

Linguistic representations of Romanians in the British mass-media

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Abstract: *Studiul de faţă îşi propune o abordare a reprezentărilor sociale şi politice ale românilor reflectate în presa britanică. Mai exact, studiul constă în idetificarea aspectelor naratologice specifice media (text, co-text, point of view, focalizare) dublate de o lectură socio-linguistică-pragmatică.*

Keywords: *text, co-text, point of view, focalisation*

Mass-media in general pretends to be an instrument for recording and presenting the reality, but they have transformed into a creator of reality (Bourdieu: 2007). A direct consequence of this fact lies in mass-media's capacity of structuring patters of representation and interpretation, imposing principles of vision of the world. The trust mass-media has been invested with, its "pretended" impartiality, its willingness of serving by informing their client, the "watcher", have made of them an authority. News selection (deciding on the most important topics for the day), news focus/ perspective (what is emphasized and how), news narratives (the story the news is transformed into for better and faster comprehension) are all stages in a happening's becoming a piece of news. All these elements end up in shaping up an image which has the attribute of an instantaneous mental representation and comprehension in their audience. Categorical representations are preferred to unique, multiple representations by their contribution to a process of simplification which proves beneficial for both producers and audience. By resorting to categories, news producers shorten the news content, are sure that the message is instantly understood and organise the otherwise chaotic reality. This has direct consequences on shaping up audiences' expectation, their representation of the world, and their concern about a particular topic. But none of this is possible outside the linguistic system which, in this situation and for this particular purpose, is not analysed in itself, but in relation to the social context which is actually linguistically constructed (Hall:2002). The analysis will be limited to the basic level – morphologic, syntactic, semantic and lexical, according to Van Dijk's categorisation (in Graddol and Boyd-Barrett, 1994, 26). In the light of these explanations, a research will be carried about Romanians' representation(s) in the British written mass-media. My interest lies in uncovering the categories Romanians usually fall in and at identifying and analysing the constituent components of the media narratives about Romanians. My data has been selected from national British newspapers which have been issued between 2006 (one year before Romania's becoming an EU member) and 2009. The articles have been selected from a wide range of popular British newspapers such as Daily Express, Daily Mail, The Sun, Metro, The Guardian. The choice of the newspapers is not hazardous, it is meant to cover both popular and quality newspapers in an attempt at identifying any possible differences between the two types of newspapers. To begin with, the analysis of the popular newspapers articles illustrated two hypostases for the Romanian citizens; in one of these, they are represented as non-EU citizens willing to gain access to the much-desired citizenship with a view to fleeing to foreign countries from which Great Britain seems to be a favourite destination; in the other, they have become EU citizens, having already reached their foreign destination, Great Britain. The first hypostasis is presented as an anticipated judgement of Romanians' coming to Great Britain impact when it was defined as "*the start of the problem*" in (Daily Express, February 15th 2006). Romania's becoming an EU member on the 1st of January 2007 is represented in the British popular mass-media as a rush of Romanians for leaving their country via Great Britain. The Romanians in "*hordes*" (The Sun, September 27th 2006) or "*scores*" (The Standard) or "*thousands*" "*queue*" or "*stampede*" for Great Britain. Besides the numerical reference which may be true, the use of "*hordes*" emphasizes the

uncontrolled, uncontrollable and disorganized Romanians while waiting for their permits. The progression is also visible in their waiting process which starts from “*queue*” (civilized standing in a line) to “*stampede*” (a rushing process, which presupposes disorder, chaos, pushing and fighting) which pictures Romanians as uncivilized and hasty. Described as two of the poorest countries of Europe, Romania and Bulgaria are said to have been celebrating their acceptance in EU with “*wild celebrations*” where *wild* could stand for savage (disorganized, chaotic) but also for bountiful (which contradicts the afore mentioned poverty of the countries). “*Wild celebrations*” could also stand for real joy, pleasure as Romanians are eventually freed. This perfectly matches Romanians’ description as “*desperate*” to go there (Britain) apparently for no reason since Romanians seem not to have a definite purpose when going to England as going seems to be just enough. Last but not least, the use of “*that part of the world*” (Romania) in relation to the workforce coming from Romania shows the real amount of respect “that part of the world” and the people living there should get and do get. To sum up, Romanians are desperate hordes of people who stampede to go to Great Britain. Another aspect which is worth mentioning is the fact that the possible acceptance of the two countries will give rise to a surplus of unqualified work force which is seen as a threat for the British work force. Somehow unexpectedly, the wave of Romanian immigrants is associated to the concepts of corruption and criminality which they presumably carry along since they come from countries where corruption and criminality are common. Thus, Romanian immigrants are created an a priori image of criminals and corrupted people whose presence increase the natives’ anxiety. After stirring natives’ anxiety the solution against Romanians is to limit their access to Great Britain or “*to give them gradual access*” which is favored for its positive, encouraging approach of Romanian immigrants.

The second hypostasis is far better represented because it comes as a result of Romanian immigrants already living in Great Britain and who, as “*foreseen*” in 2006, have brought along “*criminality*”. The linguistic means for representing Romanians living in Great Britain include the use of metonymies, of passive voice (not referring to Romanians who seem to be very active and always be one step ahead the police, but the police who can barely keep pace with Romanians’ inventiveness), and extreme vocabulary choices for highlighting the real dimension of Romanian criminality in England. The metonymy is a linguistic tool which consists of the voluntary inversion of all logic categories of language (e.g. a whole category by its representatives). The use of metonymy may stress the author’s particular interest in an entity, in this case, the gypsies. Metonymy narrows the semantic focus by highlighting only one aspect of an entity and ignoring its other attributes (Bonvillain: 2003). Metonymy is an extremely useful media tool since it refuses all identification of particular classes and prefers parts or representatives to stand for the entire category. The Gypsy children, Romanian criminals stand all for Romanians. The supra-ordinate use operates no semantic distinction between Gypsy children and Romanian criminals, who, although Romanian citizens indeed, do not represent all Romanians. By equating the classes of Gypsy children and Romanian criminals to the supra-ordinate Romanians, the intended effect is that of highlighting that Romanians are nothing but gypsies and criminals.

The passive is another tool that journalists resort to in their intention of highlighting that Romanian criminality can hardly be kept under control, if at all. Passive is preferred in relation to British authorities who are not blamed for their incapacity of handling the “*Romanian criminal wave*”, but who are pitied for having to confront such a well-organized and unbeatable force. For example, “*Police chiefs say the unprecedented rise in offences has left British forces swamped*” which follows the heading “*There has been an 800 per cent rise in crime carried out by Romanians*”. “*Swamp*” is preferred because it is

mostly used as a passive form, thus emphasizing the passive, helpless position of the British police force overwhelmed by the increased number of Romanian offenders. Furthermore, if while still in Romania looking for leaving for Great Britain, Romanians are “*hordes*”, in Great Britain they are organised in “*gangs*”, whereas individuals are referred to as “*gangsters*” or “*thugs*”. By analysing the definitions of the three terms where gang is “a group of criminals who work together”, a gangster is “a member of a violent group of criminals” and a thug is “a violent man”, then, Romanians are violent men who are organised in gangs and who trouble the British authorities. Gangster is preferred to pickpocket because it signals a well organised group of criminals who are hierarchically allotted positions. Furthermore, the predominant actions of Romanians are circumscribed to a criminal area; thus, they steal, milk the system, pickpocket, traffic children, smuggle, and beg.

Investigating the issue of Romanian immigrants in Great Britain in quality newspapers self-justifies since they regularly contain official opinions. The Guardian seemed to pay special attention to Romanians in relation to Romania’s joining the EU and the issue of the immigrants. In the article entitled “*What’s wrong with Bulgarians and Romanians?*” (The Guardian, November 1st, 2007) the answer comes in the very first paragraph “*What’s wrong is that they joined the EU after half a million Polish migrants rocked up to these shores.*” Both Bulgarians and Romanians seem to carry no fault since the blame is on Poland’s joining the EU three years before (thus, a historic decision which could hardly be charged on anyone). In order to strengthen this idea the article continues: “*The government does not want to see a repeat of the freedoms allowed to workers from Poland when it joined the EU in 2004.*” The article identifies a second reason for the barring of Romanian immigrants: “*But the real reason is that the government is fearful of losing its grip on immigration.*” From this, it becomes clear that irrespective of Romanians deeds and attitudes, it is mostly a political decision which hinders Romanian migrants from going to England due to some outer factors, such as the fear of the British authorities. The “*open door*” policy of the 2004 joining has now turned into “*a managed way*”, “*a reasonable way*”, “*a way that is balanced*”. Alistair Darling declared for BBC News Sunday

“We will need to consider, *along with other countries*, along with other institutions in this country, what our *requirements* are, so this is done in a *managed way*, in a way that is *reasonable*, in a way that is *balanced*. Immigration has to be carefully managed and our policy is the policy of a managed system.” [my emphasis]

The statement shows great care towards maintaining cordial foreign policy towards the two countries, Romania and Bulgaria, since no individual position is taken by Great Britain alone, indicated by “*along with other countries*”.

The ideology which is worked on and which stands at the back of each type of newspapers, be it popular or quality, is undoubtedly illustrated by the linguistic analysis of the articles. The popular newspapers, relieved of the pressure of home and foreign affairs, and mostly interested in protecting the natives’ interests and being the supporter of a nationalist discourse, have adopted a policy of culpabilization of an entire nation equating gypsy criminals to Romanians and describing Romanians as feared criminals who therefore should be banned entrance into their country. Another issue that has been noticed and may prove of any importance is that achievements of Romanians, whether singers or sports men, appear as individual stances without making any generalisation whereas infringements are generalised with the evident intention of creating a negative image which might lead to the general rejection of Romanian immigrants, but not only, by the native population.

On the other hand, quality newspapers, under the pressure of their social, political responsibility, but also of their status, deal with the issue of immigration in a politically

correct, unbiased manner trying to cover important matters for their citizens but without pressing the nationalism button. Romanians are referred to as Romanians and no distinction is made between Gypsies and Romanians and justice is demanded on behalf of all Romanians who should be given the same rights as all the other countries which joined the EU in 2004.

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