be redundant, whereas journalism cannot afford redundancy from at least two reasons: one, that it is not lucrative to publish or to broadcast more, second, that the target public cannot allot too much time on a daily basis for transient occupations like getting the news update in times of great (sometimes overwhelming) flow of information in the form of news. However, mostly beginning with the XXIst century, Romanian journalism headlines have exhibited a trend towards a jargon of brevity that is specific to journalism. And this language of abbreviations and brevity in journalism is called *journalese* in English, and we may call it *jurnaleză* in Romanian, to refer to the jargon of journalism that resort to strong and short and catchy language.

In order to support such a statement, we resorted methodologically to content analysis applied on newspaper headlines in Romanian high circulation newspapers.

By analyzing a research corpus of 249 newspaper headlines from five Romanian significant circulation dailies, we have noticed that the least redundant, most professionally best written headlines were those in *România liberă*. We analyzed the headlines mostly in terms of two linguistic qualities that we were interested in: *brevity* and *informative character* (not too general, i.e. specific enough). We picked the ones that are to be found at the newsstand on a daily basis because they are the ones that get usually sold. Circulation figures are not available on the BRAT website (Biroul Român de Audit Transmedia / The Romanian Bureau of Transmedia Auditing) for many publications as they do not report those figures.

In order to make it clear how we decided upon the ambiguity or vague aspect of headline language, and of redundancy, we will provide here examples of what we deem either ambiguous or vague, on the one hand, or redundant, on the other hand, with regard to writing headlines.

First, an example of headline that we considered ambiguous, vague is „*Campion la procente*” (translated as „*A Champion at Percentages*”) [2]. It is obvious why we deem that such a headline is too vague, as no one can tell

for sure what aspect of life it may refer to, as it may refer to many kinds of issues that may be evaluated in terms of championship and percentages. This headline is not specific enough, and therefore we may categorize it as clumsy from the viewpoint of skillful writing in journalism.

Second, a headline like „Alain Delon Is Ending an Age. Next Year We Will Invite Actors That Are Liked by the New Generation” is too long, i.e., redundant. It may be briefly expressed as „From Alain Delon to New Generation”, for instance. Consequently, according to the two linguistic qualities that we were interested in: *brevity* and *informative character*, we have obtained the following data:

Table 1: Word Redundancy in Newspaper Headlines

Publication (daily)	Type & size	Total no. of analyzed headlines	No. of redundant headlines	Percentage of redundant headlines
<i>România liberă</i>	Hard news, broadsheet	67	1	1.49%
<i>Adevărul</i>	Hard news, broadsheet	59	10	16.95%
<i>Jurnalul Național</i>	Hard news, tabloid	54	4	7.41%
<i>Libertatea</i>	Soft news, tabloid	32	2	6.25%
<i>Click</i>	Soft news, tabloid	37	2	13.51%

Table 2: Ambiguity of Less Informative Headlines

Publication (daily)	Type & size	Total no. of analyzed headlines	No. of vague/ambiguous headlines	Percentage of vague/ambiguous headlines
<i>România liberă</i>	Hard news, broadsheet	67	2	2.98%
<i>Adevărul</i>	Hard news, broadsheet	59	9	15,25%
<i>Jurnalul Național</i>	Hard news, tabloid	54	2	3.70%
<i>Libertatea</i>	Soft news, tabloid	32	1 (misleading)	3.12%
<i>Click</i>	Soft news, tabloid	37	2	8.10%

From tables 1 and 2 we may notice that *România liberă* had the best written headlines, with the lowest percentage of redundancy (1.49%) and also the lowest rating of vague language in headlines (2.98%). *Libertatea* ranks second in terms of brevity (93.75% to redundancy of 6.25%) and specificity (96.88% to 3.12% misleading language) of headlines, and *Jurnalul Național* is closely ranked the third one with a percentage of 7.41 in redundancy and of 3.70 in vague written headlines. *Click* is ranked fourth, at some significant distance from the top three publications with better written headlines from the viewpoint of brevity and informative specificity, as the percentage of redundancy in headlines was 13.51%, and that of vague language was 8.10%. Surprisingly, the broadsheet *Adevărul*, though not belonging to the yellow journalism tabloid category of newspapers, got the highest percentage of redundancy (16.95%) and of vague language in headlines written (15.25%) at a gapping distance of more than 10% from the comparable daily, in point of category of newspapers, *România liberă*.

What is worth mentioning here is that boasts on its first cover page with the Best Buy Award for dailies (best price for high quality). At some research „glance”, it seems that the newspaper is worthwhile in terms of the well written headlines in point of language and the award is well merited. Or, we may also infer that the newspaper keeps making efforts to „make a difference”, at least in headline writing.

What we deem is important to be concluded here is that the appeal to vague, ambiguous writing, may quite often omit „delicate aspects of reality”, or „the essence beyond the appearance” (Vasile, 2012, p. 156) and therefore is quite undesirable in writing headlines in journalism. It is also labeled as less skilled or clumsy to write such ambiguous headlines, except for those written to be misleading on purpose for the sake of humor as in publications like *Academia Cațavencu* or *Kamikaze*, etc.

Irrespective of the circulation figures (that print newspapers cease to make public any longer, as these figures have been dropping in the last decade), quality of newspaper writing will always be about value, and it usually „pays” in the long run. The more educated the public, the more high quality newswriting ranks first also in profit making, not only in other journalists ranking and award winning.

In contemporary Romanian journalism headlines are getting closer to English language journalism, in terms of style and of language, or journalism jargon (words that exaggerate, shorter grammar structures, etc). This trend is obvious in analyzed Romanian headlines that exhibit a language that is getting elliptical (for instance, the replacement of the conjunction „and” with a comma etc.).

As Carole Rich noticed, „the internet has changed the nature of news and its delivery” [3], and many of the publications are moving into the online medium nowadays (very many because they have undergone financial problems while printed). Thus, the trend towards brevity in print journalism (avoiding redundancy, anyways) may seem less important for some journalists, as in the online medium brevity is not as imperative as in print, as there is enough room in the online medium pages, as compared to the page area limits in print journalism and the higher costs of more pages in print.

Clear, strong language, short, catchy headlines are and will always be the best attraction of target audiences and readership and therefore we deem that journalists should carefully mind such aspects when giving wings to their inspiration stamina. Profit comes right in the aftermath of quality writing in journalism. This should be the attitude of The Authentic Journalist who thinks about Journalism as a Calling that is much... much more than an ordinary job. If profit making is the priority of a journalist, credibility usually decreases, and in time– this brings about financial losses, as well.

NOTE:

1. F. Gaudin, „Terminologie et democratization du savoir: à propos de dictionnaires scientifiques”, in *Le langage et l'homme*, no. 2-3, 1992, p. 129;
2. „România liberă”, no. 7890, 2-4 iunie 2017, page 5;
3. C. Rich, *Writing and Reporting News*, London: Wadsworth, 2012, p. 15.

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Les titres des articles de presse, entre le jargon du journalisme, le langage spécialisé et le langage commun dans le journalisme roumain contemporain (du XXIe siècle)

Résumé : *Dans le XXIe siècle, du point de vue culturel, la connexion avec le flux des informations ayant des réactualisations permanentes est impérieusement nécessaire pour faire face aux exigences de la vie sociale. En conséquence, l'approchement du jargon du journalisme au langage spécialisé et au langage commun dans le journalisme roumain contemporain est un phénomène naturel et bien désirable. Les titres des articles dans le journalisme roumain contemporain s'approchent de plus en plus au journalisme de langue anglais par rapport à le style ou langage ou jargon journalistique (des mots exagérant, des structures grammaticales courtes etc.). Cette tendance est évidente quand on voit dans l'analyse des titres en roumain un langage prépondérant elliptique (par exemple, le remplacement de la conjonction „et” avec la virgule etc.). Comme l'information la plus importante que détermine le consommateur décider de lire un article de presse est le titre de l'article, une analyse d'un corpus représentatif des titres des articles des cinq des quotidiens roumains de grand tirage nous permettra de remarquer comme la langue des titres des articles traduit le langage spécialisé en entretissant le jargon du journalisme au langage commun dans un résultat linguistique surtout accessible pour l'audience du contenu de presse/des medias dans un contexte de democratization du savoir.*

Mot clés: *démocratisation du savoir, titres des articles de presse, jargon du journalisme, langage spécialisé, langage commun.*