

ON SOME FEATURES OF THE LANGUAGE USED IN ITALIAN NEWSPAPERS

1. On journalism and journalese

The influence that the media, in general, and the newspapers, in particular, may have on the language used in society and vice versa is a significant and constantly changing phenomenon. This has been very visible recently, mainly because the circulation of newspapers and the number of readers have been continuously increasing. The language of newspapers addresses a wide range of people; therefore it is not an incomprehensible jargon. However, since this type of language functions in a particular way, differently from the common language, it may be called a sectorial language. The language used in newspapers illustrates all the varieties of written language: literary, technical or bureaucratic, its specificity lying in the necessity of being more expressive than the common language used on a daily basis by thousands of people:

“Il nucleo centrale della lingua dei giornali resta la più volte citata scrittura giornalistica. A motivare i modi del suo costituirsi concorrono tante esigenze inerenti al medium, quali la leggibilità (intesa non solo come chiarezza, ma anche come corrispondenza alle attese e alle abitudini del lettore) e l'economia – due fattori non sempre conciliabili-, quanto la funzione ideologica del giornale nel contesto italiano (con il prevalere di diretti interessi politici rispetto ad intenti informativi). I caratteri peculiari e più stabili della scrittura giornalistica sono riscontrabili a livello sintattico piuttosto che a quello lessicale; in questo ultimo sono dominanti l'apporto dei sottocodici, legati agli ambienti da cui proviene la notizia, o l'immissione d'innovazioni, anche individuali o di effetto, che però si bruciano presto, scomparendo o istituzionalizzandosi nel lessico comune” (Cortelazzo 2000: 49).

In addition to other types of written periodicals, newspapers represent, within the mass media, a tool for circulating written information. Although newspapers are less powerful than the radio or television due to their requiring on the part of the readers a certain level of culture and special effort for decoding information, they remain an important means of communication and guidance.

2. On the specificity of Italian newspapers

One of the most important characteristics of the Italian newspapers is the expressiveness of the statements made. Expressiveness is visible not only in the

message conveyed, but also in the format of newspaper pages, the headlines, the articles and the graphic fonts representing themselves signals of information in numerous cases. Some of the most common elements ensuring the expressiveness of the language used in Italian newspapers will be enlarged upon in the following subsections of the present paper.

2.1. Headlines in Italian newspapers

The specialists who have studied the language used in Italian newspapers have focussed particularly on *titoli* (*headlines*), which represent the strongest point of any newspaper due to their function of drawing the readers' attention. Headlines are the parts of any newspaper which are read most often; readers who want to select an article they are interested in will use the headlines to make their choice. "Building" the headlines becomes a matter of utmost importance: a significant piece of news may go unnoticed if the headline does not draw the reader's attention, while an irrelevant article may arouse one's interest strictly by means of its well-conceived headline. Written in a more visible form, headlines must express the main information within the article they introduce.

Articles in Italian newspapers imply the existence of three introductory elements:

- a) *Occhiello* usually one word which introduces the topic of the article, the event, and which contains the main information.
- b) *Titolo* (the *headline*) written in bold letters, using large fonts and making specific reference to the main topic. Since every headline is accompanied by the so-called *occhiello* and the *sommario* (*summary*), or at least by one of them, newspapers editors do not have to worry if the headline is not understood.
- c) The *sommario* (the *summary*) provides the newspaper readers with the essentials of the topic presented in the article.

Headlines are accompanied by a series of *subheadings* dividing the various sections of articles in Italian newspapers. They are clearly distinguished from the *subheadings* and the columns of the article proper in terms of the size and fonts used. Moreover, *headlines* are content marked and **striking** as the news they give is bound to catch the reader's attention e.g.: "*Auto sbanda e muore*" → *Car crashes and dies*, or "*Esce dal coma e muore*" → *Comes out of coma and dies*.

The so-called "titolisti" i.e. the people strictly in charge with writing the headlines in the Italian newspapers, are required to have and prove clarity of mind which often tends to fade away after many hours of work. Under certain circumstances, the "titolisti" may unintentionally construct humorous headlines: e.g. "*In parlamento su 315 membri siedono trenta donne*" (*Il Messaggero*, 15.03.2004) → *30 women are sitting over 315 members in the Parliament*. In some other cases, they may decide to actively involve the readership in their work by beginning the

headlines they create with an interrogative sentence: e.g.: *“Sono più fondati gli indizi che portano ai terroristi baschi o i sospetti sulla rete?”* (Il Corriere della Sera, 15.03. 2004, p. 6).

Mention should be made that a certain *headline typology* is easily traceable in the Italian newspapers. The so-called **“titoli narrativi”** (*narrative headlines*) usually begin with: *“When”* or *“There is...”*, whereas the **“titoli bipartiti”** (*two-part headlines*) imply a string of words divided by a colon, the former part of the headline mentioning the name of the person who makes the statement, and the latter the statement proper: e.g. *“Berlusconi: potrebbe capitare anche in Italia”* (Il Corriere della Sera, 13.03. 2004) → *Berlusconi: This may also happen in Italy.*

Many *informative headlines* make use of non-finite verb forms (the infinitive or the gerund) in order to give an open expressive character to the headline and to create the effect of “depersonalization”: *“Corteo unitario per dire no al terrorismo”* (Il Corriere della Sera, 15.03.2004, p. 5) → *Unanimous manifestation to say no to the terrorism.*

Last, but not least, newspaper headlines make use of **routine words** whose origin is sometimes unknown even to those who find them familiar and usual: *forzanovista, federalista, filo atlantico, migliorista.*

Instead of a conclusion, mention should be made that **newspaper headlines** and the corresponding articles are written by different people in Italy, each with their own manner of writing, of presenting the news, of communicating with the readers. However, irrespective of the author, the aim of both headlines and newspaper articles proper is to draw the readers’ attention on the piece of news presented.

2.2 On some lexical features traceable in Italian newspaper articles

The language used in newspaper articles in general is agreed to be concise in order to clearly and effectively present information, and catchy so as to draw the readers’ attention. As regards the form of newspaper articles, they are structured more like reports being less “reflective” and entailing a different use of the language, less formal and more practical. Moreover, since giving news in newspapers implies “linguistic economy” due to space restrictions, writers have to use many specific linguistic tools in order to achieve their goal. Among the lexical features characterizing the Italian newspaper articles, reference may be made to the use of abbreviations, borrowings, anglicisms, regionalisms, neologisms, etc.

Abbreviazioni (*abbreviations*) are shorter versions of common words used initially in spoken Italian and transferred in writing newspaper articles due to their brevity. Examples such as *la moto, la tele* are frequently selected by the news providers: e.g. *“la moto di Rossi è andata fuori strada”*, (Il Corriere della Sera, 15. 03. 2004, p. 35) or *“la tele di oggi...”* (Il Mattino, 5. 04.2004).

Parole comuni and **espressioni** (common words and expressions) seem to prevail in giving local news. For example, "Il figlio al lavoro come tutti i giorni: Sto male, ma non sono pentito"; "Il negozio preso di mira, il proprietario con un balzo ha preso il fucile, freddato con un proiettile, ucciso a colpi di pistola", "La città sembra essersi spaccata nel giudizio dei fatti...", "il cosiddetto fai da te?", "uno picchia con una mazza [...] l'altro infila...", "squarciare un pomeriggio" or "scaricare rabbia e paura" (Il Corriere della Sera, 15.04.2004, p. 25).

Prefissoidi (prefixes) are also recurrent in Italian newspaper articles: **sottogoverno**, **neopresidente**, **unilaterale**, **controspionaggio**, **superprotette**, "non c'è nessun **supermillionario**", "**L'europarlamento ha deciso**" (Il Mattino, 06.04.2004, p.21)

Interregionalismi (inter-regionalisms), such as *pestaggio*, *inguaiare*, *inghippo*, *scippo*, *malloppo*, *pizzicare* (arrestare), *spaccata*, *soffiata*, *palo*, *grinta* have also become popular in newspapers (Concilini 1981: 71).

Formule stereotype (linguistic stereotypes) such as: *pietoso episodio* (pitiful episode), *la brutale rapina* (the brutal robbery), *la brillante operazione* (the brilliant operation) are used in Italian newspaper articles with different purposes, the main reason being, most often, the need for technical expressions which provide a higher degree of formality to the discourse. This explains linguistic choices such as: *il ladro occulta* (not *nasconde*) *la refurtiva* → *the thief conceals* (not *hides*) *the stolen goods*, *il ladro si rende irreperibile* instead of *si sfugge all'arresto* → *the thief disappears* instead of *escapes arrest*; *la vettura entra in collisione* instead of *la vettura si scontra con un'altra*, *spesso per cause non accertate*, *talvolta sbanda sull'asfalto reso viscido* (not *bagnato*) *dalla pioggia* → *the car collides not crashes into another*, often for unestablished reasons, *occasionally one slips on the asphalt made slippery* (not *wet*) *by the rain* ; *i viaggiatori sono estratti dall'abitacolo* or from *le lamiere contorte* → *the travellers are extracted from the cockpit or from the twisted wreckage*.

Sometimes the authors of newspaper articles choose collocations such as: *personaggio chiave* (key character), *notizia bomba* (shocking news), *sciopero lampo* (unexpected strike), *problema base* (basic problem), *udienza fiume* (audience flow), *operazione vacanze* (operation holidays), or *vertenza Alfa Romeo* (Alfa Romeo litigation), *dirigente Fiat* (Fiat executive), *formato famiglia* (family format), *operazione finestra* (window operation), *dolce primavera* (sweet spring).

Prestiti dall'inglese (words borrowed from English) are also often selected in Italian newspapers. The use of English words which was once specific only to the educated people has become a norm for ordinary people, as well. Newspapers, the cinema, the radio, the television and the increase of tourism abroad turned the use of Anglicisms into a mass phenomenon in Italy. Mention should be made that numerous Anglo-American words are used in Italian with some alteration either in pronunciation or in spelling, without there being an Italian equivalent. Anglicisms such as: *best-seller*, *cocktail*, *cracker*, *jeep*, *market*, *supermarket*, *privacy*, *sex-appeal* are found on a daily basis in all Italian newspapers.

The use of Anglicisms in cases when there is an Italian equivalent may be interpreted as snobbish. Consequently, words such as: *dancing, hôtel, night-club, snack-bar* are nothing else but the more sophisticated and snobbish variants of the Italian *sala da ballo, albergo, ritrovo notturno* and *tavola calda*. Other foreign phrases in common use in Italian newspapers are: *avere delle chances, l'élite della cultura, un flash di cronaca, un volo charter, andare a un happening, fare una gaffe, subire uno stress, assistere a un meeting, fare dello shopping, perdere il self-control, fare un forfait, dichiarare forfait*.

Last, but not least, *traslati e figure retoriche* (metaphors and rhetorical figures) such as: “le questioni sono *spinose*” → the issues are *thorny*, “la ripresa politica è *drogata*”, the political recovery is “drugged” or “il carattere della decisione è *traumatica*” → the nature of the decision is “traumatic” (Il Corriere della Sera; 10. 04. 2004, p. 5) and *modi di dire* (sayings) such as: “gettare acqua e fuoco” → “throw water and fire”, “denunciano il tentativo di mettergli i bastoni fra le ruote” → “denounce the attempt of putting a spoke in the wheels” are selected in certain cases in Italian newspaper articles in order to acquire more expressivity for the readership.

To **conclude**, the need to use accessible vocabulary and the space limit imposed when writing newspaper articles may sometimes lead to errors or excessive conciseness, thus generating lack of clarity or incomprehensibility. In spite of the formal restrictions, clarity and simplicity are key elements in writing newspaper articles since information must be accessible to readers belonging to various social groups. The writer's objectivity is also very important as this element helps in maintaining the right balance between the newspapers' roles of informing and entertaining their readership.

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Corpus

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Il Mattino, 5th of April 2004, 6th of April 2004.

PARTICULARITĂȚI DE LIMBAJ ÎN ZIARE ITALIENE

Rezumat: Modul de scriere a știrilor în ziare este în principal condiționat de nevoia de a ocupa cât mai puțin spațiu și, în același timp, știrile trebuie să fie expresive și să atragă atenția cititorilor. În relația limbă comună– limbaje specializate există o serie de cuvinte, forme și structuri împrumutate din limbajul comun în limbajul ziarelor și vice-versa. În plus, anumite expresii idiomatice sunt create și diferite structuri metaforice se activează în ziare. Lucrarea de față se orientează către sistemul de propoziții folosite în mod tradițional în ziare pentru a oferi mai multă expresivitate enunțurilor regăsite în titlurile și articolele de ziare. Analiza vizează o selecție de exemple relevante din trei dintre cele mai bine cunoscute ziare din Italia: *Il Messaggero*, *Il Corriere della Sera* și *Il Mattino* publicate în intervalul martie- aprilie 2004.

Cuvinte cheie: limbaj, terminologie, vocabular, morfo-sintaxă, ziar.