

# **THE ROMANIAN PARLIAMENTARY DISCOURSE: TRADITION AND MODERNITY. A PRAGMA-RHETORICAL APPROACH**

## **1. GENERAL DATA**

*The Romanian Parliamentary Discourse: Tradition and Modernity. A Pragma-Rhetorical Approach* is an exploratory research project, included in the program *IDEAS* (code 2136/2008) and sponsored by the National Council for Scientific Research in the Higher Education System (in Romanian: CNCSIS). Directed by Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu, the research team includes five specialists, four linguists: Andra Vasilescu, Ariadna Ștefănescu, Melania Roibu, Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu, and a historian: Silviu Hariton. The team is in a permanent contact with two young political scientists: Irina Ionescu and Todor Arpad. The project started in 2009 and will be finished in 2011.

The project is dealing with the description and analysis of the evolution of the Romanian parliamentary discourse (PD) as an institutional discourse genre, from its beginnings up to the present, from an interdisciplinary perspective. Its guidelines are given by an assumption largely accepted by specialists in complementary fields (communication, PR, sociology, political sciences): politics is, almost exclusively, the domain of discourse practices in institutional settings (Chilton, Schäffner 2002: 3).

The investigation of the political discourse in general, and of the parliamentary discourse – as a subtype of the former –, is of major interest among European specialists, deeply concerned with accommodating traditions and various political discourse styles across the European Union.

A historical research of the national parliamentary discourse can result in a deeper understanding of the diversity of parliamentary practices across Europe. Moreover, it can highlight the role of the local socio-historical factors, ideologies, collective mentalities, and social psychology in building a tradition of institutional culture.

## **2. PROJECT OBJECTIVES**

**2.0.** The main objectives of the project are to highlight the complex phenomena that underlie the constitutive process of the Romanian PD and reveal the specific

patterns of the Romanian parliamentary interaction, taking into account the main acquisitions of the conceptualism, contextualism, pragma-dialectics and pragma-rhetorical analysis.

As an interdisciplinary approach of a particular discursive form, the project has content, methodological, and practical objectives.

**2.1.** Within a modern theoretical framework, the content objectives are in accordance with the current trends in the field: an integrated study of the complex relationships between discourse and society as a pathway to an in depth understanding of collective mentalities; accurate predictions on the communicative behavior of different groups in specific communicative settings. Specifically, the project has three content objectives:

(a) to examine the complex relationships between discourse, socio-political events and ideology;

(b) to identify and characterize the main stages in the evolution of the Romanian PD;

(c) to describe the institutionalizing process of the Romanian PD.

Scientific standards will be met through a close collaboration of the linguists, with specialists in history and political sciences. The task of the historian will be: to set up the main stages in the evolution of the Romanian parliamentary discourse; to select the most relevant events for each historical period; to make quantitative and qualitative analyses; to capture the way the socio-political events are reflected in discourse. Political scientists will be consulted in order to cast light upon the way social events are filtered by ideology and mapped onto discourse. The task of the linguists will be to integrate the socio-political contextual observations in the frame of the pragma-rhetorical analysis of discourse. More exactly, the linguist will deal with: aspects concerning the general structure of the parliamentary discourses (the construction and legitimating of meaning; topic management; the distinctive features of the speech acts, the observation and violation of communicative maxims; (im)politeness strategies), as well as with particular aspects which derive from the institutional goals of the parliamentary discourse (strategies of agreement and disagreement, strategies of reaching consensus, argumentative strategies, strategies of manipulation, rhetorical devices for expressing logos, ethos, pathos).

The pragma-rhetorical analysis will focus on aspects regarding the macro- and microstructural discourse levels. As far as the macrostructural level is concerned, relevant aspects are: observing or violating institutional rules, principles and constraints; discourse orientation towards agreement or disagreement, conceived as a scalar dimension along an argumentative continuum; conflict management; emotional and rational patterns of thinking; types of arguments and argumentative strategies; monological and/or dialogical discursive resources; the mechanisms of turn taking; other types of macro-acts specific to the discourse

genre under consideration. On the microstructural level, discourse controlling techniques, key-words, clichés, metadiscursive sequences, modalization, connectives, (im)politeness strategies, strategic use of parenthetical structures will be examined.

**2.2.** One of the tasks of the project is to implement a principle based methodological framework for the analysis of the parliamentary discourse that might also be applied to other types of political discourses, performed in different socio-cultural contexts. Our concern for a principled based methodology derives from the observation of the eclectic character of some analyses of the Romanian political discourses.

The study of the political discourse should be based on a flexible, interdisciplinary, and multi-layered methodology. Its main challenge is to integrate different approaches of the multifarious aspects of this type of discourse in a coherent system. Our model, which integrates a comprehensive international bibliography, might serve as a basis for further researches in related fields.

An issue of special interest is compiling and classifying a corpus, which should enable us to provide a relevant image of the average parliamentary discourse at different stages in its history.

**2.3.** The project is designed as a scientific research which also involves practical aims: to offer some valid standards for an efficient parliamentary communication. An overview of the history of the Romanian parliamentary discourse will be the basis for better understanding its present day forms of manifestation. The theoretical investigation will come with a set of explicative rules and descriptive patterns, offering some practical solutions or recommendations for all those engaged in this kind of communication (politicians, diplomats, (euro) parliamentarians, TV hosts, journalists, translators, etc.).

**2.4.** The research activity proper will be complemented with an integrative work, as well as with an activity of dissemination of partial and final results. Accordingly, a workshop with the participation of specialists from different fields (political sciences, history, communication, linguistics) will take place this year and an international colloquium on the topic *European Parliamentary Discourses: Interdisciplinary Approaches* will be organized next year.

### **3. METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS**

The research project is situated within the general theoretical paradigm of functionalism, largely represented in language sciences at present. Specifically, the research relates to corpus linguistics based on modern information technologies, which enable a higher degree of scientific objectivity in collecting and interpreting data. Our research implements too a new perspective on diachronic studies, i.e. the change of focus from the language as a system to its actualization in discourse.

The micro- and macro-structure of the PD will be correlated with the perception of the historical events, the ideology of the political parties, the relevant aspects of collective mentalities and the social psychology of the time. Accordingly, several theoretical hypotheses concerning the relationship between event, ideology and discourse will be tested. The presentation of personal and ethnic identity, as well as a typology of the discursive ethos are also important topics of our research. At the same time, an overview of the cultural features and norms of the Romanian PD will be construed.

In Romanian linguistics, this type of research is completely new. It accommodates the traditional research of the cultural national values (by investigating the speeches of some famous representatives in the Romanian Parliament: M. Kogălniceanu, I.C. Brătianu, P.P. Carp, Take Ionescu, N. Iorga, N. Filipescu, N. Titulescu etc.) with the a modern theoretical framework.

Our research is based on recent developments and widely acknowledged methodologies in the field:

- the interactional perspective on discourse, as shaped in the already classical works of E. Goffman (1959, 1974, 1981) and in the model proposed by C. Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1990, 1992, 1994, 2005);

- the analysis of the political discourse as a social practice, i.e. an exchange of ideas and opinions in a public space populated by actors who resort to certain strategies and obey the rules imposed by the communicative setting (cf. Chilton, Schäffner 2002; Charaudeau 2005, with respect to the methodology; Trognon, Larrue, 1994, as guidelines for the analysis);

- critical discourse analysis (CDA), based on a dialectical approach of the relationship between discourse and society (van Dijk 1997, 1998; Wodak, Meyer 2001; Fairclough 2002;), a method which is largely used in social sciences;

- the new directions in argumentation studies (cf. van Eemeren, Grootendorst 2004; Walton 2006; Amossy 2006);

- the theoretical investigations and the case studies on the parliamentary discourse (Ilie 1996-2006; Burkhardt, Böke 2000; Burkhardt 2003; Bayley 2004);

- some Romanian theoretical works (Sălăvăstru 1999; Beciu 2002), as well as case studies on the Romanian political discourse (Lindenbauer 2003; Metzeltin, Lindenbauer, Wochele 2005).

Both quantitative and qualitative methods will be used. The quantitative methods deal with the lexical structure of texts: key-words, frequency of their occurrences, hapax legomena, contextual occurrences, comparisons between discourse structures in different subperiods. The programs used are: Wordsmith tools (a program distributed on the web by Oxford University Press at <http://www.lexically.net/wordsmith/>) and Concordancier created at the Institute of Linguistics “Iorgu Iordan-Al. Rosetti” of the Romanian Academy. The quantitative methods use also the suggestions offered by the conceptualism of the German school of Reinhard Koselleck (Begriffsgeschichte), and by the contextualism of the

Cambridge school (Q. Skinner, J. G. A. Pocock). As for the qualitative methods, a general interactional perspective is adopted; the project provides a new and extended pragma-rhetorical model, using elements from the critical discourse analysis (CDA) and the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory (van Eemeren, Grootendorst). The diachronic perspective is introduced in order to establish the main directions and tendencies that are manifest in the evolution of the parliamentary discourse, as well as in the process of building a tradition of the Romanian parliamentary discourse.

#### 4. SHORT PRESENTATION OF THE PAPERS IN THIS ISSUE

Two articles tackle the topic of linguistic impoliteness and rudeness, which was dealt with at the International Conference of the Linguistic Politeness Research Group held in Lancaster, last summer (30 June-2 July). They were presented as papers at this conference.

Liliana Ionescu-Ruxăndoiu examines some strategies of the *in absentia* impoliteness using the data provided by the parliamentary session where the proposal of President Trajan Băsescu's suspension from office was debated.

Melania Roibu and Mihaela N. Constantinescu describe the main marks of the verbal aggressiveness in several parliamentary debates ranging from 1866 until nowadays. The focus of the paper is represented by the rhetorical devices and the insults.

Andra Vasilescu presents three case studies (parliamentary discourses given by T. Maiorescu and N. Iorga). The author aims at establishing possible correlations between stancetaking, metastance and persuasion. She identifies the presence of some culturally shared values.

Ariadna Ștefănescu's paper deals with the denominations of the concept of "Unirea Principatelor" (the bringing together of the Romanian Principalities) which covers several semantics areas (wish, feeling, interest, and sacred). The author discusses some conceptual metaphors that account for the romanticism of M. Kogălniceanu's parliamentary discourses. The speaker's attitude reveals an optimism sprung from a *wishful thinking* argumentative move, which is typical of the rhetorical tradition of that time.

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