

WRITING TECHNIQUES IN ROMANIAN JOURNALISM: NORMATIVE GRAMMAR AND STYLE

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Abstract: The study emphasizes the main characteristics and linguistic tendencies of the contemporary written press, following the evolution of the language approached in several publications. The study emphasizes not only the tendencies in journalistic language, but also the real aspects regarding the style and the general language evolution, aspects imposed by common speakers and by trend.

Keywords: journalistic style, language evolution, linguistic fashion.

During the entire process of journalistic communication the sender must permanently bear in mind the receiver; only thus it is possible to ensure the existence of the communicational feedback, which grants the success of the communication act. From this perspective, the process of journalistic communication is unique, since it is a procedure imposing a vital rule: the sender-journalist communicates only for the receiver-public. The journalistic style has a complex linguistic structure based on the necessity to maintain the sender–receiver contact during the information transmission. In order to obtain the basic features of journalistic style the journalist must respect some internal requirements, such as: to transform an event into a press information, to select the information, to create the text itself, and to transmit it in as clear and elaborated a form as possible so that the public may receive, understand, and assimilate it. Thus, the journalist can be seen as a “communicator” of the society.

- **1. The features of the journalistic style**

The journalistic style, characteristic to the devices of mass communication, does more

than to elaborate some texts, or to communicate/give information on some events. Antoine Albalat, quoted by G. Ferreol says that the journalistic style “is the expression, the art of writing which makes our ideas and sentiments sensible; it is the means of communication between souls”.¹ On the other hand, through the radio and the television, through records, books, and newspapers, the art of public writing and speech leads finally to socialization and universalization: “To write and to speak clearly and expressively, elegantly and suggestively, with the aim of communicating or convincing, of consuming the events that happened, or of presenting imaginary events has become the main form of human communication. We refer, in fact, to the relationship between thoughts and words, namely, to the structure of the personality.”² In the journalistic text we can speak about the “personality” of the writing, reflected by the perspective from which the subject is discussed, by the presentation of the facts, and by the journalist’s motivation.

The journalistic style attempts to make easier for the reader to receive the message. This process requires a precise and clear vocabulary, conciseness, originality, and motion. Ferreol also suggests a recursive structure, namely, a logical subject–predicate–object chain, which creates a framework for the receiver, which makes him sensible to the content. Reference points must always be used, since they are necessary for the reader in order to place the statements within the argumentation. This requires the use of some logical operators, which would emphasize the analogies, oppositions, and cause or consequence relationships. Each journalist’s personal style represents the reflection of a reality, since his/r (written or spoken) style is determined by his/r personality in the sense that personality also includes the style. Therefore, the author’s individuality has a major impact on the act of writing, although one of the imperatives of journalism is objectivity. The journalistic text “describes and interprets the extralinguistic reality within a relationship between the referential and conative function”, an approach focusing on the semantic and stylistic dimensions of this reality.³ The journalistic text creates original images about the referents. The originality of these images and of the messages they transmit depend, besides the author’s inherent inventiveness, on expressivity and clarity. The journalist must be able to create greatly suggestive images about reality. Expressivity also finds an elaborated

¹ Dorin Popa, *Genuri jurnalistiche* (Journalistic Genres) (Iași: Polirom, 2003), 154.

² Popa, *Genuri jurnalistiche*, 155.

³ Dumitru Irimia, *Introducere în stilistică* (Introduction to stylistics) (Iași: Polirom, 1999), 166.

formula, justified by the reporters' professionalism and sensibility. The journalist resorts to different stylistic (enumeration, repetition, parallelism, figures of speech) and grammatical (word order) procedures to emphasize those aspects s/he considers the most important and efficient for making the reader-receiver sensitive. S/he has the possibility to change the text in a process which corresponds to the spiritual changes experienced by the author. At the same time, the journalist must be always concerned with the correctness of his/r words and the elegance of his/r language, since not respecting the principle of clarity might lead to dubitative, or even dubious structures, which are discrediting. Logicians often operate with a distinction which is important in case of the journalistic text as well: clear concepts and obscure concepts on the one hand and distinct concepts and obscure concepts on the other hand. "An idea is clear if it is understood in a way that it is recognizable anywhere and not mistaken for any another idea."⁴ An idea is distinct if it does not contain anything unclear. These rules can be perfectly applied to journalistic texts. Writing clearly means for a journalist to avoid those obscurities which mar the material, indifferent of the exoticism or mystery conferred by these elements. Knowing his/r own thoughts and mastering the meaning of words a newspaperman has every chance to create a clear, coherent, and logical work, easy to follow, the reception happening in optimal conditions. In expression, the journalist must use the most adequate linguistic devices and must combine them according to the situation. Content, expression, and intention must be in complete conformity. The message transmitted by linguistic devices is permanently subjected to deformation, its exact reception not being guaranteed. Thus, the journalist must always check his/r statements in order to avoid contrary effects such as: prolixity (expressing a thought without a clear outline, without discipline; burying the essential elements into useless verbosity, which distracts the attention). The journalistic style accepts the norms of literary language, since it represents the concretization of the literary language in a certain activity. Nowadays, however, as new mass communication techniques have been developed, "the journalistic text is open in the present day Romanian language to suburban and even to vulgar and indecent language as well, this expressing a negative perception of the freedom of speech."⁵ This is made evident especially by the aggressive and obscene language promoted by certain lampoons, a language which, surprisingly, represents an efficient method for activating the phatic function. We explain this by the fact that

⁴ Popa, *Genuri jurnalistiche*, 157.

⁵ Irimia, *Introducere în stilistică*, 167.

the unrestrained linguistic expression represents in this case a sign of the phatic function. Dignity demands the use of words and expression permitted by the cultivated sense of language, the preference of socially acceptable phrases. For a true journalist self-respect starts with the respect for the grammatical norms in force. Coarse, trivial, and vulgar formulations are contrary to dignity. Coherent thinking, efficient formulation, as well as the clarity of presentation and argumentation ensure, besides a “healthy” text available for both poles of the communication, a balance of the social, economic, and political life, principles which are adapted to the modern ethics of journalism.

2. Writing techniques and normative grammar. The information treatment model in journalism

Sociologist Abraham Moles defines information as “the quantity of originality, novelty brought by a message.”⁶ Information is not selected randomly, but according to the *nature of the selected information*, the *channel* of transmission (written press, radio, TV), and the *type of the text* (journalistic genre) the journalist intends to use (news, report, investigation, interview, comment). Albert Kientz elaborated a general information treatment model in printed press, using the following criteria of analysis for selecting the information: the originality of the message, its intelligibility, the public’s degree of involvement, the psychological depth of the transmitted information.⁷

In journalistic practice *the originality of the message* makes the public focus their attention only on the events which contain new, current, unexpected, unusual information, which change a certain social tradition. Once the originality of the message has been established, all the information which forms the event is introduced to the text in relation to the new, original element of the message. The information describing the event will be gathered related to the originality of the information. Thus, if the information were diffused that it snowed in January, this would not be an unusual event; if, however, it snows in June, this is an unusual event.

The intelligibility of the message is the second criterion of information treatment. New as it may be, the information will not be received by the public, unless the text which contains it is written in a language accessible to the public to which it is addressed. Abstract terms, long and ambiguous sentences, complicated syntactic structures, superfluous expressions and details,

⁶ Luminița Roșca, *Producția textului jurnalistic* (The Production of Journalistic Texts) (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 47.

⁷ Ibid.

redundancy, figures of speech, clichés, connotations are to be avoided, for they greatly hinder the reader to record the information, and they make the reception more difficult. To facilitate the reception of the information and to accomplish the process of communication, the journalist must build his/r message around a nucleus of key-words which play the role of integrating factors. For example, if the information were received in this way: “Yesterday, April 24, the current year, a great tragedy happened. A truck ran into another tank car. People were screaming terrified and they could not believe their eyes...”, surely, the effect wished for would not be achieved. Unlike everyday language, the journalistic style has a particular technique, namely, some *key-words* are placed to the centre of the message. Thus the journalistic message or news will have another form: “A grave road *accident* took place yesterday, on April 24, 2000, on the Bucharest–Pitești superhighway. A truck *collided* with a tank car...”. This facilitates the reception, since in the public’s mind the entire action will be woven around the words *accident* and *collision*.

Similarly, the intelligibility of the message is conferred by: the number of words in the sentence, the simplicity of expression, the correct word choice, the logical, natural construction of the text. The journalist also analyzes the information according the *public’s involvement*; this enables him to choose the correct journalistic genre, as well as the time and the space accorded to the information by the media channel.

The fourth and last criterion of the information treatment model is the impact of the message on the public. Thus, *the psychological depth of the transmitted information* has an essential role in its reception. It has been observed that the deeper the information touches the human psyche the more probable it is that it will be remembered. Thus, references to violence, sex, and family life touch the deep strata of the human psyche. This explains why these topics are exploited by sensational press addressed to a larger public with a medium or a low educational level. This type of information is the successful key to large numbers or audiences, since the information which refers to economic, social, and political problems affects only the superficial strata of the human psyche.

The American journalism school defines news in a larger sense as the information which treats the critical situations in interhuman relationships, as well as the occurrence of some unexpected and surprising events.⁸ American journalism uses some “ingredients” of news in constructing this

⁸ Spencer Crump, *Fundamentals of Journalism* (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1974), 55.

journalistic genre and the Romanian journalism school borrows them. Thus, *spatial-temporal proximity*, as well as the presentation of some *conflicts, natural disasters* are essential conditions for raising the public's interest. Information on earthquakes, typhoons, explosions, and accidents are more eagerly received than ordinary events.

Therefore, for the efficiency of the communication process the journalist must bear in mind all these considerations. The sender/journalist must be aware of the following facts: the legibility and understanding (decoding) of a text means that it favours immediate understanding; legibility is conferred by: the number of words in the sentence, the simplicity of style, the appropriate choice of words, the logical construction of the text; an important element in considering the information value is the number of readers who will be interested in a certain topic; the longer the effect of the information lasts, the better the reception of the message is.

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