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Use and Possible Mis-Use of Irony in Post-1989 Romania The Case of Print Media Discourse (A Pragmalinguistic Analysis)

1. Some Preliminary Post-Modern Remarks to This Study

Many contemporary scholars have treated irony as the master trope of our times. Once a possession of literary critics only, irony has in recent years become attractive to philosophers and political theorists. They have rejected the restrictive confinement of irony to rhetoric and tropology and have transplanted it from the relatively hermetic environs (tropology) into the fertile soil of philosophy.

Among post-modern “professional” ironists, irony has become an umbrella-concept for treating ideas like subject, object, representation and knowledge¹ As an originally textual trope, irony will always preserve its subversive ambiguity: it embraces parallel truths simultaneously and paradoxically (the said and the implicit). It sceptically distrusts any inducing pretence to “objectivity” of meaning or referentiality. It treats language as a medium of representation in which the referential dimension cannot be disconnected from the context of verbal action. Extrapolating things, one might say, along with post-modern philosophers, that irony is the metaphor for a historically specific mode of discursive practice: not only it undercuts the search to look for a neutral mode of linguistic representation, but it also infiltrates the ontological contexts of life. With irony there is no dogmatic, consistent meaning of reality, self, identity, etc.

The expansive gesture of installing irony as a master trope has evidenced its “political” overtones, as well. Irony is thus conceived as a strategy of deconstructing any form of authority because of its subversive effects on

traditional hierarchies and artificially enforced relations of power. It is rather this conception of irony that is functional in the study of ironic discourse in print media texts. This will consequently necessitate a re-definition of irony and of the traditional standards of news reporting deviated from the idealised transparently “objective” representation of truth and reality.

2. The Relevance of Irony to the Romanian Society and Mentality

The present study is influenced by the permissiveness of irony in contemporary thought, but only for the general idea of trying to understand the take on irony in a post-totalitarian society; this approach in itself is of course too ambitious. Even if I cannot bring exhaustive arguments (and will restrict to textual ones only), I put forward the idea that post-1989 period was a political moment of irony in Romania because of the extratextual inconsistencies of a society in transition. There was a continuous need to subvert public values and ingrained realities of the “old” totalitarian regime; there is still a need for support for the on-going change. The use of irony (with its humorous or bitter import included), rooted in the every day verbal encounters of life among Romanians and also in the media discourse, might be an expression of the “unmastered past” crisis:

Until the November 1996 presidential and parliamentary elections, post-communist Romania presented scholars of the transition with a striking paradox – the most abrupt break with the older order seemed to have resulted in its least radical transformation. Many old faces remained in power while skilfully putting on new masks (...) The social base of the Iliescu regime was primarily the part of the population emotionally and professionally linked to the economic and social structures inherited from the old regime: primarily the large industrial and ministerial bureaucracy, the former apparatchiks converted into entrepreneurs, and a group of new barons of Romania’s emerging private sector, often recruited among the former Communist Youth Union nomenklatura.

(Tismăneanu, 1997)²

There is a difference between the possible ways one might “complain” about the Romanian “ironical crisis”. The scholar’s approach displays the ironic incongruities of Romania’s transition with a detached, analytical

attitude. The scholar needs a critical consciousness in order to perceive the situational irony and then to describe it explicitly (situations are ironic when an expectation is violated or otherwise invalidated in specific ways). *Discourse irony* as manifested in the media texts builds on *situational ironies*. The journalist's intention is also to make his readers perceive and appreciate *striking paradoxes of reality*. But unlike the analyst who remains objective in his statements (the description of the ironic situation is not associated with an ironic form), the ironic journalist becomes a participant in the ironic situation as he displays it using implicit textual strategies. Consequently, he elaborates a text paying attention to the way his point of view and beliefs are reciprocated with the readers' contextual comprehension. He adds subtlety and imagination to the phrasing of his ironic utterance (the text of the news report).

Let us consider here some texts selected from the corpus in order to illustrate the way *situational irony* is discursively transformed into *textual irony* in news reports or commentaries:

Toate aceste proprietăți ("ale întregului popor") au fost transformate – prin frauduloasa constituție iliesciană – în proprietăți de stat de drept și "vândute" semnificativ singurilor cu adevărat bănoși: foștii (actualii) nomenclaturiști.

(*România Liberă* 2014/1996, p.10)

The text could have been a literal, non-ironical description of the paradoxical incompatibilities of Romanian society if the ironical parentheses had been missing. The first one – all *these properties* ("*of the whole people*") echoes the wooden language of the communist propaganda. The ironic echo rejects the communist claim of a collective propriety. Further in the text, "the whole people" will be contrasted with "nomenclatura", the only privileged part of the people having a real right of propriety. The second parenthesis – *the only really wealthy people: former (present) nomenclatura members* – openly reflects, by using such an explicit juxtaposition of antonyms: former/present, the idea that the representatives of the ruling elite are the same hard line members of the communist party. The two parentheses function as a parallel, double commentary undermining the "surface", non-parenthetical text. A general ironic message is attached: the present is very similar to the past or there is an unhappy continuation of the past into the present in spite of the official claims of revolutionary change.

Another text, quoted here just for a start, expresses the idea that the main ruling party – PDSR – is very similar to the "old" central power and

has the same dictatorship-like habits of the past; the text uses very complex textual strategies to render the ironical meaning, referring back, like an echo, to revolutionary slogans, well-known lines from communist propaganda lyrics (salaried court poets) and Romanian proverbs; all of them are ironically deviated from their original use and meaning:

Title: *Dărmănești / Ole...Ole... "banii noștri unde e?"*

Sponsorizări aruncate pe apa Troțușului și a PDSR-ului

În Lunile noiembrie-decembrie 1995, partidul ("e-n toate, e-n cele ce sunt și-n cele ce mâine vor râde la soare..." etc.) a dat indicația (prețioasă) de a fi sponsorizați viitorii săi candidați la alegerile locale din iunie '96. Zis (adică – ordonat) și făcut. Faimosul Ion Răuță, de la Sascut, a primit fonduri destinate ... serbării pomului de Crăciun. Că ... deh: omul "gospodar" își face iarna pom și vara voturi.

(*România Liberă* 2144/1997, p.3)

This text also uses, among other techniques, the ironical parentheses; the *foreground* of the text where information is provided is subverted by the *ironical underground*.

The (ironic) contrast between the pluralist forms and the lingering authoritarian methods and mentalities can be perceived and consequently described at the level of rhetorical irony in the public discourse. The ironic discourse (with its sometimes co-existing foreground and underground levels) is in a way an expression of the "rhetorical opposition" to the discourse of paternalistic official authority. So understood, irony provides consolation or escape for the disempowered, preserving a therapeutic sense of freedom under "ironic" conditions. It may equip the powerless or the dispossessed with a much-needed (still-needed) critical perspective. Ironically, this kind of "resistance through the culture of irony", contrasted with the democratic idea of freedom of expression in post-1989 România, sounds very similar to the use of irony before 1989 under the circumstances of communist dictatorship; at that time irony used to be dissident and could have been punished as subversive discourse. It was not allowed in any official print or broadcast media. The major difference is between illegitimate (before 1989) and legitimate (post-1989) use of irony. The common point is that irony continues to be a defensive form of opposition to the official discourse.

One might look here even more for an ironic tradition, for a specifically Romanian way in approaching the world (not only as an episodically strategic manifestation in the media). This can be heard among many

Romanians as a way they identify themselves as a people who “deceives” history and its hardships by intelligently using the wit of irony. Theoretically, the subject was mostly covered by the ethnic psychology representatives in the Romanian culture of the thirties.³ According to some of them, Romanian irony (rom. *zeflemea*, *bășcalie*) and the Romanian sense of humour (rom. *a face haz de necaz*) are ingredients in the paradigm of Romanian specificity, along with fatalism and passivity. One might draw some connections between these Romanian “ingredients”: the ironic and humorous self-indulgence or relaxation can be viewed as a contemplative activity of an individual who does not believe in his potential to change his life actively. There are many authors who describe the ironic worldview in its social and ideological function as a mode of escape from the active responsibilities of life.⁴

These ideas are extremely vulnerable within a cross-cultural approach where the “charge” of specificity could easily be nullified. The present study is not intended to support this idea, as the “textual” basis and the methodology are not appropriate and solid enough for generalised evaluations regarding Romanian identity.

3. A General Description of the Study

The idea of this research is to investigate the use of irony in the discourse of some very well known post-1989 daily Romanian newspapers. This is not for the sake of merely and experimentally looking for the occurrence of irony in the journalese as a trope in the tradition of “ornamental” literary style. One might come across irony excessively while reading or just leafing through Romanian daily newspapers. Therefore the reader experiences a kind of *routine irony* which he spontaneously contextualizes using his real, Romanian everyday up-dated background. Irony is symptomatically embedded in the language of news reporting or commentaries as a natural way of representing things, of approaching reality.

As a starting point, it is interesting to note and further analyse that in the print media, irony often manipulates specifically Romanian, shared stock of information to the point that the reader might have a restrictive/preferred access to the message of the text. It depends if he is an outsider or an insider. The *outside reader* (geographically, temporally or just cognitively alienated) is completely left out from the coherent message because of the impossibility of matching ironically constructed information

to a reality not sufficiently known to him. This is the case of *restrictive* or even *blocked reading*; when confronted even with a straight reader, not particularly an outsider, looking for transparent information, the text, containing news infiltrated by irony, takes the risk of being misread or incoherent. On the contrary, for the *inside reader*, the ironically constructed information maximises the message exploiting the literal, linguistic structure and matching it to details felicitously known that activate an endless series of subversive, not-explicitly manifested meanings – the case of *preferred reading*. This generally develops, by the everyday practice of reading the news, a kind of *ironic competence* on the part of the reader.

Another problem of the present study is to interpret the turn to irony in reporting news in post-1989 Romanian daylies: is it just a matter of rhetorical temporary fashion in Romanian post-totalitarian print media discourse; a way of understanding the new freedom of the press as a “democratic” reaction to the old (but still persistent) standards of (neo) communist official discourse? Or is irony, as a stylistic marker of media texts, a reflection of the existing ironic contrasts of Romanian transition society itself? Before aiming at such ultimate interpretations of irony in Romanian print media texts, I will try to describe the pragmatic mechanisms of irony, respectively to come to a way of classifying the textual or inter-textual strategies irony is based upon in a specific context in order to render specific, nevertheless endless, meanings to notified readers. As far as the texts reveal, irony is instantiated via Romanian historically grounded information that needs to be contextualized in order to get a “successful”, coherent reading of the news. I will dare to call this domestic *irony*. There will be two categories of ironic strategies in the media: 1) *the inter-textual “Romanian” archaeology of irony*; 2) *the ironic intimization*.

The corpus of the study includes print media texts selected from two main daily newspapers: *România Liberă* (*Free România*) and *Adevărul* (*The Truth*), the period restricted mostly to 1995-1996. The topics of the texts reflect mainly “domestic” occurrences of irony covering exclusively domestic news related to corruption, top officials in the government, presidency, events involving local officials or their relatives and connections.

The study will be provided with an adequate, working definition of irony in print media texts trying to accommodate some definitions of irony developed by pragmatic theorists. Irony is obviously not an ornamental trope; it is rather a perspective, a mode of discourse evaluating reality while using very specific “Romanian” background information (which

will be described in a typology). This creates a shared complicity between both writer and reader and also an in-group identity (community of similar way of thinking) through the media text. The analysis investigates how ironic strategies work and how they are linguistically and pragmatically processed in the text.

4. The Pragmatics of Media Discourse and a Textually-Aware Study of Irony

4.1. Irony and the Old / New Standards of Objectivity

Especially in the post-communist countries in Eastern Europe there used to be large discussions and controversies related to the problem of the professional quality of journalism and its adjustments to the new political developments. Immediately after 1989, when the newly-born free press tried desperately to replace the old party press, people, journalists included, complained about the imperfection of news, about the failing to report “objectively”, about party- or politically biased style similar to the old days. That was first a reaction to the governmental or state controlled policy of the media; it lasted until some of the newspapers (or television and radio stations) became economically independent and then could pursue their autonomous editorial policy. Progressively the myth of “objectivity” faded away as everybody realised that journalistic practices are always embedded and influenced by political structures and interests emerging from the broader social and political context.

According to these traditional standards of “objectivity”, irony, excessively marking the style of news reporting, would not be “allowed”; it is a subjective, biased mode of presentation designed to interfere, even in a very subtle, implicit way, with the reader’s cognitive territory. It is evidently not the same as manipulation through falsehood, the kind practised by the communist media policy in order to control every bit of the political and economic system and of the life world of individuals.⁵ Strong *manipulation* through falsehood (politically partisan journalism conveying the communist party line) prevented people to make their own truth as a means to achieve a just and free society. *Weak manipulation* through irony provides people with a half-truth or a relativized truth and

might be a way to reflect the ambiguities of a hybrid society, moving from communism to democracy.

Even if irony corresponds to the free democratisation of meaning as an alternative to the “controlled” meaning in a totalitarian society, one might say that it is still an infringement of the dogmatic canon of professional objectivity, with its stress on disinterested detachment, the separation of fact from opinion, the balancing of claim and counterclaim.⁶ Irony is obviously not among the rigorous reporting procedures because of its tendentious meaning. It adds subjective information (perspectives, thoughts, feelings) to the content of the news and it might involve individualised talent of the journalist who is no longer a mere “information distributor”. The so-called objective approach to the news cannot deal tolerantly with the use of irony in print media discourse.

4.2. Irony and the Pragmatic Hermeneutics of Print Media

Irony is only one possible strategy that contests the one-sidedness of objective meaning claimed by the traditional standards of news reporting. There are many other “biased” strategies of media textuality one might investigate to support the idea that the journalist’s interpretation of reality is inevitably subjective as reality itself is a text. Any report or coverage of reality is placed within a framework of interpretation that generates different ways of adequacy to the same real referent: the event, the situation.⁷

Because of the paradoxical contrast between what is said and what is meant (sometimes to the limit of semantic opposition), irony seems to be an extreme metaphor for the “disturbances” of meaning in news reports. It implicitly activates attitudes towards the situation reported on the part of both writer and reader. It is intentional but never explicit: the burden of subjective, “biased” comment is never exposed to open accusations of morally unacceptable bias. Irony specifically rests upon very subtle exploitations of language framed by a context in its broadest sense: beliefs, expectations, background information, relationships to other prior texts – a common stock of knowledge specific to a community. This is why irony generously articulates much more than the information stated in words and literally or passively “given” to the reader.

Irony cannot work through a fixed, literally definitive meaning in the print media text. It always needs a pragmalinguistic negotiation (emblematically called interpretation) between writer (journalist) and reader. They both contextualize the information and experience the

meaning interactionally. This is very different from the traditional model of media communication where the information is passively transmitted as a give and take and seems to be more secure/objective. In a news report, if not relevantly contextualized, irony brings forth the insecurity of incoherent or missed meaning. Whenever irony is used, the emphasis is no longer on the information itself, but on the added, subversive comment articulated implicitly in the text and meant to be deciphered by the reader.

Let us consider here a Romanian news report, selected from the corpus, stylistically marked by irony. The ironic meaning has to be understood from the very beginning as an initial 'guess', developed later in the text as a whole perspective, not as a locally lexicalized trope. Without this 'guess', the reader could face a misunderstanding of the literal in the text ⁸:

Title: *Firmă a VIP-urilor locale și centrale privatizează pe șest S.C. Postăvarul*

(...) *INTER TOUR este o mostră care ilustrează că în țara asta mai-marii zilei sunt uniți nu prin principii, ci prin interese economice. Cine se aseamănă se adună în aceeași firmă (...); alături de ei – nevestele, copiii, cumnații, verii, nepoții, prietenii. Căci unde se puteau Ei întâlni mai bine, mai intim și mai cu folos decît într-o societate comercială? Și dacă nu ei, cine? (...) Și cum să nu prospere o așa mîndrețe de firmă, înființată strategic în urmă cu doar trei luni pentru a achiziționa cît mai multe procente dintr-o mîndrețe de societate de stat? Că dacă nici șefii FPP-ului și FPS-ului nu știu ce să-și tragă în bățatură, atunci...*

(Adevărul 1573/1995, p.8)

The information summarised in the title: (approximately.) *Local and central VIP-s secretly privatise Postăvarul Company* is not augmented in the text by factual information, but by subjective information. With the exception of *Inter Tour* – the name of the privatised company – almost the whole text reproduced above represents an ironic commentary of an ironical situation: the former state companies are privatised and owned abusively by the officials and their families working in the institutions meant to organise privatisation as a newly developed form of ownership. This situation (officials having abusive economical interests and using their position in the name of democracy) is already known to the ordinary person, the potential reader of the news report. Therefore the reader anticipates the meaning of the text and accepts it as an ironically helpless commentary of the situation. The story about Postăvarul/Inter Tour company is just a pretext to fulfil the ironical expectations of the reader who has probably experienced the same reality before in his personal life

or in his previous reading experience (other similar reports in the newspaper he could have come across); this is why he is not offered verifiable extra-information (as if details are not important). The reality is commented upon using rhetorical questions and inter-textual plays upon well-known proverbs or slogans the reader is meant to recognise while sharing the ironical game. A Romanian proverb (English equivalent: *Birds of a feather flock together*) is modified and amplified ironically: (approximately.) *Birds of a feather flock together in the same company: together with them – their wives, children, brothers-in-law, cousins, nephews, friends*. The enumeration is also ironical because it makes the list exhaustive in an exaggerated way. The final overall meaning behind the text might be deciphered by the ironically competent reader as: 'nothing relevant for me as an ordinary person has changed; there are only words about privatisation, this is just in the interest of the powerful people looking for profiteering business; *they*, the privileged, are the same; this is the same old story...!'.

The text is not relevant enough at the *level* of its *direct, literal information* (there are just a few referential verifiable details – changing name of the company: Postăvarul/Inter Tour; names of governmental institutions: FPP and FPS). The reader is more receptive and is committed to the expression of an ironically *evaluative 'point-of-view'* approaching the situation described. This might be called the *ironical plottable level* of the text. It operates and is realised with actively shaping contexts of ideas, assumptions and evaluations shared by both writer and reader. The text gives minimal factual information while maximising the reader's ironical expectations.

5. Towards a Working Definition of Irony

5.1. *The Non-Applicability of the Standard Definition to Print Media Texts*

It is not the purpose of this study to go into a thorough examination of irony as a term. As the history of the concept might show, irony is sometimes too elusive and broad (the modern and post-modern meaning), sometimes too limited in its application (the rhetorical or stylistic meaning). To come to a working definition of irony as it is manifested in print media texts is

not such an easy task. The definitions listed in the dictionaries of literary terms or in traditional works of rhetoric are not of very much help.⁹ They mainly defined irony as a rhetorical device or figure of speech in which the literal meaning of a word or statement is the opposite of that intended. Many pragmatic theories on irony challenge this standard definition, as it cannot account for the diversity of ironic utterances in a natural language.

In print media texts, irony is far from being an ornamental trope used to aestheticize the sophisticated “literary” expression. On the contrary, the ironic “feeling” of the texts comes out as a natural manifestation very close to the familiarity of the everyday spoken language. Irony would be too simplistic if restricted to a semantic opposition. It is rather an implicit perception of contrasts, incongruities, and incompatibilities regarding persons, events, and ideas. The tension of the ironic contrast is based on unexpectedness as a central property and also on the associated attitude of disappointment, contempt.

The factual information in the news report might be subtly infiltrated by irony as a key-framework within which things have to be understood or relativized. Irony challenges a shift of emphasis from the “objective”, verifiable details of the news to the internal, evaluative attitude of both writer and reader. The evaluation (a critical judgement) expresses failed expectations concerning the issues discussed. For example, the following text can be hardly called a news report. It is rather an elaborated commentary using ironic variations on a main theme (the minimal factual information): Dumitru Radu Popescu, the president of the Economical Restructuring Agency (Agenția de Restructurare), failed to carry out the project meant to privatise the former state industrial enterprises. The reader is not provided with further details about the failure, so that to make his own judgements. He is only assisted by the writer to enjoy the ironic ramifications of the fact. Even if the top official was the initial ironic target, irony is finally aimed at a general impotency to organise a systematic change (a possible reminiscence of the past), in spite of the financial efforts invested in the mentioned institution:

Mare meșter la teorie, dl. Dan Dumitru Popescu, președintele Agenției de Restructurare! Expert în ale managementului, divalopmentului, marketingului, privatizaișanului și cîte și mai cîte, domnia sa e gata oricând și oricui să-i explice de unde vine și încotro se îndreaptă restructurarea, pardon, ristracciarîngul. Pentru ca, analizând la bani mărunți ce s-a făcut până acum în materie de restructurare, rezultă un bancrapsi de mai mare dragul, adică faliment total. Comandouri întregi de specialiști și pseu-

dospecialiști (...) trudesesc 25 de ore din 24 ca să pună pe roate modelul ideal de restructurare. Doar un amănunt mititel îi mai ține în loc: nu știu cu ce să înceapă. Eh, dac-ar veni vreo indicație, două, de undeva de sus, altfel ar sta lucrurile! Dar așa? Așa că mai cuminte e să așteptam nițel, până se vor restructura întreprinderile singure. Prin ce metodă? Prin falimentare, bineînțeles, că e cea mai sfântă metodă.

(Adevărul 1571/1995, p.6)

In order to be felicitously perceived as ironic, the text quoted above needs a very good knowledge of colloquial Romanian and also bits of Romanian background knowledge. These are very important elements involved in the stylistic interplay between words and context. Almost every sentence of the text is ironical; irony cannot be locally identified because it evolves in the text with every word as *an interpretative perspective*.¹⁰ The reader contextually knows that the linguistic material (everything stated literally) is not to be taken seriously, that it just implies an interpretation, sometimes counterfactual, sometimes exaggerated. The pragmatic insincerity of irony is a shared convention temporarily assumed by both writer and reader. Especially for the news text this convention is quite important. The reader is expected to discriminate (empirically) when the writer intends to inform him literally about a state of the world and when he intentionally deviates from the literal expectancy in order to imply ironical meanings.

The text can also be used to invalidate the traditional definition of irony, which is obviously not workable for this approach. According to this definition, irony is restricted to the mechanism of semantic opposition: the literal meaning is replaced by the opposite (contrary, contradictory) meaning of a sentence. The dynamics and the complexity of the print media text leave no room for such artificial semantic operations. The reader generally perceives irony globally, sometimes having ready-made expectations of irony. As a perspective, irony seems to be attached to the global text like a constantly accompanying layer of meaning undermining and at the same time preserving the literal level (the surface of the text).

In the text quoted, the first evaluative description regarding the top official: *Mare meșter la teorie (a great magister of theory)* is misread if the ironical meaning is understood as the opposite of the literal meaning. The reader is not supposed and will not apply a negative operator (*he is not a great master of theory*); on the contrary, the literal sentence is preserved. Irony is attached because of the irrelevance of being a great master of theory when expectations are different: to have been very efficient in his

work. The ironic perspective degrading the image of the top official is signalled in the text by the deteriorated phonetic transcription of technical words borrowed from English (management, development, marketing, privatisation). The caricatured transcription of technocratic jargon ridicules the useless theoretical competence of the official, his claims to implement Western privatisation contrasted with the disappointing results. At the lexical level, this contrast is expressed by stylistically hybrid combinations of words: *un bancrapsi de mai mare dragul* (approx. *an exceptional bankruptcy*) where the English word is in the neighbourhood of a Romanian idiomatic phrase. Finally the contrast between the technocratic term (*bankruptcy*) and the idiomatic phrase (*de mai mare dragul*) is ironically homogenised by the familiarity of the transcription (*bancrapsi*) which demystifies the vacuous claims of the authority. Irony is not signalled at every step of the text, but the reader will read along sharing the same perspective.

5.2. Understanding Irony – Attitude, Context, and Pretence as Essential Elements

5.2.1. Attitude – irony is not overtly signalled in the text. This is why sometimes it might be left unnoticed. As pragmatists say, the ironic perlocutionary effect cannot be associated with a performative explicating the verbal action: *I ironies (you) that... Whenever a speaker/writer uses an ironic “label” or formula, like “it is ironic that”, “this is an irony”, “isn’t it ironic that...?” etc., that is a didactic description of an ironic fact, situation. It is not an ironic utterance and consequently it will not trigger any corresponding attitude or effect on the part of the hearer/reader.

In spite of these pragmatic restrictions programmatically leaving irony as totally implicit (always to be detected), the competent reader recognises the ironic intention and in the end, after completing his reading, he is left with a certain (“biased”) attitude towards the reality represented in the text. In his pragmatic account of irony, Grice¹¹ assumes the importance of the “attitude” element as a key component: *irony is intimately connected with the expression of a feeling, attitude, or evaluation. I cannot say something ironically unless what I say is intended to reflect a hostile or derogatory judgement or a feeling such as indignation or contempt.* Other authors argued that *negativity* and *disappointment* might not be an intrinsic

property of the ironic form. Irony can fulfil other communicative goals: to emphasise a point, to be humorous, to express emotion, to provoke a reaction, to get attention, to manage the conversation, to dissemble.¹² Irrespectively of the feeling expressed, the recognition of the ironic attitude is generally equated to the understanding of ironic meaning itself. Theoretically this poses the question of how the respective attitude is derived from the utterance, especially that it is not openly marked in a text.

The negativity of irony is reflected in the print media texts selected for this study, but it lies behind the details as an ultimate implicit paraphrase. Even when the ironic strategies are humorously playful, the attitude expressed calls attention to the *discrepancy* between *what is* and *what should have been* (failed expectancy) or *what is pretended* and *what is* (conflict between appearance and essence). As I suggested in the beginning, quoting a scholarly study on România's democratisation, this contrast is first contingent and refers to the strange continuities with the old authoritarian regime, in many respects more marked in România than in other European countries. The ironic journalist points to ironic fragments of reality the reader can easily recognise as incompatible with legitimate expectations. Present realities are often ironically commented upon using old clichés to suggest similarities – present=past:

Title: *La capitolul deplasări în străinătate Parlamentul și-a depășit planul: 12 ani în 3.*

*Nu contează că de multe ori cei ce pleacă nu sunt în stare să schimbe nici măcar două vorbe într-o limbă străină cu interlocutorii sau că preferă să facă târguieli, decât să participe la toate acțiunile oficiale. Bineînțeles, ei fac toate astea **în interesul țării!***

(Adevărul 1574/1995, p.2)

The title of the news report suggests the ironical reading of the entire text because of the syntagm a *depășii planul*, very common in the official documents of the communist centralised economy obsessed with records; the formula *în interesul țării* (in bold letters in the end of the text quoted) also reminds of the communist demagoguery, but ironically not as a delayed echo. The present officials might have motivated their frequent travels abroad using the same empty formula (immediate echo of official statements). The writer pretends that this is a well-known doubtless truth: *Of course, they do all these in the interest of the country!*

The negativity of irony is sometimes taken to a *sarcastic extreme*; in the following text the abusive familiarity is meant to express derision aimed at top officials of the day:

Statisticile vĂcĂroidiene au ceva omenesc Ăn ele? Omul vrea salariu, casĂ și pĂpicĂ. VĂcĂ și ai sĂi au alte prioritĂți. A, cĂ joacĂ și ei tenis, cĂ scuipĂ și ei semințe Ăn Giulești, cĂ fac și ei planul la vreo bodegĂ?

(AdevĂrul 1571/1995, p.3)

The name of the Prime Minister, VĂcĂroiu, is ironically played upon twice in the text: as a derived adjective having a suffix with pejorative connotations – *vĂcĂroidiene* – and as a short name simulating a familiar way of addressing – *VĂcĂ*. The group of the governmental leaders – *VĂcĂ și ai sĂi* (*VĂcĂ and his pals*) – is ironically designated by the personal pronoun *ei* (*they*) as if *they* are completely separated from the ordinary people. The writer ironically pretends a condescending attitude towards *their* “priorities” alluded in the text: they play tennis, they go to the football matches, they drink a lot. The writer uses very familiar linguistic expressions in order to pretend that he assumes the point of view of an ordinary person, not of a journalist who “technically” presents information.

Negativity is the ultimate attitude of irony. But irony is always ambivalent, so it can express the *negative* judgement using *humorous* strategies. One might come across frivolous corresponding effects at the surface of the text. These are meant to be enjoyed by the readers of the print media text. The *entertainment effects* associated with irony are not negligible. At first sight they shift the interest of the news text from information to “*stylistic*” pleasures socialised between writer and reader by means of the newspaper. The text quoted below comments upon the results of the 1996 presidential race when Iliescu lost the elections against Constantinescu. The writer’s “*ironic triumph*” is expressed allegorically using an initial script of a religious ceremony for the dead (the losers). He refers to former political leaders as saints having sacrificed themselves for Romanians’ better lives. Using an ironically religious vocabulary, the writer alludes to acts of corruption and to powerful people protected by Iliescu regime; but the negative attitude takes the form of a *playful* rejection emphasising the “*fun*” of the news:

Title: *Ion Evlaviosul și “pedeserii” le spun romĂnilor un pios “La revedere”!*
 (...) “*mult prea iubitul și stimatul*” ION EVLAVIOSUL, Ănconjurat de robii lui Dumnezeu, Sf. ucenic NĂSTASE, Sf. ucenic MELEȘCANU, Sf. ucenic HREBENCIUC și ceilalți “ucenici”, “mucenici”, “sfinte” și “pravoslavnice” care de 7 ani tot postesc și se tot roagĂ – Ăn sĂrĂcie și cucernicie – pentru bietul romĂn. Timp Ăn care au apĂrut și noi sfinte locașuri de cult, precum “Schitul” INTER, “MĂnĂstirea” LIDO și “Capela” REX etc., a celor 3 CRAI DE LA RĂSĂRIT, sfinții GEORGICĂ, VIORICA și VALENTIN.

(RomĂnia LiberĂ 2024/1996, p.24)

The negative import of irony cannot be absolutely generalised in the print media texts. The stylistic or textual strategies (humorously inventive) of irony may function as a surface weakening disguise for criticism and derogatory attitudes.

5.2.2. Context – Pragmatic theories of irony stress the importance of context in processing the ironic intention. Irony is no longer a matter of semantic deviance based on the inversion between a literal and a figurative meaning. It is rather a particular case of pragmatic meaning exploiting the context of use in a crucial way.¹³ In the print media text there is no co-occurring situational context; the writer and the reader are distanced from each other (physically and temporally) in a quasi-interaction mediated by the newspaper. The context-dependency of irony is consequently expressed only by their textual and extra-textual common ground – what they share as mutual beliefs, mutual knowledge and mutual suppositions regarding “Romanian stock” of information. For the analyst, this is quite difficult to trace and to isolate from the whole of the text, while for the competent reader is just a matter of spontaneous process of sense-making. The journalist is ironic only to certain readers who share specific knowledge against which they can make sense of irony as a negotiated meaning. Irony will consequently run the risk of being temporarily recognised, unlike the transparent information which is “forever printed”. Any remote reading might affect the perception of irony as readers cannot be in complete and absolute knowledge of all the possible contexts of their social, political, discursive environment.

Once the basis of common ground established or at least anticipated (as an ironic assumption), the ironic writer can echo, allude to, evoke or pretend different thoughts, expectations, situations, prior texts or fragments mentioned and at the same time rejected in the ironical text. The reader is supposed to construct a corresponding meaning and to recognise the more involving dimension of the textual potential, making his own ironic connections.

Some further examples can illustrate how context – as shared material – helps the writer to express his ironical intention and the reader to recognise it and consequently to project the negotiated ironic meaning. A very good knowledge of Romanian is also needed as a pre-condition for activating the ironic message. In Romanian print media texts where irony occurs, irony is textually manifested exploiting the colloquial possibilities offered at hand by the ordinary language spoken by the community.

The writer sometimes assists his reader with a meta-commentary of the ironic news report, as in the following text whose ironic title is a modified quotation glossed by the writer to refresh the memory of his reader:

Title: *Victoraș, să ai grijă de “Motorola”*

(...) *Ne-au rămas din Elena Ceaușescu două replici nemuritoare: “Victoraș, să ai grijă de copiii!” (...) și “Mă copii, sunteți ca copiii mei!” (...) Cum a avut grijă dl. general de copiii din prima exclamație, se cam știe. Înșă cum a avut grijă de copiii-soldați dintr-a doua, vorba lui Minulescu, noi nu vom ști-o, poate, niciodată.*

(Ziua 864/1997, p.1)

The text refers to a scandal about a dirty business involving one of Ceaușescu’s former army generals, Victor Athanasie Stănculescu. In order to understand the title only, the reader needs a lot of contextual information. He must know the general’s history: he used to be very devoted to Ceaușescu, but he finally had an ambiguous attitude. Anticipating Ceaușescu’s fall, he pretended he had a broken leg to avoid involvement in the events. Nevertheless, Ceaușescu and his wife trusted him and, before they were sent to death, they asked him to take care of their children. Victor Stănculescu was then addressed by Elena Ceaușescu with a short name, *Victoraș*, a diminutive suggesting intimacy. Romanians having witnessed the 1989 events generally have a distanced memory of the “treacherous” general, now a prosperous businessman. Elena Ceaușescu’s words – *Victoraș, take care of the children!* – were also very memorable and often ridiculed in the press (Elena Ceaușescu displaying a motherly protective attitude ironically contrasted with her standard image). The title of the present news report incorporates the original text into the context of the scandal about Motorola equipment illegally sold to the army by the former general’s company. The ironic title mixes the old information (history of the modified quotation) with the newly given information about the dirty business. The writer helps his reader to find adequate references for the understanding of his ironic commentary on the news. He draws an ironical conclusion – that one will never know the truth about this business, as it always happens when the “general” is involved or when somebody important is involved (ironical distrust in the Romanian system of justice). In order to express this conclusion, the writer uses somebody else’s words to avoid responsibility. He quotes a Romanian poet’s famous line – *noi nu vom ști-o, poate, niciodată* (we will not perhaps ever know) – and also

helps the reader identify the quotation, explicitly pointing to the name of the poet as a source of ironically pretended authority.

Readers are not always explicitly assisted in contextualising the shared information needed in the processing of the ironic meaning. Most of the times, bits of common ground are imperceptibly amalgamated in the text. The text (fragment) that follows represents a news comment on Iliescu's imminent failure to win the 1996 presidential elections (a comment inspired by the TV talk show broadcast a night before the elections, involving all the candidates for presidency):

Title: *Săracu' dom' președinte!*

Jur că văzându-l pe președinte, ca un pui de găină speriat între 15 "huligani" (...) mi s-a făcut așa o milă că am înțeles-o până și pe țața Leana din Orbești care, tot din milă creștinească, l-ar vrea pe domnul Iliescu președinte pe viață. Da' să știți că mi-a plăcut cum se-mbătoșa președintele (încă) în exercițiu, demonstrând cu fapta că dezastrul nu e deloc dezastru, că ce a fost mai greu a trecut, c-așa și pe dincolo, taman pe dos decât încercam cei 15 destabilizatori ai liniștii naționale să convingă poporul. (...) Pot spune că înțeleg și de ce tuna și fulgera președintele (încă) în exercițiu când îl contesta vreun eșantion nereprezentativ de golani sau măi animalelor. Și cum să nu se irascibilizeze dom' președinte (încă) în exercițiu dacă în democrația asta nenorocită nu mai ai tu parte de o unanimitate ca lumea, de o realegere vibrantă la al III-lea... mandat, de o adeziune a întregului popor?

(România Liberă 2020/1996, p.10)

The text displays a complexity of ironic strategies. But only some of them are necessarily based upon contextual background knowledge. The reader should have previous information about the president's discursive history in order to understand why the writer ironically calls the other 15 candidates *huligani* (*hooligans*) or *destabilizatori ai liniștii naționale* (*destabilizers of national tranquillity*). This is how the president himself used to call ordinary people showing their democratic opposition to the Iliescu neo-communist regime during the famous April-June 1990 demonstration (finally repressed by the miners). Among some Romanians, the words have become ironical synonyms (emotionally charged) for any form of democratic opposition or criticism. The writer ironically sanctions the president's verbal outbursts. He refers back to another famous phrase – *măi animalule* (*you animal*) – Iliescu once used to address an independent journalist. This phrase is ironically transformed in the text from an exclamative into a noun used in the plural: (approx.) *I can say that I can*

understand now why the president (still) in power over-reacts when he is contested by an insignificant group of hooligans and you animals.

In the last section of the text quoted, the writer ironically implies that Iliescu might be a substitute for Ceaușescu. He pretends that together with the irritable *Poor Mr. President* he longs for the old days when presidents were elected for a lifetime, when everybody voted unanimously. The reader should recognise that the writer ironically complains about the *wicked democracy* assuming somebody else's voice, not his own. The script of the old system of communist elections is invoked; here the reader is supposed to identify and then automatically reject the over-used formulae of collective agreement: *unanimitate, realegere, adeziune* (*unanimity, re-election, acceptance*). Apart from these discursive memories of the past, the reader should have the contextual information that in 1996 Iliescu was said to candidate abusively for a third presidential mandate. This is why an ironical detail is operated in the text of the original cliché: in the alluded rhymed slogan *Ceaușescu reales la al XIII-lea congres* (*Ceaușescu re-elected for the 13 party congress*), there is a change inserted: *realegere vibrantă la al III-leamandat* (*a vibrant re-election for the 3rd... mandate*). A series of parallel terms can be coupled to suggest ironical similarities: Ceaușescu/Iliescu; XIIIth congress/IIIrd mandate. Without the memory of the "distant" slogan, irony will be partially recovered using the immediately accessible information (third mandate). The same text has *gradual ironic readings* for differently informed readers. This might be empirically quantified on a scale of *ironic readability*: from the strongest meaning (for a reader as informed and ironically competent as the writer) to the weakest one or even to the "dead irony» point. When the "no irony at all" effect happens, the reader is still confronted with a miss-match between text and context, but he cannot speculate as to the specific way in which the writer initially intended his text. The reader might be very well aware that the text is more-than-a description, perhaps a critical commentary. The missing context will instead prevent him from precisely assessing the degree and the focus of criticism attached to those things in the situation (persons, circumstances, actions) which the writer finds unreasonable, unsatisfactory, intolerable or laughable.

5.2.3. Pretence is another structural element that might be involved in certain types of irony. For example, in the last section of the text analysed, the writer rhetorically complains about the "wicked democracy"; he pretends compassion for the "poor Mr. President" and voices his thoughts. The ironic pretender interchanges his identity with his ironical target.

Traditional definitions of irony mention false naivety and false ignorance as attitudes the ironist might expose to dissimulate his intention or to manipulate his victim. Pragmatic theories (Grice 1975; Clark and Gerrig 1984) sometimes attribute an essential role to the *functional pretence* or *make-believe* intended to be discovered instead of the opposite of what the ironist thinks or expresses literally.

Grice tries to account for why listeners go beyond the meaning of what is said in cases of irony. According to his theory on conversation,¹⁴ participants in a conversation observe the co-operative principle. Listeners assume that speakers will be truthful and informative. When a speaker says something that is patently untrue (and when both speaker and listener know this and know that each other know this), then a listener can make one of two interpretations: either the speaker is violating the co-operative principle or he is *deliberately* trying to communicate something by *appearing* to violate that principle. In doing so, he implicitly invites the listener to make an inference and to look for a communicative intent (conversational implication) behind the apparent violation.

In their pretence theory of irony, Clark and Gerrig¹⁵ expand Grice's later remarks: *To be ironical is, among other things, to pretend (as the etymology suggests), and while one wants the pretence to be recognised as such, to announce it as pretence would spoil the effect.*¹⁶ The ironic pretence refers back to the Greek *eironeia*, meaning "dissembling, ignorance purposely affected". Clark and Gerrig's psychological account, inspired by Grice, is a model for the mental processes by which irony is designed and recognised. They think that pretence is a notion powerful enough to solve the most obvious problem about ironic utterances – that *speakers are not really saying what they appear to be saying*. Ironists can pretend to use the words of any person or type of person they wish (like actors do), just as long as they can get the intended audience to recognise the pretence and, thereby, their attitude toward the speaker, audience, and sentiment of that pretence.¹⁷ Irony-pretence recognition is essentially conditioned by the relevant common ground/shared understanding already established or developed between speaker and addressee.

There are many news texts in the selected corpus that (fragmentarily) display irony as pretence. Readers are "invited" to enter the make-believe world of the writer as if they are initiated, as if there is an inner circle, a secret intimacy set up between them. This is not important only from a functional point of view regarding irony; it is also important for the relationship between writer and reader as it is sociologically constructed

through the newspaper. The ironic writer selects that category of readers who share the same background knowledge, but also the same perspective (political attitude?) regarding the persons, situations described. Irony, as a biased strategy of media texts, engages the readers in the inner circle of consensual meaning.

Strategies of pretence recognition may be technically very different. In most of the texts, there is a *gliding effect* from the *straight information* to its ironic commentary, from *serious to non-serious* discourse. The entering into the make-believe world of implicit meaning may be signalled by:

– statements that are obviously counterfactual, that are not at all reasonably acceptable irrespectively of context

The following illustration is an ironic comment of Iliescu's electoral slogan for the 1996 presidential position – *Cinstea e puterea lui/ Votați Ion Iliescu* (approx. *Honesty is his power/ Vote Ion Iliescu*). The journalist rejects the possible implicit meanings of the text: if honesty is what defines Iliescu so specifically against other candidates, that means that others are not honest. The text ironically radicalises this insulting proposition, developing on the idea with further arguments;

Numai Ion Iliescu este inocent. El singurul, dincolo de orice critică sau bănuială. O țară întregă de răi, proști și leneși, doar șeful statului bun, deștept și harnic.

(*România Liberă* 2017/1996, p.24)

The writer evidently pretends his own words. The truth of those words would be acceptable only in a fictitious world of possible meanings: (approx. *Only Ion Iliescu is innocent. He alone, beyond any criticism or doubt. A whole country of bad, stupid and lazy people, only the head of the state kind, intelligent and hardworking.*)

– statements that contextually are not acceptable (the reader is expected to know that context and to evaluate the proposition correctly – as pretended):

Casa baronului Neumann din Arad a fost grădiniță pentru copiii tovarășilor PCR, apoi a devenit casă de oaspeți, în ea trăgând cu plăcere până și fostul dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, căruia i-au plăcut rămășițele burgheze.

(*România Liberă* 2148/1997, p.10)

Only the last section of the text (underlined) is a case of ironically pretended meaning. The first part is a literal description of a situational

irony: elegant houses were once nationalised by communists for the sake of collective propriety and then put by them under their own control and disguised ownership (Baron Neumann's house from Arad was transformed into a kindergarten for the children of communist hard line party members and then into a guest house exclusively for communist top officials). The underlined words cannot be literally taken by the reader who knows that Ceaușescu used to profess the continuous struggle against any "bourgeois remainders" endangering the triumph of socialism; nevertheless this did not prevent him from enjoying the bourgeois style of life. The pretended sentence challenges a shift of meaning for the syntagm *rămășițele burgheze* (*bourgeois remainders*): initially that was used in communist speeches to refer to people (meant to be exterminated for being enemies of communism), while here there is a pretended referent associated with the expression – material things formerly owned by middle-class people and then abusively used by the "new elite" of the country.

– statements in which one can find fragments at the same time quoted/echoed and pretended; the quotation marks signal the pretence:

Timp de șapte ani, Ion Iliescu a făcut tot ce i-a stat în putință pentru a păstra, la toate nivelurile, o conducere monocoloră, cu el președinte și partidul său la guvernare, iar acum brusc l-a găsit dorul de "contra-ponderi" și "coabitări".

(*România Liberă* 2015 /1996, p.3)

The writer pretends somebody else's pretence: Iliescu himself, all of a sudden speaking of "counter-balances" and "cohabitations" between political forces, is not very credible as he used to preserve, as the text states literally, a monochrome leadership. The word *acum* (*now*) is to be contextually understood as "now, when he is on the point of losing his power completely"; so the writer ironies Iliescu's opportunistic policy under extreme circumstances and also the showy formulas (*counter-balances*, *cohabitations*) used by him to solve the situation.

– statements that use conventionalised markers signalling that the words given in the text are to be taken as pretended/ non-serious. In the media texts used in the corpus, these lexicalised markers are generally used to report a top official's words and to render them ironically:

Am reținut din conferința de presă a lui Iliescu și din răspunsurile la întrebările ziariștilor: (...) "Noi am preferat să pierdem decât să promitem ceea ce nu putem îndeplini" (ca să vezi, neprihăniții!).

(*România Liberă* 2031/1996, p.3)

The writer first quotes Iliescu's statement in direct speech as a form of impartial reproduction of words: (approx.) *We preferred losing to promising what we cannot achieve*. Then a short parenthetical comment is added that in itself is *ironically pretended* (because of the marker *ca să vezi*): *ca să vezi, neprihăniții!* (approx. *as you can see, how pure they are!*); this comment (pretended admiration) successively projects an ironical reading of the quoted matter. It functions as an ironic feedback of the original quotation. The parenthesis immediately following Iliescu's words short-circuits the credibility of the attitude attached to those words and also their implication: 'we preferred losing to promising unlike our rivals who won but dishonestly promised what they could not achieve'. There are two levels of ironic pretence in this text: 1) first order pretence – the parenthetical comment suggesting pretended admiration signalled by the marker *ca să vezi*; 2) second order pretence – Iliescu's original words are under suspicion of being infelicitously pretended. He just put on that attitude to cope with the situation.

Another Romanian "pretending marker" – *vezi Doamne* (approx. equivalents *so to speak, ostensibly, seemingly*) – is used in the following text and it also accompanies the news report of an official's public statement. It is worth noticing that this marker is mostly used in colloquial Romanian to relativise the credibility of somebody's words, to cast doubts about the real intentions of one's verbal action.

Title: *Cine-i preocupat de soarta regelui!*

Neobositul parlamentar, aflat acum în opoziție și grijuliu să nu rămână în anonim, se arată preocupat de soarta Regelui Mihai I, pe care are grijă să-l plaseze în același cârd cu Ion Iliescu și Ion Gh. Maurer! Și, vezi Doamne, susține dl. senator, că acestora ar trebui "să li să dea" locuință și pensie corespunzătoare pentru calitatea de foști șefi ai statului român.

(*România Liberă* 2143/1997, p.2)

In this text it is contextually used to ridicule the senator's idea: to place the former king among communist leaders; to suggest to the Romanian authorities that these leaders should "be given" a house and a pension as a reward for having held the highest position in the political hierarchy of the state. The writer pretends that he presents the senator's words; in fact, his intention is to ridicule those words. The reader is warned about the ironic pretence from the very beginning. The title – *Who is worried about the King's destiny!* – rhetorically uses the form of a *wh-* question for an exclamative utterance. This leaves room for an inference challenging the reader's curiosity: somebody who is not expected to be worried about the

King's destiny is nevertheless worried about it. The mental anticipation of a contingent irony frames the reading of the text. The reader will consequently know to interpret the evaluative modifiers ironically : *neobositul*, *grijuliu* are adjectives already connoted with the ironic distance, especially placed before the nouns they modify. In the end of the text (which is its ironic climax), the marker *-vezi Doamne* – helps the writer to present the MP's ideas and at the same time to express his attitude towards the stupidity of those ideas.

The texts under discussion can show that pretence may be an essential element in the functioning of irony, but it cannot be generalised across all types of irony. Even within one text, one might come across different strategies of irony – which is very discouraging for those accounts trying to formulate a universal definition of irony; and also for interpreters of “echological” irony (irony manifested in the environment of real texts – as opposed to fabricated texts).

6. Strategies of Ironic Inventiveness in Romanian Print Media Texts

6.1. The Inter-Textual “Romanian” Archaeology of Irony

A compact reading of Romanian print media texts displaying irony might give the feeling that the reader is trapped in a “*vernacular inter-textuality*”. The writer often intends to touch the *textual consciousness* of his readers in order to particularly get the empathy and complicity effect of irony. He deals with the factual reality on ironical terms while using a lot of *packaged textual material* available from a *Romanian repertoire* of past and contemporary texts. These are alluded to excessively and consequently irony occurs. They generally block a transparent or at least coherent reading of the news text. If the reader is not “in the know”, a lot of the information (not only the ironic meaning) is not accessible to him because of the *inter-textual layers* covering the literal level of the text.

Most of the ironic news texts are very well suited to an inter-textual approach. Irony is localised and fenced-in by quotations and allusions¹⁸ recycled in the ironic text. The alien textual elements integrated in the ironic text are hardly traceable because they are generally affected by

alterations and *inter-textual corosions* (meant to generate ironic meanings); also because they are not always made visible in the seams of the text by overt marking. Nevertheless, the reader is expected to do the archaeological work of documenting allusions and mentally verbalising their ironically evocative potential.

Recent allusional studies focus on the dynamic process of actualisation needed in the perception of allusive material. In order to build up semantically significant links between the *alluding text* and the *alluded-to text*, the reader is supposed to follow the steps of “allusive reference” and “allusive implication”: recognising, remembering, realising, connecting.¹⁹ A successful allusion always evokes theoretically unlimited and unpredictable associations and connotations. Any allusion involves a commentary about the text, person, or event called up. The actualisation of allusion enriches the alluding text semantically. The allusive competence allows the reader to trace the (hidden) allusion, to identify it and eventually to process its textual corruption. Modifications are very important for the ironically semantic deviations as they imply commentary, speculation, evaluation arising from a conflict between the original form / context and the modified form / context of the news text.

In this chapter I intend to provide a typology of specifically Romanian inter-textual references that function as “*traditional*” *allusional markers* of irony in print media texts. I have classified the most frequent allusive material I have come across in the selected corpus. Some allusions are particularly seductive to both writer and reader as “Romanian” agents of irony. It seems that this memory depository of texts, fragments, syntagms or simple words (derivative textual segments) already has its own ironic history and can shape a Romanian “*ironic heteroglossia*” or “*ironic dialogism*” always at hand. It alerts Romanian “*competent*” readers in a particular way. Even if these elements are preferentially repeated, they are never devoid of their ironical potential. They are subjected to an ironic remaking (humorisation) and revitalised by specific defamiliarising techniques with every new integrating (con)text.

1. Romanian Proverbs and Sayings (Received Wisdom) and Inter-Textual Irony

They are usually modified and lexically disintegrated in order to be adapted to the new context of the news report. The reader is left with the (syntactic) pattern of the original proverb. He is expected to recognise the

original and its wisdom or standard message and then to contrast it against the new context. The reader will also speculate the modifications operated in the form of the initial text and will pragmatically derive ironic meanings:

Title: *Ce naște din lup se poartă ca-n codru*

Nepotul țărănistului Vasile Lupu trage cu pistolul în oameni.

(*Adevărul* 2242/1997, p.1)

The title alludes to the proverb: *Ce naște din pisică șoareci mănâncă* generally referring to the idea that people are hereditarily stigmatised and their behaviour is sometimes predictable. The original proverb is modified by inter-textual operations: *substitution* (*ce naște din pisică / ce naște din lup*) and *addition* (*șoareci mănâncă / se poartă ca-n codru*). These changes are inter-textually correlated to the information of the news which should be interpreted ironically: the nephew of the depute Vasile Lupu shot somebody with his gun and nevertheless he was not arrested by the police because of his uncle's influential position. The new shape of the proverb plays upon the name of the depute: *Vasile Lupu / ce naște din lup* transforming it ironically into a common noun.

Many ironically distorted proverbs are used as paratextual elements – for example, as titles – guiding the reader to an ironic reading of the whole text; the title using a proverb also functions as an ultimate ironic conclusion to be derived from the text. This is due to the didactic attitude generally connoted to received wisdom:

Title: *Când sângele interesului apă nu se face*

Sigur, când e vorba de pedeserii care au pus umărul la ridicarea vieții tandemului Mona de Freitas – Gabriel Bivolaru pe noi culmi de civilizație și prosperitate, merită, nu-i așa?, să furi, dacă e nevoie, pentru că sângele interesului apă nu se face...

(*România Liberă* 2026/1996,8)

The original proverb – *Sângele apă nu se face* – refers to the strong family feelings, to the “blood” bonds between people. The general metaphorical meaning is ironically deviated by the addition of the word *interesul* (*interest*) which generates a new ironical metaphor: *the blood of interest*. This metaphor is used to comment upon the community of corrupted politicians and their “family bondage”.

Sometimes the writer explicitly quotes the original text of the alluded proverb and then builds on it ironically as if experimentally putting into practice a detached stylistic exercise:

Un lucru început este pe jumătate făcut. Principiu vechi de când lumea, de care dl. Valeriu Tabără, ministrul agriculturii, se simte atașat cu trup și suflet. Așa că i-a adus și o mică adăugire: un lucru făcut pe jumătate poate fi considerat, fără probleme, ca și terminat. (...) La ultima sa apariție publică, a anunțat că exact în următoarele 4-5 zile se va face tot ce nu s-a făcut până acum.

(Adevărul 1561/1995, p.6)

The writer attributes all the ironical distortions to the governmental official in order to mock at his public statements. The writer pretends that he engages in a philological meta-commentary of that statement.

2. Caragiale – Romanians' Irony Authority and the Erudite Inter-Textuality

References to Caragiale are rather a case of pseudo-erudite inter-textuality as they are limited to the characters' most famous words or clichés spontaneously appealing to the audience's oral memory. The references alluded to, are not signalled by quotation marks as they are assimilated to popular collective knowledge and are invoked for the sake of "natural" similarities between the fictional world and the immediate reality.

Caragiale's high quotation frequency in print media texts is directly related to irony. Any allusion to Caragiale's literary works automatically challenges an ironic reading. The allusions ironically pre-inform the alluding text because their original context is also ironic. Some allusions contextually activate the writer's satirical wit against political demagoguery. Caragiale's initial intention is readjusted and the relationship between fiction and reality is up-to-dated in the new contextual embedding:

Title: *În căutarea doctrinei*

Doctrina PDSR este admirabilă, este sublimă, putem zice, dar a lipsit cu desăvârșire. Am încercat să definim PDSR conform schiței de program lansate cu mai mult timp în urmă. Ceea ce a fost imposibil.

(România Liberă 2188/1997, p.2)

The underlined text alludes to Caragiale's play: *O scrisoare pierdută*. It is the only ironical segment of the text. Irony is inter-textually conditioned here by the recognition of *the source text* (almost completely reproduced). Without this recognition, the entire text may be taken as literal criticism

and irony may go unnoticed. Details are operated in the original text (the subject: *doctrina PDSR*, the tense of the verb *a lipsit*) to integrate the allusion in the continuum of the alluding text. Nevertheless, irony is perceived by the vigilant reader because of the paradoxical semanticity of the first segment: it contrasts superlatives: adj. *admirable*, *sublime* with the opposite idea of *completely missing*, *completely non-existent*.

The same text can be metonymically quoted only by mention of the adj. *sublime* which is ironically connoted in Romanian (as excessive evaluation) because of Caragiale's paternity:

Partidele, cu mici excepții, dormitează. Liderii au plecat aproape toți în vacanță, nerăbdători să citească romane horror. Expresia sublimei politice românești pe perioada estivală ar putea fi întruchipată de octogenarii frunțași țărăniști (...).

(Adevărul 2229/1997, p.1)

The same quotation is used as an ironic summary of the news text as if the alluding language is more powerful for the reader than the literal expression; the ironic summary is introduced by the formula *in other words*, but the source of the alluded "other" words is not specified. It is assumed as very well known:

Dl. Dumitru Popescu, președintele Agenției de Restructurare, a recunoscut că, până în prezent, în domeniul restructurării "este vorba doar de niște modificări nesistematice în aplicare" și că o serie întreagă de fonduri alocate pentru acest proces "nu și-au atins ținta". Cu alte cuvinte, ca și întreaga reformă economică românească, restructurarea este sublimă, dar lipsește cu desăvârșire.

(Adevărul 1565/1995, p.6)

There are occurrences of elaborated inter-textuality when the writer explicitly refers to Caragiale used as a pretended scholarly source, as an argument of authority:

Întrebat de gazetari, în ziua alegerilor, pentru ce anume a votat, dl. Chebelevu a răspuns: "Am votat pentru schimbarea în continuitate." Îți vine în minte, imediat, Farfuridi cu al său "să se revizuiască, primesc! dar să nu se schimbe nimic." Numai că Farfuridi e simpatic și te amuză.

(România Liberă 2015/1996, p.1)

The quotation is used in order to subvert the top official's statement, to render it ridiculous. The journalist pushes responsibility for the ridicule towards the specified source, but he does not dissociate himself from the

content of the words included within the quotes and borrowed from Caragiale's character.

Another ironically charged allusion from Caragiale's inter-textual repertoire is the word *curat* (literally "clean, cleanly") used as an adverb meaning "really". Originally, the word is used in a pun: *curat murdar* meant to ridicule the verbal automatisms of a humble character always mechanically repeating the words of authority and then intensifying them by the use of "really". In Caragiale's text, the pun expresses the indiscriminating agreement of an inferior person towards a superior person (the asymmetrical relationship between employee and employer).

The print media texts allude to this paradoxical pattern : *curat murdar*. The idea of repetition is preserved and the allusion function ironically to echo the authority's words and to reverse their initial meaning, to discredit it as pretended, dishonest, false, irrelevant etc. Once the allusional pattern recognised, the reader is supposed to re-process the immediate text ironically. The intensifier *curat (really)* ironically replaces the writer's direct critical commentary. The ironical commentary has an exclamative contour and simulates the demystifying attitude of the ordinary powerless person:

– it may immediately follow a direct quotation as an echo of a top official's statement

"Ungaria depășește toate standardele internaționale în materie de minorități." Curat le depășește!

(*Adevărul* 1552/1995, p.1)

– it may be used in the title as an ironical marker (the title overcodes the whole text), to express the writer's stance towards the information reported and to anticipate the reader's perception

Title: *Curat protecție socială!*

50-70 milioane lei apartamentul pentru tinerii căsătoriți.

(*Adevărul* 1581/1995, p.1)

Titles of Caragiale's famous literary works are ironically alluded (recognition of the reference and of the original wording of the title is needed) and then ironically modified by inventive substitution (semantic processing of modifications needed):

D'ale campaniei pedeseristo-iliesciene, ironically xeroxing Caragiale's D'ale carnavalului

O scrisoare găsită (!) de Simeon Tatu și culisele obscure ale întregii afaceri

The last title mentioned echoes Caragiale's *O scrisoare pierdută* and operates a play upon words: it replaces the word *pierdută* by its opposite *găsită*. The substitution adjusts to the real information of the news (which refers to a found letter), but suggests that the report should be ironically framed by the reader within the script of Caragiale's play. The reader is expected to know the plot of the play and to supply an additional context to the overall structure and content of the news text. The inter-textual title and the suggested framework allow readers to identify the kind of ironical textual situation they are about to enter.

3. Miorița / Mioritic – Scraps of Nationalist Discourse Ironically Demythologized

The occurrence of the derived adjective *mioritic* is definitely an ironic marker in print media texts. Whenever it is used it challenges an ironic reading or at least a semantic relativisation of the surrounding text. The word was lexically derived from *Miorița*, the name of the most famous Romanian ballad. It is generally considered that this ballad encapsulates the specifically Romanian attitude towards death – fatalism and serenity. The ballad has been excessively commented upon and has generated a lot of globalised judgements about Romanian national character. The Romanian philosopher Lucian Blaga has added increasing fame to the word in his theory about the Romanian cultural morphology of *spațiul mioritic* (the *mioritic space*).

The term has been abusively used by the nationalist discourse. The frozen syntagms: *plaiul mioritic* (*mioritic realm*) – a metaphorical synonym for 'Romanian geography' – and *ciobanul mioritic* (*mioritic shepard*) – an allegorical synonym for the generic Romanian – sound very nostalgic and inherent to the learned memory of most Romanians.

The solemnity of the term *mioritic* as overused by the ethnocentric communist discourse to express exaltation towards the values of national mythology is ironically de-emotionalised in post-1989 media discourse. The term is now deprived of its symbolic manipulations (signifier of stereotypical nationalist attitude) and it is recycled as an ironically grotesque synonym of an 'ethnic' adjective: *Romanian*. Ironically sanctioned, the word expresses a tendency in the print media discourse to repudiate rhetorical forms of ethnocentric self-glorification. The adjective is stylistically transposed to a new lexical and situational habitat suggesting

the ironic degrading effect – from the language of patriotic lyricism (edulcorating descriptions) to the language of reality (cynical evaluations):

Title: *Bătălie pentru vila lui Ceaușescu*

Se știe foarte bine că imediat după ce economia de piață a făcut ochi și pe plaiuri mioritice, multe persoane aflate în fruntea unor sereleuri și-au îndreptat atenția și banii spre stațiunile balneoclimaterice.

(*România Liberă* 2179/1997, p.24)

The underlined syntagm is used as a synonym for Romania and it triggers further ironical inferences referring to the way some persons understood the particularly “Romanian style” of market economy.

Ce-i drept, experiența istorică ne îndreptățește la o expectativă optimistă, dar vigiță, la adresa demnitarilor mioritici.

(*România Liberă* 2014/1996, p. 10)

There is a stylistic and a pragmatic difference between *demnitari români / demnitari mioritici* (*Romanian high officials / mioritic high officials*). The ironic evaluation of the adjective *mioritic* is a nucleus of subversive semanticity – the reader may develop his own contextual connotations about high officials – while the neutral adjective *Romanian* simply designates a category.

4. Residuals of “Wooden Language” Ironically Recycled

Before 1989, the wooden language used to be the dominant ideological discourse. As an instrument of authority, power and control it was meant to “socialise” people to the political indoctrination of communism. Because of its ritual dissemination, it seems that people involuntarily internalised the verbal magic of the bureaucratic language. Their discursive memory is still passively loaded with chunks of wooden language. Unlike before 1989, when the wooden language functioned as a kind of unique “discursive establishment” submissively accepted in public life, after 1989 there are two conflicting tendencies: to preserve this ideological language (at the official level) – as the agents of power have not relevantly changed²⁰; to oppose to it – as a sign of speech democratisation. The radical opposition (conditioned by a radical change of society and mentalities) would have been a complete *textual amnesia* meant to liberate people from the tyranny of manipulative language.

In print media texts, there is an extensive (marked and not marked) quotation and allusion to “wooden” stereotypes displaced from their original context and ironically relocated within another context. At the linguistic level, the clichés are ironically rejected and defamiliarised. But they are not used just for the sake of a stylistic experiment. They would not have been mentioned and their repetition, still ironically contextualised, would not have been a meaning-making strategy if there had not been any grounding situational similarities between the original context and the relocated context (situationally understood). Irony is aimed at these situational similarities:

(...) a venit vârsta de pensionare, repede, prea repede, când abia s-a obișnuit cu gustul puterii absolute, când doar de câțiva ani chiriaș în palate, la Cotroceni, la Scroviștea, când a făcut doar câteva “vizite de partid și de stat”(...), când ar mai fi doar un pas să devină... “ales pe viață”!

(România Liberă 2020/1996, p.10)

The writer quotes the syntagms: “vizite de partid și de stat”, “ales pe viață” to point to the similarities between the two political figures: Ceaușescu and Iliescu. The insertion of quotation marks is meant to strikingly signal a non-linear “stumbled” reading of the text: the alien inter-textual material *should* be processed by the reader (it is not optional) in order to grasp the writer’s intention adequately. This intention is strongly ironical, if not sarcastic.

In some texts the situational similarity is explicitly formulated in the title. This is why the “wooden” residual is not necessarily marked. The reader will experience an ironic detachment towards the situation described and towards the cliché:

Title: *Pasul înapoi spre totalitarism?*

(...) după ce s-au repartizat zeci de miliarde pentru achiziționarea de mobilier stil și limuzine de lux, ce mai contează, acolo, câteva sute de milioane în plus pentru a acoperi acest spor la salariile funcționarilor care-i sprijină pe parlamentari în nobila lor misiune dedicată binelui țării?!

(Adevărul 1570/1995, p.1)

The segment *nobila lor misiune dedicată binelui țării* (approx. *their noble mission dedicated to the wellbeing of the country*) is a *discursive echo* of communist media text. It is contrasted here with the information about the millions spent by the Parliament for expensive furniture and cars. This is a *situational echo* of Ceaușescu’s taste for luxury. The ironic

evaluation of the more-than-described situation is announced by the ironic topic rhetorically formulated in the title: *Pasul înapoi spre totalitarism?* (approx. *A step backwards to totalitarianism?*)

Any echo or mention of “wooden” linguistic stock is ironically modulated in the print media text. While situations are cycled (contingent irony – a suspect resemblance between the present phenomenon and some previously encountered phenomenon), “wooden” stereotypes are re-cycled (textual irony), not merely repeated, when embedded in the new utterance with its shifted context.

Recycling strategies:

– marked quotation of a stereotype

Dominanta regimului Iliescu este “lupta neabătută” pentru legalizarea furturilor comuniste.

(*România Liberă* 2014/1996, p.10)

– unmarked quotation

Am mai reținut din ideile magistrale ale plenarei pe cea referitoare la soluția PSM de a reda șomerilor mii de locuri de muncă prin repunerea în funcțiune a tuturor marilor capacități industriale.

(*Adevărul* 15775/1995, p.8)

– allusional appositions ironically framing the referent

a) *Un soi de conferință de presă, mai degrabă o dare de seamă, a susținut ieri fostul președinte al României, emanat la 22 decembrie 1989.*

(*România Liberă* 2031/1996, p.3)

b) *Un ban roșu de Gorj, un prim-secretar, s-a hotărât să facă în acest lăcaș istoric casa de oaspeți, sub acoperirea fostului OJT.*

(*Adevărul* 1571/1995, p.3)

– residuals of “wooden” stylistics ironically sanctioned by meta-commentary

a) *“Cred că suntem datori față de noi și față de Funar (asta da, mai ales, dl.Matei!) să strângem rândurile în jurul său (tipic PCR) și să contracarăm demersurile celor care doresc să-l compromită.”*

(*România Liberă* 2143/1997, p.2)

The reproduced statement of an official is interrupted by the writer's parenthetical textual voice which explicitly identifies or demystifies the "wooden" ingredients.

b) În Jurnalul medicilor veterinari nr.12/1996 îl găsim evidențiat pe țară pentru "pricepere, dăruire profesională, spirit gospodăresc și organizatoric, personalitate..." Nici că se putea o mai completă apreciere (...)

(România Liberă 2016/1996, p.16)

The writer abandons the quotation as unfinished when similarities with the encomiastic style of totalitarian discourse are so striking that the text is completely predictable. Then he adds his meta-commentary pretending a superlative appreciation of the "superlative" stylistics of the text quoted.

– ironic distortions of "received" stereotypes; their frozen structure is ironically deconstructed and exorcised

a) (...) bătrânii comuniști din CPEX, vinovați de dezastrul produs, cu al lor "socialism multilateral" lăbărțat.

(România Liberă 2020/1996, p.10)

The last element of the original cliché: *socialism multilateral dezvoltat* is replaced by a very informal, familiar lexical element, *lăbărțat*, meant to suggest an intentionally ironic debasement

b) Legea caselor naționalizate a trecut prin Camera Deputaților ca un tren expres printr-o haltă oarecare. (...) O asemenea unitate în cuget și (ne)simțire n-a mai cunoscut de mult aula Parlamentului.

(Adevărul 1572/1995, p.1)

The ironically evoked formula – *unitate în cuget și simțire* (approx. *unity in thought and feeling*) – was used as a stylistic variant of another "wooden" element essential in the communist vocabulary – *unanimity*. In the present text, the formula establishes a first level of irony – the resemblance between this Parliament and the former communist one. The modification operated (the parenthetical addition of a negative prefix to the word *simțire*) completely changes the meaning of the word into its opposite – *lack of feeling, indifference*. The second level of sarcastic irony is achieved by the informality of the new word, which is a very familiar synonym for the neologism 'indifference'. The play upon words is not gratuitously ironic (like other exorcising inter-textual operations); it is very well matched with the information in the news text about the MP's neglecting of the nationalised houses law. The "wooden" modified cliché replaces the writer's direct critical commentary.

The use of “wooden language” in the print media texts is ultimately a pretext to examine the past and the present and to anathematise ironic continuities. At the surface (discourse) level the intention is to de-historicise the communist vocabulary and its ideological triteness and to recycle it with an ironically detached attitude. “Wooden” residuals are transparently enclosed by quotation marks to signal the textual clash with the new (con)text and to alert the reader to process the indeterminacy of similarities and dissimilarities.

6.2. The Ironic Intimisation

Irony is just a dormant meaning of a print media text if it is not properly managed by the writer. One important problem in the *management of irony* is how the writer pragmatically feeds the ironic interpretation. Inter-textual strategies (as described in the previous sub-chapter) may function as facilitators of ironic meaning once the reader recognises the alien textual elements and is able to process them against the new context.

Another possible strategy to make the reader “get ready” for a negotiation of ironic meaning is to use a *conversational style*; in the presentation of information, the writer may create a comfortable familiarity for the *complicity* needed by irony as an alternative reading of the literal text. He might adopt a *chatty tone*, concentrating less on the information and more on his interpersonal relationship to the reader. This unconventional attitude in reporting the news may signal the presence of the subversive ironic meaning.

The writer needs the common ground on which to stand together with his reader. On the one hand, he has the common background knowledge (assumptions, expectations, previous information); on the other hand, he can simulate a conversational common ground similar to the pattern of face-to-face verbal interaction. In order to assert the primacy of the interpersonal, the writer appeals to pragmatolinguistic forms of familiarity and participation.

– he might engage in a pretended conversation with his readers explicitly addressing to them as conversational partners

a) *Dacă n-ar fi fost interesele campaniei electorale ale dlui Iliescu la mijloc, credeți dvs., stimați cititori, că Ministrul de Interne își trimitea polițiștii, în 1992, să facă figurație pe gratis, zile în șir, pentru clipul lui Jackson?*

(*România Liberă* 2140/1997, p.3)

The direct form of addressing is a pretext for the writer to introduce an ironical pre-supposition embedded in a rhetorical question and following an ironical hypothesis.

b) *“Da, este adevărat, mi-am dat și eu cu părerea atunci ca simplu cetățean.” – a răspuns atunci Cotroceniul. Ca simplu cetățean, deci. Adică, vedeți dumneavoastră, Procurorul General al României s-a dus la piață să-și facă cumpărăturile și acolo a văzut un “simplu cetățean” care scotea foc pe nări împotriva judecătorilor. (...)*

(România Liberă 2020/1996, p.20)

The writer assumes a didactic attitude towards his reader who is protectively explained the real meaning of the president's words. The writer addresses his readers as an introduction to an ironically pretended narrative.

– implicit involvement of the reader's agreement to the writer's interpretation of facts – the use of the ironical tag question *nu-i așa?*

Pentru că – nu-i așa? – tot proclama pe nas Iosif Boda și alți brucani visând la “coabitare”, chiar dacă alegătorii dau toate semnele că nu doresc așa ceva (...)

(România Liberă 2014/1996, p.2)

– rhetorical questions ironically staged by the writer to challenge the ironic imagination of the reader

Cheltuiala nu-i mare. Cu totul or fi circa șase milioane, adică un fleac de Olcit. (...) S-o ia academicianul pe jos ca Badea Cârțan, cu tablourile în coșuri? Nu se poate!

(Adevărul 1581/1995, p.1)

– the ironic solidarity of the 1st person plural – the writer presumes to be one of the many and takes the ordinary person's perspective; without the shift of the grammatical person, the text could have been a neutral report of the official statement

La seminarul asupra toleranței, Măria Sa Cioabă a declarat că supușii dumisale ne mai tolerează o vreme, cât să le plătim un tezaur de metale prețioase și ceva argint.

(Adevărul 1574/1995, p.6)

– ironic feedback of reported speech; interjections and other familiar phrases expressing colloquial doubt are placed at the end of top official's reported words. The formality of the statements reproduced contrast with

the everydayness of interjections. These create the impression of spontaneous conversational reactions and of trivialized attitudes

a) *Borbély Ernő, figură marcantă în UDMR, chiar așa a și declarat: "Noi suntem un stat în stat." Măi să fie!*

(*Adevărul* 1575/1995, p.2)

b) *Despre Memorandumul cu FMI, Ion Iliescu a spus că acesta s-a bucurat de opoziția...Opoziției. Ca să vezi cine era de vină!*

(*România Liberă* 2031/1996, p.3)

The insertion of the interjection transforms the literal contour of the text and locally projects an ironic reading:

c) (...) *instituții surmenate – vai! – de grija protejării resurselor financiare ale statului.*

(*Adevărul* 1575/1995, p.8)

The strategies of ironic intimation develop contextual ways for writer and reader to empathise, identify and co-operate in the socialised negotiation of ironic meanings.

7. Conclusions

The use of irony is not only a matter of experimenting unconventional style in Romanian post-1989 print media texts (1995-1996). In the "ironic programme" exhibited by the texts of the corpus, there is a relationship between textuality and wordliness that one has to speculate. The *ironic strategies* reflect *the ironic mood* that expresses *ironic incongruities* of the Romanian society itself. This circular series of ironies shows that irony is historically grounded, that the writer picks it up from his surroundings as the result of the collapse of individuals' hopes for a better and freer society brought on by liberalisation and democratisation of the country's political atmosphere. At the same time, irony is one way to express emancipatory tendencies that might get people to a new level of awareness in understanding the socio-political processes.

When the writer is ironic he obviously uses biased strategies in presenting information. But this is a subversive rhetoric meant to get readers out of the narcotised condition in which the official rhetoric and policy have put them. As mediated in a newspaper, the rhetorical instrumentality

of irony teaches people to defy the authority and to assume a critical stance vis-à-vis the events.

The specifically “Romanian” stock of information involved in the ironic texts is a stumbling block for a transparent reading. The readability of irony is highly determinate because of the particular use of Romanian language and because of the particular references to the memory repertoire; these are restrictively available for those who are not initiated. The more determinate the construction of the ironic text (contextually anchored), the more generous its potential to proliferate an endless series of ironic associations for the initiated.

The paradoxical generosity of meaning that irony displays might argue for the new theory of conversational journalism which seeks *to mean more* for the community instead of informing accurately. According to this²¹, *news is a co-operative activity that is constructed and evolves through the conversations of a community*. The conversational journalist is expected to write about political leaders, officials, and authorities in a way to make all these facts relevant for the reader’s life and values. In contrast to the usual news criteria, this approach emphasises non-traditional attributes such as perspective, context, and human bias. The ironic perspective might be one legitimate way to go beyond verifiable facts and to rely on the “humanity” of the news in a given context – how readers perceive the information, how they might intimately react to it, how they integrate it into their own lives. Before 1996, the use of irony in print media texts might have been encouraged as a textual and social tactics of evasion and obfuscation empowering the like-minded readers to repudiate the authority, to oppose to it and ultimately to endorse the opposition wholeheartedly and to risk acting upon it in order to bring about the change.

NOTES

1. Some distinguishing works in the post-modern literature on irony celebrate the idea that irony can be used as an instrument of critical practice to explain everything – texts, behaviour, life, the world. The tendency to see irony everywhere reflects much more than a simple theory about how to interpret texts; it is symptomatic of a *weltanschauung* or paradigm. See Behler, E. –1990– *Irony and the Discourse of Modernity*; Dane, J. –1991– *The Critical Mythology of Irony*; Finlay, M. –1990– *The Potential of Modern Discourse*; Hutcheon, L. –1994– *Irony's Edge: the Theory and Politics of Irony*; Wilde, A. –1987– *Horizons of Assent: Modernism, Postmodernism and Ironic Imagination*
2. Tismăneanu, V. –1997– *Romanian Exceptionalism? Democracy, Ethnocracy, and Uncertain Pluralism in Post-Ceaușescu Romania*. In: Dawisha, K. and Parrot, B. (eds.) *Politics, Power, and the Struggle for Democracy in South East Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 403-443
3. These authors and others generally find positive connotations to the idea of a specifically Romanian irony: *superior attitude, a form of verbal energy* (Lovinescu, E. –1937– *Miorița și psihologia etnică*); *the joking tradition of an indulgent, tolerant irony* (Philippide, Al. –1936– *Tradiția literară românească*); *irony as expression of the Romanian peasant's critical wit and philosophy* (Ralea, M. –1943– *Fenomenul românesc*). Authors quoted in the anthology: *Aesthesis Carpato-Dunărean* –1981– București: Minerva. On the opposite side of these opinions, the contemporary essayist Patapievic, H.R. approaches the Romanian irony destructively: he thinks that “bășcălie”, a Romanian subtype of irony (word with unknown etymology), *deteriorates our relationship to veracity in an irresponsible way*. He speaks of the sterility of (Romanian) irony and its tendency to devalue everything. It has nothing to do with a *moral surgery*; on the contrary, it mixes up derision and complicity between the subject and the object of the ironic mockery. (Patapievic, H.R – 1995 – *Cerul văzut prin lentilă*, București: Nemira, p. 13-16)
4. Haakon Chevalier (1932 – *The Ironic Temper*, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 12) thinks that *irony characterises the attitude of one who, when confronted with a choice of two things that are mutually exclusive, chooses both (...)* But he reserves the right to derive from each the greatest possible passive enjoyment. And this enjoyment is irony. Alan Thompson (1948 – *The Dry Mock*, Berkeley: University of California Press p. 255) characterises the ironical person as a *generally passive person who looks on as the world goes by. He is not indifferent to it, but whenever he has an impulse to act, he reflects that reform is hopeless and rebellion perhaps worse ultimately than submission*.

5. Splichal, Slavko –1994– *Media Beyond Socialism. Theory and Practice in East-Central Europe*, Westview Press: Oxford, p.144.
6. *ibid.*, p.173.
7. Edgar, Andrew –1992– *Objectivity, Bias and Truth*. In: Belsey, A. and Chadwick,R. (eds.) *Ethical Issues in Journalism and the Media*, Routledge: London, p. 126: *Different interpretations will make appeal to different totalities. This does not entail a distortion of the interpretation, but rather a potential enrichment.*
8. Edgar (*op.cit.*, p. 113) uses concepts like Ricoeur’s *hermeneutic circle* and Gadamer’s *cultural horizon* as applicable to the interpretative procedures needed in the understanding of media texts. I have further developed this idea to illustrate how ironic interpretation proceeds. As irony is almost never explicitly marked, the reader’s “guess” is needed *grounded in the beliefs and expectations normal to competent members of a given culture.*
9. Dictionaries generally describe taxonomies of irony, as complete as possible, from a historical point-of-view: from the ancient rhetoricians to the (post)modern thinkers. Definitions are illustrated by literary quotations or artificial examples. See: Cuddon, J.A. –1991– *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, p.457-462; Harris, W. – 1992 – *Dictionary of Concepts in Literary Criticism and Theory*, p. 178-183; Lanham, L.A. –1991– *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms*, p.92-93; Myers, J. and Simms, M. –1989– *The Longman Dictionary of Poetic Terms*, p. 147-148; Ruse, C. and Hopton, M. –1992– *The Cassell Dictionary of Literary and Language Terms*, p. 156-157.
10. I have tried to find a more technical term that might define irony as a general approach framing the factual reality in print media texts. The definition coined here ad hoc – *irony as an interpretive perspective* – is inspired by David Kaufer’s study: *Irony, Interpretive Form, and the Theory of Meaning (Poetics Today*, vol. 4:3/1983; p. 451-464). Kaufer despairs of ever finding a unified core for the study of ironic phenomena, because of the diversity and familiarity of the ironic. The author restricts to verbal and situational irony and tries to describe them within a theory of communication and inter-subjective understanding. Kaufer thinks that *perspective-taking* (on what is said or on the situation at hand) is intrinsic to any theory of sentence meaning (p. 460). The ironic perception is but a highly aestheticised form of the perspective-taking and covers a range of specific actions and attitudes such as reflectiveness, association, dissociation, and the like. (p. 459)
11. Grice, H.P. –1978– *Further Notes on Logic and Conversation*. In: Cole, P. (ed.), *Syntax and Semantics*: vol.9. *Pragmatics*, New York: Academic Press, p.124
12. S. Kumon-Nakamura, S.Glucksberg, and M.Brown –1995– *How About Another Piece of Pie: The Allusional Pretence Theory of Discourse Irony*. In: *Journal of Experimental Psychology*. General vol. 124, No 1, p. 4

13. *Context* is broadly defined by linguists as a term referring to the features of the non-linguistic world in relation to which linguistic units are systematically used. In its broadest sense, context includes the total non-linguistic background to a text or utterance, including the immediate situation in which it is used, and the awareness by speaker and hearer of what has been said earlier of any relevant external beliefs or presuppositions. See: Crystal, D. –1992– *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*, Blackwell: Oxford, p. 78-80.
14. Grice, H.P. –1975– *Logic and Conversation*. In: Cole, P. and Morgan, J.L. (eds.) *Syntax and Semantics*, vol. 3: *Speech Acts*, New York: Academic Press, p.41-58
15. H.H.Clark and R.J. Gerrig –1984– *On the Pretence Theory of Irony*. In: *Journal of Experimental Psychology. General* vol. 113, no 1, p. 121-126
16. H.P. Grice -1978 – *op.cit.*, p. 125.
17. H.H.Clark and R.J. Gerrig, *op.cit.*, p. 124.
18. For the sake of conceptual economy, I will use *allusion* to define hidden references in a text related to another text. In his study – *Towards a Descriptive Poetics of Allusion* – Udo J. Hebel thinks that *allusion* may now serve as the over-arching category under which quite diverse devices for establishing verifiable inter-textual relationships can be subsumed. His presentation allows for the incorporation of quotations into the larger category of allusion. *Quotations, whether cryptic or marked, are nothing more, and nothing less, than specific fillings of the syntagmatic space of the allusive signal*. See Plett, H. –1991 – (ed.) *Inter-textuality*, Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, p.136-164.
19. Hebel, U.J., *op.cit.*, p.137.
20. Sălișteanu-Cristea, O. –1998– *Official Power Discourse in Post-totalitarian Romania*. In: New Europe College Yearbook 1994-1995, Humanitas: București, p. 185.
21. P.Anderson, R. Dardenne, G.M. Killenberg –1994– *Conversation of Journalism. Communication, Community and the News*, Praeger: Westport, Connecticut, p. 6.

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