

DYNAMICS OF QUANTIFYING EXPRESSIONS, A ROMANIAN-ENGLISH CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract: Quantity can be expressed through a series of specific structures both in Romanian and English. Apart from their standard connotations, they include a rich register of stylistic nuances which can be found in verbal and written language alike. Whether they refer to small, medium or large quantity, the expressions acquire suggestive value, giving expressiveness to the language. Their main role is to enrich communication through their metaphorical variety.

The present work aims at a comparative analysis of the quantifying structures and their role in shaping Romanian and English language.

Keywords: connotation; stylistic nuances; quantifying structures; communication.

1. Introduction

Quantity creates a rich morphological and syntactic reality and the lexical classes specialized in this semantic field include numerals, indefinite pronouns, quantifiers, degrees of intensity in adjectives and adverbs. The class also comprises various quantity-related words used as metaphors, figures of speech, approximations etc. In this regard, one of the most controversial is the indefinite pronoun *some* (*niște, ceva, câțiva, câteva*) due to the difficulty of its being included in a specific morphological class.

The specialized studies classify it as a functional element (article - weak determiner) or a lexical element (weak adjective) (Stan 2007, p. 203). Stylistically *niște* or its synonymous forms *niscăi, niscaiva*, creates pejorative or comic affects when used with a concrete or abstract noun. The ironic nuance of this determiner emerges from the following example

(1) *Cei care "prindeau bulgarii" n-o făceau ca să aște niscaiva intrigi amoroase din Balcani, ci tot pentru vreun serial sau vreun film de calitate.* (dilemaveche.ro 2020).

Sometimes, the negative meaning of *niște* results from the combination with positive nouns, used ironically as in *niște deștepti* (Graur 1977, p. 8). Apart from the indefinite amount it expresses, *niște* may have the role of an indefinite article, indefinite adjective or may provide various stylistic functions which mark admiration or irony depending on the speaker's intention.

Quantity can also be expressed by means of such prepositions as *de, din, dintre* which are widely used in partitive structures. From a semantic point of view, they indicate the separation of a smaller part from a definite whole. Compared to the preposition *dintre* which is always associated with a noun in the plural, *din* has multiple possibilities of combination with countable nouns in the singular or plural or non-countable mass or abstract nouns.

- (2) *Într-una din serile trecute l-am văzut trecând pe strada mea,*
 (3) *Puțin din talentul lui s-a transmis și fratelui meu mai mare.*

2. Collective nouns

The category of collective nouns requires a separate analysis due to their hybrid status: individual entities and mass nouns or concrete and abstract nouns. *Semantically, collective nouns are defined as lexical elements denoting entities composed of previously made up distinct parts, homogenous with each other but autonomous and heterogeneous to the whole* (Flaux Van De Velde 2000, p. 8).

They are characterized by two properties: the property of cumulative reference (e.g., one group added to another makes up a larger group). In terms of this property, the collectives are heterogeneous in nature and differ from the mass nouns which are homogeneous entities – *gold* added to *gold* form a larger quantity of the same mass. Therefore, the entity does not lose its ontological status.

Division or sub-assembly property is another semantic feature of mass nouns which separates them from individual entities. For example, a part from a *table* is no longer a *table*, whereas any part of *wine* is still part of the same mass noun. The resulting entities for both collectives and mass nouns are smaller than the whole but share the same ontological status.

The agreement with the verb is relevant insofar as it refers to the whole or to the members of the collectivity. As Du Marsais stated

Il faut observer ici une maxime importante de la grammaire, c'est que le sens est la principale règle de construction – ainsi quand on dit qu'une infinité de personnes soutiennent le verb soutiennent est au pluriel parce qu'en effet selon le sens, ce sont plusieurs personnes qui soutiennent; ainsi il n'y a rien contre la grammaire dans ces sortes de constructions...On rapporte ces constructions à une figure qu'on appelle syllepse d'autres la nomment synthèse; mais le nom ne fait rien à la chose cette figure consiste à faire la construction selon le sens plutôt, que selon les mots (1987, p. 348).

Romanian differs from English as regards the use of collective nouns. For example, the noun *familie* makes the agreement only in the singular whether the whole or the members of the whole are referred to.

- (4) *Familia mea este alcătuită din patru membri.*
 (5) *Familia mea este la petrecere.*

The same noun has a different status in English where its agreement with the verb is either in the singular or in the plural, depending on the speaker's intention

- (6) *My family is made up of four members*
 (7) *My family are at the seaside.*

As O. Jespersen asserted in his *La philosophie de la grammaire*, "It is nothing illogical or antigrammatical, but we must see the simple natural consequence of the double nature of these words" (1971, p. 270).

3. Universal quantifiers

Another category specific to the quantifying system comprises universal quantifiers: *tot*, *oricare*, *orice*, *oricat*, *fiecare*, *fiece*. *Tot* designates the whole globally and provides a quantitative estimation when it accompanies a countable or uncountable noun. This quantifier combines either with a common or a varied plural.

- (8) *Toți oamenii își părăsesc locuințele în vreme de calamitate.*
 (9) *Toate stofele de bună calitate provin din India.*

As regards the semantic values of *tot* / *toată*, they are equivalent to *întreg* / *întreagă*, although their distribution is made depending on the noun they combine with. When used with a collective entity, both adjectives have identical distribution as shown in the examples

- (10) *Toată familia a participat la un eveniment important / Întreaga familie a participat la un eveniment important.*

Oricare / *Oarecare* emphasizes the free choice between the entities of the whole

- (11) *Oricine poate vizita muzeul de artă.*

On the other hand, *oarecare* can provide a moderate intensity or an approximation as in

- (12) *...invitația pe care am adresat-o sectorului cultural, reprezintă o oarecare bătaie de joc...*(dilemaveche.ro 2010).

Without reflecting the perspective of a choice, *fiecare* designates the separative whole. It has a distributive role and agrees with the verb in the singular when placed as subject of the sentence.

- (13) *Fiecare alege ce vrea în viață.*

The possibility of combining with a plural verb is provided by its general content, in which case *fiecare* becomes a semantic equivalent of the plural word *toți* / *toate* as in the example

- (14) *În viață fiecare ne comportăm cum ne dictează conștiința.*

However, there is not such an oscillation of agreement in English for *everyone* / *everybody* which agrees with the verb only in the singular.

- (15) *Everyone explains the theory in their own way.*

4. The category of intensity

Both adjectives and adverbs have degrees of intensity with emphatic semantic values ranging from zero degree to the maximum intensity. The progressive indicates the increase of the property to the limit beyond the superlative and is known as *the degree of mobile intensity* (expressed either progressively or regressively) or *the comparative of superiority* (*tot mai*, *mereu mai*, *din ce în ce mai*) (Iordan & Robu 1978, p. 407). However, the progressive cannot be included in the comparative of superiority because it is always used without the second term of the comparison. The progressive

morphemes include semi-adverbs and semi-adverbial phrases *tot mai, mereu mai, din ce în ce*, followed by the adverb *mai* (progressive) and *mai puțin* (regressive). The idea of progression or regression in English can be expressed by various adjectives, adverbs or phrases (*growing, increasingly, the more...the more, the less...the less, sharply, upward*).

(16) *There is growing concern that America's economic recovery could be derailed by the eurozone crisis* (Sunday Times 2012).

(17) *She sounded less and less eager to return to Ireland* (collinsdictionary.com).

The superlative of indefinite pronominal adjectives is usually expressed by substituting the forms *mulți / multe* for the pronominal adjective *cât / câți / câte* and by repeating certain nouns such as *lume, rând*.

(18) *Ce ai văzut la concert? Lume și iar lume.*

(19) *Copiii se adună rânduri-rânduri.*

The superlative of quantity can also be found in the structure of collective nouns containing a plurality of identical objects.

(20) *Este ora nouă seara, iar la ușa Ministrului Sănătății robotește un furnicar de oameni* (dilemaveche.ro 2016).

There is also an affective hypercomparative (Toșa 1983, p. 187) in idioms of the type *mai mare rușinea, mai mare deranjul, mai mare mila*. The new GALR I (2008, p.159) considers them false comparisons of superiority. Instead, they are equivalent to an absolute superlative.

5. Dynamics of quantifying words in written and spoken communication

Although the quantity-related words abound in many morphological classes, the ones requiring special attention prevail in the language of the written press. They have gained considerable significance both through their semantic nuances and the impact they have on readers. In this regard, Romanian benefits from an arsenal of such words which mostly belong to the spoken register. Some of them are found in English as well, but the richness of connotations is much more prominent in Romanian.

The analysis of the Romanian language highlights a wider variety of quantifying structures, whose main role is to indicate a linguistic reality based on diversity and semantic novelty. With the exception of journalistic strategies of using impactful words, word play, noun strings, alliteration or verb changes, there are also a series of metaphors, idioms or hyperboles which reflect quantity in an expressive way. Dynamics of terminology reveals that *Languages are constantly changing and they can only work by changing* (Bally 1950, p. 18).

The new paradigm of communication has changed and extended its functions. Whether intentional or non-intentional it is an integral and essential part in understanding the written or verbal messages.

Today's communication is more based on interactivity, accessibility to various multimedia channels, unlimited possibilities and diversity of content. Its versatility created over time has given us the chance to get closer to immediate reality, to understand the flow of information better and to adapt to its continuous evolution.

However, part of the human communication has remained unchanged since people still tend to go back to past terminology and adapt it to the new social contexts. Words have preserved the same subtlety and solemnity and even if they are part of the oral register of the language, they have not ceased to surprise the reader by their force of adaptation to all types of modern discourse.

Irrespective of the form it encompasses (sounds, sign language, behavioural, visual display, computer typed messages or handwriting), communication has shaped well-defined purposes, to provide information, to express feelings, to raise awareness or to create a psychological arousal. The ordinary speaker participates voluntarily or involuntarily in the evolutionary process of language under the action of some factors which are internal or external to the linguistic phenomenon.

Words expressing quantity are frequently used both in Romanian and English and their role is to highlight the ironic intention, inappropriate for the importance of communication. The flowery communicative act prevails in the journalistic discourse and the various meanings that words acquire mark either positive or negative connotations, inaccuracy or vagueness of language.

The category of quantity comprises such words and phrases as: *avalanșă, amar, brumă, berechet, cascadă, căcălau, cu carul, copios, crâmpei, doldora, cu diumul, fluviu, cu ghiotura, gărlă, grindină, groază, maldăr, morman, munte, noian, potop, șuvoi, puzderie, torent* etc.

Their separate analysis emphasizes both a richness of stylistic nuances and the clear intention of the writer to express fully connotative meanings which reflect the objective reality. Although specific to the informal register, they are separated depending on the category they belong to. Most of them express a large quantity *avalanșă, amar, berechet, cascadă, căcălau, cu carul, copios, cu diumul, fluviu, cu ghiotura, gărlă, grindină* as opposed to the small quantity rendered by *brumă, crâmpei, iotă* etc.

The use of hyperbole in the phenomenon of quantification is easily observable and is based on various grammatical classes comprising nouns, verbs, adjectives or adverbs. This figure of speech must be understood beyond the linguistic framework and sums up the intention of the speaker and the recognition of this intention by the receiver. As the definition suggests, the hyperbole is "... une figure qui opère une transposition du réel et joue ainsi sur la perception du récepteur, dans le but – non de le tromper, mais d'amener à la vérité même et de fixer, par ce qu'il dit d'incroyable, ce qu'il faut réellement croire" (Fontanier 1977).

The role of hyperbole is to exaggerate the characteristics of different objects or situations with a view to impress the reader and this is much reflected by the use of quantifying words.

The dictionary entry for *avalanșă (avalanche)* denotes "o masă de zăpadă care se desprinde de pe coasta unui munte și se rostogolește la vale." (dexonline.ro). In addition, it acquires a metaphorical meaning suggesting a large number of objects or a high verbal flow marked by the use of many words in a short time.

(21) *În avalanșa de etichete voit jignitoare cu care detractorii referendumului... una mi s-a părut remarcabilă pentru că scoate la iveală un cusur structural al omului recent* (dilemaveche.ro 2018).

The overtly negative connotation is clear in this context, similar to

(22) *We were swamped by an avalanche of letters/phone calls / complaints,*

where the verb *swamped* emphasizes an overwhelming situation that somebody finds it difficult to cope with. The adjective and noun *amar* have both literal and metaphorical meanings "care are gustul fierii, pelinului, fig. chinuitor, trist, răutăcios" (dexonline.ro). It is also used as an interjection as in *amar de vreme!* and makes reference to a long period of time or to a large quantity. In the past, this noun phrase denoted an approximate quantity and was used with both animate and inanimate nouns.

(23) *Ce di amar di bani dau pentru vrăjbile celi ticăite a lor!* (Neculce 1963, p. 353),

(24) *Ca de atuncea din an în anu tot rău și amar de creștini și pustiire au rămas locurile pre acolo* (Neculce 1963, p. 45).

Căcălău is a colloquial word with a little rude or vulgar meaning. It refers to a large quantity of bad, useless things and is more specific to Romanian as in

(25) *În mod paradoxal, căci avem pământ căcălău...dar suntem pe unul dintre ultimele locuri din UE la productivitatea la hectar* (ziare.com 2012).

The well-known phrase *a avea timp berechet* (*to be in plenty of time*) is sometimes used ironically as highlighted by R. Zafiu's headline *Telenovele berechet* (dilemaveche.ro 2012) in which the author focuses on the viewers' propensity for colloquial language or the spoken version of a new language. The pejorative meaning of the word *sumedenie* is relevant in the following example

(26) *Într-o perioadă a imunizării prin vaccin în care prioritate au cadrele medicale, Cibulkova a reușit să fenteze legea, atrăgându-și o sumedenie de critici* (ziare.com 2021).

The noun denoting a large quantity is usually used in the singular but followed by determiners in the plural introduced by the preposition *de*. The English equivalent *lots / lots of* has the same status, with the specification that *lots of* is more informal than *a lot of* and is used before a noun in the singular or plural.

(27) *A lot of experience is needed in this field.*

(28) *There are a lot of players who need support and motivation.*

The adverbial phrases *cu duiumul*, *cu ghiotura*, *cu carul*, *cu toptanul* are mainly used as speech forms in particular geographical areas. Most of them have Turkish origin and denote a large quantity signalling an unpleasant situation or a negative connotation.

(29) *Programe cu duiumul în afara școlii i-au ținut ocupați ani în șir, zilnic: câte 4-5 ore de balet* (dilemaveche.ro 2021),

(30) *Ne revoltăm din pricina corupției la nivel înalt, dar înghițim mesaje politice care nu necesită masticare cu ghiotura* (revista22.ro 2014).

With almost the same negative connotation the adverbial phrase *cu carul* is mostly related to the idea of money and expresses the lack of limit, greed or somebody's strong desire to get rich. The English equivalent *a bomb* is used informally as shown in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary.

(31) *Some company directors make an absolute bomb.*

A similar idea is conveyed by the synonyms *doldora* and *gârlă* whose adverbial use refers to abundance or large quantity.

(32) *Institutul Matei Balș, feuda lui Streinu Cercel de 19 ani a beneficiat de bani gărlă* (revista22.ro 2016).

Derived from Slavic, Hungarian or French, the words *potop, puhoi, șuvoi, torent* etc., are widely spread in Romanian and their semantic meaning has extended to the area of excessive quantity, similar to natural phenomena that strike abundantly with an extremely destructive force. Their main role is to flourish the act of communication by exaggerating the dimension of a situation. Their English counterparts *flood, stream, torrent, volley* also belong to the register of large quantity and their semantics is as rich as in the Romanian language (*a flood of emotions / emails, a stream of work, a volley of angry questions, a torrent of abuse / criticism* etc.

(33) *Au urmat diverse etape, venite puhoi una peste alta, un asalt pestrîț și dificil de combătut, tocmai din cauza acestui amestec* (dilemaveche.ro 2020),

(34) *Coaliția de guvernare s-a destrămat în doar câteva zile, într-un torent de mesaje incoerente...* (dilemaveche.ro 2019).

6. Conclusions

Far from being an exhaustive analysis, the present study aimed to identify various ways of expressing quantity either by using the phenomenon of approximation, quantifiers, metaphors or figures of speech. Although most of these terms prevail in the spoken language, they highlight a wealth of expressive means meant to provide the reader with a diversified communicative framework. The semantic class of quantity is a complex phenomenon that remains open to further research. The connotative load of certain structures exemplifies the dynamics of language as a living organism in continuous change and adaptation to the needs of expression. All the changes occurring in language from one historical stage to another reflect a more or less creative framework that both senders and receivers of information benefit from in order to get an accurate picture of the linguistic reality.

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