

THE SPECIFIC OF THE ROMANIAN POLITICAL LANGUAGE
IN THE SECOND HALF OF XIX CENTURY.
CASE STUDY: MIHAI EMINESCU'S POLITICAL ARTICLES

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Abstract

Our study proposes an analysis of Romanian political language in the second half of XIX century, in terms of specific discursive mechanisms, of semantic mutations that are recorded in the political vocabulary of the time, of the discrepancies that characterize verbal sign in the space of political communication. Since the press of this time plays a crucial role in the formation and distribution of the Romanian political language, we support our observations on the analysis of political articles published by Mihai Eminescu in the journalistic work of the time. Being the sign of one of the most precipitate era in the national history, Eminescu's journalism is relevant to the avatars of the Romanian political language, which was still in its infancy at the time.

Keywords: *political language, political vocabulary, Eminescu's journalistic work, semiosis.*

Rezumat

În studiul dat, ne propunem o analiză a limbajului politic românesc din cea de-a doua jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea, din prisma mecanismelor discursive specifice, a mutațiilor semantice, pe care le înregistrează vocabularul politic al vremii, a discrepanțelor ce caracterizează semnul verbal în spațiul comunicării politice. Dat fiind că presa acestei vremi joacă un rol esențial în procesul de constituire și de difuzare a limbajului politic românesc, ne sprijinim observațiile pe analiza articolelor politice, publicate de Mihai Eminescu în publicistica timpului. Semn al uneia dintre cele mai precipitate perioade din istoria națională, jurnalistică eminesciană este relevantă pentru avatarurile limbajului politic românesc, aflat încă la început de drum în epocă.

Cuvinte-cheie: *limbaj politic, vocabulary politic, lucrările jurnalistice ale lui Eminescu, semioză.*

1. Some historical considerations

The nineteenth century, especially the second half of it, marks a milestone in the historical process of the modern Romanian state formation. The revolutionary moment in 1821, with the political transformations that followed this event, especially the movements of 1848, situated in the broader context of small states attempts to earn a place on the map of modern and independent Europe, announces a period of major transformations towards modernization of the Romanian state. The years 1859 and 1877 are imposed as the reference dates in the modern history of the Romanian people: the first is the year of Small Union, in which the Romanian County and Moldova county join fates as a result of the double election of prince Alexandru Ioan Cuza, and 1877 marks the conquest of Romanian state's independence on the battlefield.

Modernization of the Romanian society is based on forms of European civilization, but an important contribution is held by the local background. No doubt that among the import forms and the local content there are numerous contradictions, so that the Romanian society in this period is discordant in many of its sides. Contradictions registered in the forms of social organization are felt in the political language used by young political class, formed in the Western schools. With the form preceding the substance, both in terms of social organization and the level of culture and civilization, there appear, inevitably, inaccuracies, discrepancies, visible in the layout of political expression, characterized by a mixture of old and new, of archaisms and neologisms designed to translate the political events of the time.

Favorite space for the expression of the political language of the time, the press of the nineteenth century reflects the political events of the time; it also constitutes an important means of spreading political ideologies and values among the population. The relatively late emergence of the Romanian political press must be interpreted in the socio-political horizon of principalities. Under the impact of political imperatives of the time and the model of European journalism, the necessity of publishing journals with political theme is felt first in Transylvania, found under foreign domination, and later in Moldova and the Romanian County. Configuring a young political class, with a growing self-awareness, showing openness towards the idea of modernity and declaring to support strongly the change side and the adoption of Western values, contribute to the establishment of a specific political language, able to reflect new economic and social realities and the history of the time. Due to distribution and access to large categories of public, the journalistic work favors the original political discourse, which is distinguished, characterized by addressing a particular theme, with a specific vocabulary and the circumvention of the pulpit rhetoric that was defining for the previous periods.

2. Political vocabulary and semantic changes in the political language of the time

Defining strictly a lexical inventory characteristic of the political language has proven to be a difficult enterprise, if not impossible, since it values lexical paradigms specific of other areas of knowledge and communication (philosophical, scientific, religious, poetic etc.). Without specifying a specialized vocabulary, the political discourse requires effort to conceptualize, describe and explain political events, and the adequacy of the speaker's expression in discursive aims. In this respect, in addition to the specific terminology (*party, propaganda, ideology, doctrine, senate, parliament, government, presidential election, anarchy, communism*, etc.), the political language borrows from the vocabulary of the fundamental language, as well as other specialized vocabularies a series of words that are endowed with

new meanings. An illustrative example is provided by terms such as *right*, *left*, *center*, *red*, *orange*, very common in colloquial language, which, once entered the political discourse, acquire a new significance, expressing political views and different ways of making politics. The movement phenomenon is bilateral, a series of specific political language terms entered, in their turn, the colloquial language: *politics*, *democracy*, *liberal*, *ideology*, etc. We notice that identity does not reside in the political language used, but in the functions they fulfill in the space of political communication: “on entendra par vocabulaire politique l'ensemble des mots et des formules élaborés non pour mettre le langage au service du réel mais aussi pour accomplir des fonctions spécifiquement politiques qui consistent à mettre le réel au service du langage, ou plutôt à mettre grâce au langage le réel au service de la politique»⁴⁸⁶.

In addition to the common fund, the political vocabulary records differences from a country to another, each political culture has its own vocabulary drafted according to the history, institutions and the social life conditions. Also, within the same geographical area, there are recorded variations of political vocabulary and word meanings according to the affinities of those who use them. Space factor joins time factor in determining lexical variation, because every era has its vocabulary structure, depending on their scale of values, showing preference for lexical structures and particular semantic meanings that basically reflect the system of beliefs which govern it. Thus, an analysis of the Romanian political vocabulary of 1848, as it is reflected by the press of the time, reveals the presence of three distinct layers with the following language: neology layer, archaism layer and the layer of terms coming from the religious vocabulary⁴⁸⁷. With Junimea generation, the political language loses the pathos specific to forty-eighters generation, losing overall religious terminology and a large number of archaisms. The era of state independence marks a fresh renewal of the Romanian political language, both at the issue level and the expression level. The political discourse is now wearing Western model marks, entering a strong process of modernization. Beyond the proliferation of some clichés at the expression level and the content level, the efforts of renewal, modernization, and political language specialization are noted in that time.

Almost all the Romanian political terminology of the nineteenth century is fixed and disseminated through periodicals. The role of media in this era is not limited to releasing neology terminology, but also to explaining it thorough a distinguished meta-discourse dimension. In this regard, noting between brackets of an older term or tracing language, adding new terms along with known synonyms, the record of detailed definitions and

⁴⁸⁶Denquin, 1997, p. 5.

⁴⁸⁷Dimitrescu, 1997, p. 15.

explanations, either in footnotes or in other places, are designed to facilitate the reader's access to the journalistic message. Receptive to innovation, the press of the time contributes to the replacement of tracing language with neology borrowing "brăul pământului" (*girdle the earth*) - replaced with the equator, "casa păstrătoare" (*house that keeps*) with the bank, "mergere înainte" (*go forward*) with progress, "stare împrejur" (*state about*) with the circumstances, etc. Gradually, heavy periphrastic formations acquire an isolated character and the speech is gaining fluency and elegance. In addition to explaining and adapting neologisms, the press of the time plays an important role in filtering regional elements, so commonly used at that time. Obvious results in this respect are visible in the second decade of the nineteenth century, when, finally, a number of archaic and regional particularities are abandoned.

3. Eminescu's political language semiosis

To provide an insight into the specific Romanian political language of modern Romania beginnings, we relied on the analysis of the political articles published by Mihai Eminescu (1850-1889) in the press of the time, being convinced that Eminescu's journalistic writing is a relevant sample of means of expression specific to the political communication of the era. Asserting himself firstly in literary creation, Eminescu has an important journalistic activity and is the main contributor, editor, and managing editor responsible for the political columns in "Albina", "Familia", "Curierul de Iași", "Timpul", "România liberă" and "Fântâna Blanduziei". However, Eminescu's journalistic work has been neglected for a long time being the subject of ideological and mystifying speculations. Later on the author's overall creation has been re-evaluated through the open dialogue on the raised issues.

Being a sign of one of the most precipitated era in the national history, Eminescu's journalistic work reflects a journalist's viewpoints related to the events and people of his time. Apart from the results of the journalistic approach, we are interested in Eminescu's political language and specific means of expression.

As a journalist, Eminescu is distinguished from his predecessors by a personal style conveyed in his texts, focusing primarily on the diachronic perspective of the facts, constantly referring to historical and biblical examples. The author relies on Romanian and foreign paremiology in the support of his arguments, making use of various objectives sources of research. Satire, irony, sarcasm, sharp expressions are constantly encountered in Eminescu's journalistic writing. It is namely this fact that makes the author one of the most vehement journalists of the time.

In an era in which the norms of the literary Romanian language are not fixed yet, Eminescu's language reflects the author's concept of language

issues and the efforts to modernize the means of expression. Analyzing the major features of the language used in articles by Eminescu, Stanciu-Istrate Maria highlights two features of it: the phenomenon of modernization or "literalization" as defined by Garabet Ibrăileanu, consisting of language orientation after the Wallachian literary forms, and modernization of the vocabulary, manifested in the author's preference for neologisms⁴⁸⁸.

Speaking of the writing practice and the exigency that the poet manifested in the composition of texts, Ioan Slavici stated: "As a writer Eminescu wasted much paper, especially since he made many corrections in the choice of words and wished to give to the print he manuscripts kept clean and legible. For example, he often wrote the articles for «Timpul» at home, read them aloud, and then re-wrote them. Before giving them to print, he read them to someone and if he wasn't satisfied with them, he re-wrote them again. There was always plenty of torn paper around his table"⁴⁸⁹. We find in the above quote an extremely rigorous Eminescu in regard to the form of the texts ready to be published.

Being addressed to a large audience, Eminescu uses in most articles a denotative language, using the basic meanings of the chosen words and where there is the danger of semantic ambiguity, the journalist formulates definitions, uses etymologies and explains concepts. We cannot ignore interference areas between publicistic and artistic language, visible in the expression of thought and figures of speech, used by the journalist in the body of articles. Contrastive analysis of poetic creations and publicistic creations reveal in this respect the existence of a common lexical fund, in addition to differences in auto reference/specific reference typical of those two creative fields.

The poetic of Eminescu's journalism, expressed in many articles, shows the journalist's preference for paremiology, for the relevant quotation, for irony as a figure of thought compelling pragmatic effects, for the cultivation of clear language, uncorrupted by the etymologist criterion or by inappropriate misuse of inadequate neologisms, and by the journalist's belief that the clarity of expressed ideas depends on the clarity of the verbal expression used. The journalistic discourse is governed by the principle of truthfulness, regardless of the repercussions of such an enterprise⁴⁹⁰.

In the polemical articles, Eminescu starts from the deconstruction of the argumentative approach of the opponent, opposing, in turns, to each of its argument for finally exposing the lack of content and material falsity⁴⁹¹. Advocating for the scientific base of the press article, Eminescu stated: "It is

⁴⁸⁸Stanciu-Istrate, 1998, p. 41.

⁴⁸⁹Slavici, 1998, p. 138.

⁴⁹⁰Eminescu, 1980, p. 292.

⁴⁹¹Vazaca, 1993, p. 10.

true that sophisms are so frequent in the newspapers that no one deserves to reveal their errors, some intentional, some unintentional which intervene in them. A sly journalistic code, of the habits of this guild of words merchants, written popular for the understanding of each would truly deserve that name that it was given by the monks in the Middle Ages to Aristotle's logic: *medicamentum mentis* ⁴⁹².

The vocal tone is primarily aimed at the form imperfections of colleagues' articles, gaps which always betray, according to journalist, the content vice. The error is often intentional, relying on the ability of manipulation and the ignorance of the reading audience. The journalists' lack of culture, politicians manipulative intentions, indifference to the language used in the articles are just some of the failings of a journalism which is still in its infancy and receives virulent criticism from the journalist.

Analyzing Eminescu's journalistic style, Dan Mănuță notes the playful spirit governing most of the articles of the journalist: "An inventory of the procedures used by Eminescu reveal the overwhelming presence of sarcasm and irony, as the absence of parody, humor and, in general, of ludic. There are dominant some forms of satire, using a sharp vocabulary, trenchant statements and bluntly assessments"⁴⁹³. An example is provided by the article "The Turk has Turned Insolent", published on the 1st of September 1876, in the "Curierul de Iași" in which the journalist satirizes the claims of the Ottoman court that the ruler of Romania celebratea with cannon fires and enlightening the ascension to throne of Abdul Hamid II: "If the sultan and vizier in the country would come together with a group of riders, that we may please us trying their best in front of us with the numerous people of Israel, then they would see their dream come true - in all corners of the street with increased font: «Great entertainment! For the first time in Romania. Today the day (that day) at 7 in the evening it will start the Almighty Abdul-Hamid and his vizier Mehmet-Rușdi most famous representation. His highness will execute the toughest games on line, accompanied by the famous vizier as a clown. Entry 50 cents». This would be the most appropriate means for the proclamation of His Turkish Majesty in public"⁴⁹⁴.

A particular feature of the articles by Eminescu is *the insert in the texts of some proverbs and popular sayings* that support the ideas and the concepts of the journalist. Recourse to paremiology, a sign of experience and popular wisdom, comes to support the argumentative approach offering color and charm to the text. Adapting its stylistic means to the specific readers, the journalist uses the popular extraction paremiology inside the pictorial

⁴⁹²Eminescu, 1985, p. 181.

⁴⁹³Mănuță, 2000, p. 28.

⁴⁹⁴Eminescu, 1980, p. 196-197.

formulation of ideas: "The Hungarians know our proverb: «Romanians never forgets» and we remember through a dream like that a Hungarian newspaper commented this proverb in the melancholy tone, knowing that accounts to check with us are not exactly clear"⁴⁹⁵.

There are not to be neglected the resources offered by other people's culture and language: "«Leben und lehen lassen» is a good German proverb explained: Live you, but leave and another to live"⁴⁹⁶ or "«The peace fruit grows in the silence tree» an Arab proverb says it nicely, somewhat applicable to today's modest attitude of the Romanian press"⁴⁹⁷.

Another aspect highlighted by reading the articles is the *constant historical figures appeal* to support the journalistic approach: Ștefan cel Mare, Mihai Viteazul, Matei Basarab, Vasile Lupu, Alexandru cel Bun, Mircea cel Bătrân compile the historical figures gallery that awaken the admiration of the journalist, also representing as many examples for contemporary. In addition to historical figures, a number of personalities of Romanian culture are mentioned in the text: Gh. Asachi, A. Pann, V. Alecsandri, N. Bălcescu, C. Negruzzi complete the representative figures gallery of Eminescu's journalistic work.

Defining means through which Eminescu builds his articles and the specific of his journalistic style, in the notes of the study the "Icoane vechi și icoane nouă", G. Călinescu makes statements that prove their viability for the entire poetic of Eminescu's journalistic work: "The skeleton of Eminescu's article is especially ideological, making part of a political system that always take place, and what it seems pamphlet is critics handled with a large verbal pictorial. The literary value of these items resides first of all in the advised manner to translate without many neologisms, in a language available to all, the great abstractions. Maiorescu had this gift. But Eminescu exceeds it a lot in regard to the form. It comes down to the village talking manner and proverbs, he gets parables, and uses figures of speech with an amazing certainty. Never were the ideas expressed in our newspaper that general so everyone has the illusion that understands it all"⁴⁹⁸. The exegete outlines in these lines one of the greatest qualities of Eminescu's journalistic style: the ability to express abstract ideas through simple words, thus facilitating the access for the readers to the text message: "The theories are strung on string empirically, are dissolved in parables, turned into theater monologue, spoken seriously and taken as a joke, with a verbal invention,

⁴⁹⁵ *idem*, p. 252.

⁴⁹⁶ Eminescu, 1989, p. 72.

⁴⁹⁷ Eminescu, 1989, p. 132.

⁴⁹⁸ Călinescu, 1976, p. 558.

with a proverbial uncanny that has something from Creangă and Anton Pann, but subtly has arrived to the complexity of cultural thinking"⁴⁹⁹.

Convicted for the used virulent language, for the hardness of the expression, for the use of invectives and degrading qualifications in the presentation of the political opponents, Eminescu responds to such criticisms in one of his articles published in the pages of "Time": "We do not choose words as they sweeten or tighten the facts, but as they cover exactly our idea. The word is but a tool to express thinking, a signal that one gives to another to awaken at the other end the same idea, and when we appear bitter, not the words, but the truth we share is bitter"⁵⁰⁰.

4. Conclusions

The specifics of the political language cultivated by the Romanian press in the nineteenth century is determined, on the one hand, by the cultural character of the language, in an age when the Romanian language rules are not yet established, and on the other hand, by the particular political reference to the social and historical context that generates the mentioned political content. The specialized literature considers the nineteenth century to be the matrix of the modern Romanian political language, but without denying the existence of early forms of discursive manifestations of the kind in the chronicles (the chronicles and royal court documents provide relevant arguments in this regard). A key role in establishing and disseminating the political language is played by the press, which is still in its infancy in the nineteenth century. Even when the stated purpose of periodicals is the development of literature and promoting cultural values, the political component skillfully mystified by the literature pages remains an important dimension of the editorial activity. It is the time when the political language is delimited by the legal-administrative one, acquiring a distinct identity. From *Asachi* and *Heliade* to Eminescu and C.A. Rosetti, the cultivated political discourse in the Romanian media pages in this era suffers spectacular mutations from terminological and thematic specialization, determining the style and the religious imagery, promoting literary rules that are absolutely necessary, and from developing specific discursive mechanisms. Such a journey bears the imprint of the influence of Western models that still do not succeed in casting shades on the stylistic matrix of the Romanian language, which sets a particular political discourse profile for that time.

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⁴⁹⁹*idem*, p. 563.

⁵⁰⁰Eminescu, 1985, p. 120-121.

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