Mădălina Georgiana MATEI [1]

Book Review of:

ANDRA VASILESCU, MIHAELA-VIORICA CONSTANTINESCU, ARIADNA ȘTEFĂNESCU, ȘERBAN HARTULAR, *Insights into Romanian Political Discourse*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2024, 511 p., ISBN 1-0364-1533-3

As stated in the Editorial at the outset, this volume constitutes the first comprehensive scholarly effort to examine Romanian political discourse tailored for an international readership. It analyzes a wide array of political discourse genres – including parliamentary and presidential debates, political programs, media talk-shows and ceremonial speeches, while also addressing public responses manifested through protest slogans, memes, editorials and online commentary. Laying emphasis on current discursive practices with occasional historical references, the volume fosters interdisciplinary dialogue across fields such as linguistics, communication studies, anthropology, psychology and political science.

Based on pragmadiscursive, interactional and rhetorical frameworks, the 14 chapters of the volume explore key themes such as (im)politeness,

―――――――――――――
[1]   "Transilvania" University of Brașov, ORCID: 0009-0003-9226-1450, m.matei@unitbv.ro.

consensus-conflict-aggressiveness, manipulation and discursive creativity. These are approached through detailed corpus analyses and case studies that characterize Romanian political discourse as embedded in its socio-cultural context and emphasize its uniqueness within a post-communist democratic setting.

The first article, *Impoliteness Strategies in Some Romanian Presidential Debates* authored by Liliana Ionescu Ruxăndroiu, investigates the manner in which impoliteness is used as a rhetorical strategy in the Romanian final televised presidential debates of 2004 and 2009, categorizing the candidates' use of impoliteness strategies and focusing on the manner in which the latter contribute to the construction of political ethos and public identity. The analysis relies on an interactional model of politeness, primarily informed by Terkourafi (2008), it integrates Goffman's (1959) theory of face and prioritizes the distinction between on-record and off-record strategies of impoliteness, which is tailored to appeal to all categories of voters, over the positive/negative impoliteness dichotomy. The general findings are that Romanian presidential debates are characterized by overt conflict and strategic verbal aggression as candidates consistently use impoliteness to discredit opponents while reinforcing their own political and moral authority.

The second chapter is written by Andra Vasilescu and entitled *Populism(s). The Romanian Case (2016)* puts forward a pragmatic framework for defining discursive populism with a particular focus on the interplay between (im)politeness strategies and macro-speech acts within political discourse, specifically in the political programmes of Romania's four most successful parties in the 2016 parliamentary elections. The author conceptualizes discursive populism (or first-order populism) as a communication style whereby politicians use politeness and impoliteness strategies to build in-group identity and achieve rhetoric legitimacy through rhetorical manipulation.

Ariadna Ștefănescu authors the third chapter, entitled *Reinventing the Political. (Im)politeness and Interdiscursivity in the Romanian Public Communication Sphere*, which focuses on the strategic use of (im)politeness and explores how politeness-related communicative styles manage to shape, transform or sustain political meaning. The author views impoliteness as a key discursive mechanism to the production and reconfiguration of

political discourse which is adapted to various situational contexts and communicative goals. The three interrelated macro-concepts, namely interaction, interdiscursivity and communicative style, are used to analyze not only the relationship between politics, power and (im)politeness, but also the interdiscursive negotiation that leads to the transformation of political meaning.

Anamaria Gebăilă's article entitled *Impoliteness in Forms of Address Used in Romanian Political Talk-Shows* investigates the manner in which impoliteness is constructed through forms of address in Romanian political talk-shows. Relying on politeness theory and conversational analysis, the author identifies two main strategies, *i.e.*, the use of inherently rude or informal address terms (e.g. *bă, nene*) and the use of standard forms in inappropriate or confrontational contexts. The terms of address which often shift from referential to expressive serve as tools for negotiating power and for managing face and audience involvement.

In chapter five, *Pragmatic Overtones in the Use of Evidential Markers in Present-Day Romanian Political Discourse*, Cecilia Mihaela Popescu explores evidentiality within contemporary Romanian parliamentary discourse and demonstrates that epistemic and evidential markers play a crucial rhetorical role as strategic tools for legitimizing or reinforcing political stances and for speakers to attain persuasive goals. The latter often use uncertainty or inferential expressions to discredit opponents and manipulate the audience. Sensory-perceptual evidentials, inferential evidentials or reportative evidentials substantially contribute to establishing power-dynamics, to stance-taking and to ideological persuasion, all of which are mechanisms of discursive authority in political communication.

The sixth chapter authored by Gabriela Stoica, *The Rhetoric of Patriotism in Romanian Political Discourse*, is a critical analysis of the strategic use of patriotism in contemporary Romanian political discourse. According to the author, patriotism is a key persuasive instrument which is used to construct a positive political ethos characterized by affective involvement, commitment and alignment with culturally validated values and norms. The present-day politician professes a form of politicised patriotism by performing a pathemised ethos whose ultimate goal is to align emotionally with their audience in such a way as to maximize emotional resonance, to self-promote and to gain electoral support.

Romanian Presidential and Royal Christmas Messages by Gabriela Biriș presents a pragma-rhetorical, corpus-driven analysis of 17 Romanian presidential and royal Christmas messages. The paper distinguishes between royal and presidential messages in terms of purpose, rhetoric and editorial style: royal messages tend to be more personal, empathetic and historically grounded with the aim of establishing trust and moral leadership. Presidential messages are more institutional, with references to ideology and formulaic (Meade 2021). National identity is constructed differently in the two Christmas message variants, *i.e.*, royal figures invoke shared heritage and emotional resonance (Wodak *et al.* 2009) whereas presidents lay more emphasis on present-day values and social roles. The study concludes that royal messages display a greater rhetorical richness, a good balance between *pathos* and ethos, thus being more effective in promoting social solidarity and national identity.

The intensification of verbal disagreement and aggressiveness in Romanian parliamentary discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic is the topic of Carmen Ioana Radu's article *Verbal Disagreement and Aggressiveness in Romanian Parliamentary Debates During the Pandemic Period*. The study reveals that the pandemic was a discursive catalyst, aggravating a pre-existing tendency towards verbal confrontation. The factors that fuelled the confrontation were debates on sensitive matters such as corruption or public spending, ideological aggression of far-right politicians, and the emotional pressure of widespread illness and mortality. The author states that Romanian MPs display a discursive ethos characterized by conflict, emotional manipulation and image construction. Hence, disagreement and aggressiveness become institutional mechanisms of power negotiation and legitimacy.

Adriana Costăchescu investigates the communicative strategies employed in the Romanian Parliament during a pivotal session focused on debating a motion of no confidence in her article *Conflictual Communication and repair Strategies in a Romanian Parliamentary Debate: Around a Motion of No Confidence*. The research emphasizes the prevalence of assertive, indirect and perlocutionary speech acts (*i.e.*, irony, sarcasm and insult) as the main instruments of parliamentary discourse defined as a vehicle of institutional critique as well as a strategic means to construct public ethos. The author sets her analysis within the framework of Image Repair Theory (Benoit 1995/2015) pointing out that speakers employed

various defensive strategies including bolstering, shifting blame, mitigating offensiveness, irony and caustic remarks. These verbal attacks were shaped by rhetorical devices such as proverb modification, mocking nicknames and code-switching.

Insults and Offence in Romanian Parliamentary Debates. A Metapragmatic perspective authored by Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu is a comprehensive qualitative and quantitative analysis of insults and the practice of taking or claiming offence grounded on a metapragmatic and speech act theoretical framework. The study demonstrates that within the Romanian Parliament, the strategic performance of insults and the claiming of offence contribute not only to a political image construction, but they also shift the focus from deliberation to spectacle. The ultimate goal is that of influencing the public (*i.e.*, the citizens) whose emotional response of anger or allegiance is thus triggered.

Anca Gâță in her article *Unparliamentary Language in Disguise: Information in Excess, or Overspecification as Strategic Maneuvering* analyzes the use of overspecification in parliamentary speeches. The author emphasizes that overspecification can be viewed as a covert impoliteness strategy that contributes to strategic manoeuvring so as to obtain rhetorical advantage without breaching parliamentary rules. Overspecification ultimately serves as a communicative tool for discrediting opponents and for constructing political identity.

Liliana Hoinărescu investigates the role of irony as an (im)politeness strategy in her article *Irony and (Im)politeness in Romanian Parliamentary Discourse. A Diachronic Perspective* by analyzing its sociopragmatic functions across historical and contemporary contexts. According to the author, irony was historically employed as a mitigated politeness strategy favouring rhetorical elegance to direct personal criticism. In contrast, contemporary parliamentary discourse displays a shift towards more aggressive forms of irony used as a direct impoliteness strategy to discredit adversaries. The study also addresses the emergence of gendered irony wherein female MP's are targeted through cultural stereotypes.

In the thirteenth chapter entitled "*Like Thieves in the Night*". *A Pragma-Linguistic Analysis of Protest Slogans in Romania* the authors Răzvan Săftoiu, Adrian Toader and Emanuela Tudorache examine the linguistic and cultural dimensions of protest rhetoric during the Romanian #rezist movement. Grounded on a pragma-linguistic analysis, the research explores not only the structural but also the stylistic features of protest slogans, as well as

their cultural contextualization and rhetorical efficacy. The slogans, the authors emphasize, are syntactically complex and the lexicon is selected in such a way as to trigger strong perlocutionary effects through metaphors, humour and wordplay which manage to enhance the persuasive force of the message. Lexical blending fulfils both stylistic and derogatory functions aiming at undermining the credibility of political actors by questioning their moral, intellectual and ideological integrity.

Chapter fourteen, *Romanian Memes on Controversial Policies: Visual and Verbal Strategies of Political Critique* written by Bianca Alecu focuses on a multimodal critical discourse analysis of six political memes concerning a Romanian IT tax exemption law. The analysis combines paratextual cues and elements of political discourse analysis to examine the manner in which memes construct political stances. The author identifies two main meme-making techniques, namely tagging and portrayal, which are used to represent political actors or social groups. Memes, the author postulates, are powerful instruments for expressing political sentiment, criticism and identity in this type of digital discourse.

Insights into Romanian Political Discourse is an outstanding scholarly achievement that offers an all encompassing, refined, interdisciplinary study on the intricate dynamics of Romanian political communication. Chiefly commendable is the scientific thoroughness and collaborative effort of some of the most valuable Romanian linguists whose wide array of case studies explore political debates, parliamentary interactions, festive speeches and civic protests from pragma-rhetorical, linguistic and cultural perspectives. The editors – Andra Vasilescu, Mihaela-Viorica Constantinescu, Ariadna Ștefănescu and Șerban Hartular – and contributors successfully map the uniqueness and specificity of the Romanian democracy's discourse, raising awareness of the tremendous power of discourse in the construction of political identity.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Benoit, William, 1995 [2015], *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies: A Theory of Image Restoration Strategies*, Second edition 2015, Albany, State University of New York Press.
Goffman, Erving, 1959, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Garden City/New York, Doubleday & Co.

Meade, Lynn, 2021, *Advanced Public Speaking*, University of Arkansas Open Resource Fayetteville, https://uark.pressbooks.pub/speaking/, accessed: 31 May 2025.

Terkourafi, Marina, 2008, "Toward a Unified Theory of Politeness, Impoliteness, and Rudeness", in Derek Bousfield, Miriam Locher (ed.), *Impoliteness in Language. Studies in its Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice*, Berlin/New York, Mouton de Gruyter, 45-74.

Wodak, Ruth, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl, Karin Liebhart, 2009, *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*, 2nd edition, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.

All links were verified by the editors and found to be functioning before the publication of this text in 2025.