

THE PHENOMENON OF ACRONYMIC EXPLOSION, ITS METALINGUISTIC AND METASEMIOTIC PECULIARITIES

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În a doua jumătate a secolului XX și începutul secolului XXI acronimele, „inițialismele” și prescurtările de cuvinte au pătruns în toate sferile de activitate umană. Problemele sociale și politice de ordin național și internațional, tot ce este legat de existența omului, sunt afectate de acest fenomen social lingvistic. Importanța acronimelor în procesul de comunicare este incontestabilă.

Începând cu a doua jumătate a secolului XX, realitatea lingvistică impune necesitatea publicării de dicționare specializate, consacrate unei noi avalanșe de neologisme, resuscitate și perfecționate – abreviațiile în general, acronimele și „inițialismele” în special, fapt confirmat și de denumirile dicționarelor „Acronyms and Initialism Dictionary”. Jumătatea a II-a a sec. XX este martorul unui fenomen lingvistic reflectat în lexicologia periodică, și anume: apar regulat dicționare specializate de acronime și „inițialisme”, numărul cărora crește vertiginos și a ajuns la peste 500 000 unități lexicale în limbile engleză, germană, franceză, rusă etc. Productivitatea lor sporită este cauzată de timpul accelerat de dezvoltare a societății umane și de necesitatea de a exprima succint un volum mare de informație. Se întreprinde o analiză a unor probleme lingvistice, metalingvistice și metasemiotice.

Confronting various opinions in the field we discover discrepancies in the metalanguage, interpretations and classifications of certain lexical, grammatical or lexical-grammatical phenomena. Analyzing various kinds of abridged lexical units and the system of terms used in this field we confront different terminological systems put forward by scholars and try to explain the difference in meanings of the terms to make it easier for students to better understand the material on the subject. One of the main stumbling blocks in rational categorization is the lack of a firmly established relationship between the actual phenomena and their names. The specific language of lexical categories cannot be taken for granted and metalinguistic work cannot be regarded as merely taking an inventory of terms. It is mainly a question of discovering whether there is any real difference in the various approaches and theories, or whether it is purely a terminological difference, mere conventions on this level. Sometimes the researcher fails to keep clearly apart the object of analysis and the metalanguage - the words and expressions used when people talk about the object language. Even if this is not the case, we very often find a large number of different terminological expressions and we are faced with a peculiar situation: we must compare those different systems and try to understand why the different metalinguistic expressions were introduced, the discrepancy not only in the expressions used to denote certain more specific or particular categories, but also in the naming or description of the most general concepts themselves. [8, 104] If we compare the multitude of terms used in the lexicology to name all possible abbreviated lexical units we discover that only in English there exist different approaches and interpretations in defining a variety metalinguistic units used in the field: *shortenings, curtailing, abridgment, abridgement, contractions, telescoping, shortenings, to telescope, abbreviate, curtail, shorten, contract, blend, blending, fusion, adhesion abbreviations, acronyms, initialisms, abridged words. Brachionymy and brachiology* are occasionally used (*brachi-* means *short*), *cutting-down, shorten*. Compare the terms in: **French** - *abrègement, abrégé abrevement, signe abrèviatif, abréviation, retranchement, contractions, syncope, syncoper, sigle; siglaison, brachyonyme (brachy = short, etc.); German* – *Aphäresis; Apokope, Apokopieren, Abkürzung; Zusammenwachsen (telescoping), Verwachsen; lingv. Zusammenbildung; Kürzung, Verminderung, Herabsetzung, Verringerung; Reduzierung; Reduktion, Kürzung; Zusammenziehung, Kontraktion; Abkürzung, Abbiatur; Kurzbezeichnung; Kürzel; Spanish* – *abreviatura, sigla; acortamiento, abreviación, reducción; contracción, simplificación, reducción; aféresis; apocopa* [1].

Some of the terms are used to denote the same thing and some others express different meanings. It is not merely a question of choosing between this or that particular term, but the question of approach or attitude to categorization. Various approaches bring to different meanings of some of the terms and serve as a source of confusion in the language. No consistent metalanguage can be worked out, unless a very clear distinction is

made between the emic and etic levels. Quite a number of the discussed terms are part of the international vocabulary in the result of the process of borrowing. A difference has been observed between the manifestation forms and the phenomenon of reduction of words. A great number of terms are being constantly created and entering the usage: Cf. the **French** *apocope, aphérèse, truncation, siglaison, acronymie, mot-valise, port-manteau, initialisme* - all of them in scientific sources are united in the generic term *abbreviation* (to mean the process of reduction). Lately some linguists have used the term *brachionyme*. In French the terms *brachiology, brachiographie, brachionymie, brachionyme* have been actively used, while in English the term *abbreviation* is regularly used as a generic term to express the meaning of any variety of shortening or reduction of a lexeme, and it is also used in the meaning of *initialism* (words usually reduced to their initial letters). The common element *brachy* - in English (*brachi* - in French) is practically an international affix of Greek origin. It is used to form quite a number of lexical units, especially in the field of medicine. Thus, in the Multilingual Dictionary ABBYY Lingvo 10 we come across such examples. **English:** *brachyfacial, brachyours brachysyndactylie; brachydactylie*. **French:** *brachygraphie* (shortening of words); *brachysyndactylie; brachydactylie*. **German:** *Brachydaktylie; Brachyphalantie; Brachylogie*. **Italian:** *brachilogia* (Syn: brevità); *brachilogico; brachimorfia; brachimetacarpia* [2]. In the absolute majority of cases *brachy-* means *short*. There are some rare exceptions like *brachyfacial* which means *broad-faced*. From the above given examples we can see that the Dictionary contains lexemes with the meaning of *short, compressed, shortening of words, shortness of speech* in French, German and Italian correspondingly. No wonder that the term *brachyonymy* is sometimes occasionally used in some other languages. Thus, in the Romanian Explanatory Dictionary (1996) we find the term *brahiologie* “Tip de elipsă care constă în evitarea repetării unui element al frazei exprimat anterior. (fr. brachyologie)” [3, p.109]. The meaning of *brahiologie* in Romanian has a narrower meaning than in French, the language it was borrowed from. In Romanian *brahi-* is also mainly used in the field of medicine, for example: *brahial, brahicefal, brahicefalie, brahipod*. Most of these terms have been borrowed from French [3, p.109]. The terms *brachiology, brachiographie, brachionymie, brachionyme* have become more popular and they are found in many linguistic publications.

Let us take some examples of interpretations given by linguists of the terms used in the domain. Thus, A. Ceas in his work “Brachiographie et oralité” (1990) quoting from Marie T. Cabre “Terminologie et traduction” [2, p.145-156] gives an exhaustive explanation of the given term. The Canadian linguist Marie T. Cabre remarks the notional area of reduction of lexemes, giving a formula: *sigles – initialism – acronyms – abbreviations*. The scholar considers the abbreviation as a particular case of reduction of a lexeme and states the need to reconsider the exiting terminology [2]. Lexicographic sources express an ambiguous attitude towards the introduction of new terms in the linguistic usage. But linguists have started to use the new term not only in French but even in some other languages. In Grand Robert “Dictionnaire de la langue français” the term *brachilogie* means “a manner of expressing with extreme conciseness” [4, p.1643]. In the field of neology linguists should always keep in mind the fact that there is a connection between the social-political conditions of the given speaking community and that of the entire population of the globe in a permanent process of optimization of the linguistic means of communication. A generalizing term like *brachilogie* in French should help avoid the phenomenon of homonymy, polysemy we come across so often. In the field of lexicography we should pay special attention to the constantly changing terminology to avoid the confusion of scientific terminology in the publication of lexicographic dictionaries, regularly making a revision in order to actualize the neologisms, modifying the definitions, to respect exigency towards the proposed neologisms. The creation of abbreviated units and their metalanguage, the compiling of numerous dictionaries in the domain are part of a continuous social and linguistic phenomenon. Their creation and existence are due to the important function they have in communication. The increased productivity of all possible abbreviations and shortenings is caused by the accelerating tempo of development of the human society and the need to properly express the constantly growing volume of information.

The innovations in the human society are a step towards progress and have the right to exist in case they are applied rationally in time and space and reflected in every day activity. To create new words and new meanings to the existing lexical units is a natural manifestation of linguistic competence of people, capable in a given situation to put forward new names referring to new realities. The speaker realizes this capacity using different resources of word building offered by the linguistic system. The language is the most mobile and the most flexible of social factors reflecting the development of a given society. The speed of linguistic

change of lexical units, creation of neologisms is extremely rapid in highly developed societies. The process of formation of neologisms as new lexical units or in the framework of already existing words using various linguistic means follows the existing laws. At the moment we observe a competition among the existing word-building forms, where various forms of abbreviations become the most productive means of creation of neologisms. The rapid evolution of science and technology cause the creation of new notions and ideas and forms to express them. The abundance of advertising messages, literary works, science fiction, informational technology, and many other fields of human activity contribute to the rapid growth of the word-stock. The speakers try to single out all the new lexical units, distinguish their meanings, imposed by the expressivity of style and freshness of the vocabulary, attracting the consumer of information, enhance his interest by the novelty of ideas and linguistic forms. Advertising is permanently manifesting itself as being inventive and creative, using all possible lexical abracadabra. At the same time modern languages are subject to two contrary tendencies: improvement of means of speech, where linguists are engaged in the standardization of the elements of word-building of a given language, supporting the ways of diversification and renovation of suggestive and emotional possibilities of language expressivity. The second tendency is the principle of discourse economy, a linguistic phenomenon which implies the reduction of linguistic units to the minimal space and time dimensions of the presented text, pragmatic exigency characteristic to modern times. Linguists started to look for procedures that would satisfy the two exigencies of formal contraction of form and condensation of the semantic content of the language.

Attention is paid, first of all, to abbreviations, and all the cases of acronymisation. Some linguists consider them as completely different linguistic categories. Many points of view have been expressed lately in linguistic publications concerning the massive use of acronyms in written and oral communication. The acronyms and abbreviations in general are not an invention of our times, they were invented and used in ancient times and quite a number of them have been preserved up till now. Scientists still wonder about their linguistic nature, their dissemination and function in all the languages of the world. Let's give some examples of various points of view of scientists in the field expressing their attitude towards the linguistic elements under discussion. Among them we can find purists, defending the classic language, and, linguists approve language innovations. Thus, Lopaticova M. is against continuous intensive change of the vocabulary, stating the fact that the arbitrary formation of neologisms contradicts the essential function of the language as a means of communication [5].

Let's present some points of view of F.de Saussure's supporters on acronyms: “Un signe sans signifié ne peut être qu'un de set extérieur au système la langue! L'acronyme sur le plan sémantique dévie doublement du modèle du signe linguistique créé par le grand savant: d'une part son signifié ne correspond pas concept ou une image mentale stable dans la langue; d'autre part on ne peut définir sa valeur dans un système de signes” [9, p.24-25]. Structural semantics cannot approach it with the techniques and methods it has at the disposal. Some counterarguments of compromisers suggest to treat lexicology only from a practical point of view: “Sauf l'économie discursive grâce à ce qu'ils n'utilisent la me matière linguistique s'évite le surplus, la surproduction des unités lexicales encombrerait le tissu de la langue, leur mémorisation et leur emploi correcte dans processus de la communication et comme conclusion logique l'opinion l'acronymisation c'est un procédé avec une finalité bien déterminée même qui transgressent toutes théories linguistiques créées depuis des siècles”. St. Ullmann also affirms that acronyms do not express notions, have no meaning, their function is not one of signification but one of identification, still he considers them as a means of linguistic communication [9, p.24-25]. P. Guiraud thinks that acronyms have nothing in common with abbreviations. The possibility and function of their mechanisms are radically opposite to the known linguistic units. A.Martinet explains the problem in the following: «La réduction de présentation formelle c'est une des causes de sa haute fréquence dans la parole (principe pragmatique) [7, p.187]. H. Marcuse thinks that “Ayant le sens truqué, alourdi mais une fois devenu vocable officiel, référence constamment dans l'usage général (national ou même international) et sanctionné les interlocuteurs... il perd toute valeur cognitive... sert simplement à foui l'information: SOS, NATO, USA” [6, p.119]. Important is that each created neologism should possess its form and meaning. Thus, some linguists consider the acronym a spontaneous and arbitrary creation which lacks semantic motivation. In this connection C.Hagège affirms: “Les hommes opère avec leur langue, la réinventent, la transforment, créant des catégories nouvelles se répartissent conformément à une certaine hiérarchie transgressant souvent les établies par la linguistique classique. Pour les formations en cause ça

sera: Autant d'acronymes, autant d'étymons". [Ibidem] Some scientist call them image-words, lexical units used astonish and shock the reader. For example: *ADAM* – an acronym which has developed four homonyms. Coming across *ADAM* in the text the reader would intuitively evoke the name found in the Bible. In reality the present term *ADAM* covers in modern communication realities of the world economy. This example will deny the affirmations that the acronym can be viewed as a comparison, where we usually look for common or different qualities and characteristic features. The acronym can be considered with certain reserve as a kind of substitute used for a well determined purpose.

There are interminable debates among linguists concerning acronyms. One of the conclusions is that acronyms are not words in the classical point of view. They are a new kind of linguistic element as part of something new to change the theories of the past and introduce new ideas of well-known modern linguists. In acronyms the volume of the linguistic message is reduced to a simple unit. Each component of the acronym represents a certain lexical unit. But to a closer inspection we discover that acronyms gradually acquire characteristic features of usual lexical units: they may be polysemantic and homonymous, the same unit can be transformed from noun into adjective ore even verb. Thus, *LASER* as a noun, laser beam (adjective), to lase (verb.). As an international term *LASER* is used in many languages as a simple lexical unit and not as a combination of initial letters of five words. Plenty of similar examples can be adduced.

All the neologisms should be understood by the speaker as representing an extra linguistic reality, trying to define, in a certain way, the denoted object. Acronyms do not possess a motivation in the classical sense of the word. Its motivation is completely arbitrary, formal, determined by the possibility of combining certain letters in an euphonic ensemble denoting a certain referent. It is a referent of a well centered activity by a collective choosing a syntagm ensuring the denomination of a new created unit, proceed the research of the appellation, maximum reduced, as a form and possessing an extra-linguistic expressivity. This is a minute work of reduction, dislocation, suppression, etc. which allows the creation of a new communication element. The realization of a linguistic sign in the act of speech is the denomination of a reality which connects the significant to an extra-linguistic object or phenomenon recognized by the speakers. As neologisms are constantly being formed motivated by extra-linguistic causes we find out that the same acronym can serve different referents not only in one language, but also we can find homonymous referents in other languages as well.

Acronymisation is created by specialists in order to reduce some lexical elements to a single unit, denoting an object, a political organization, important extra-linguistic phenomena inthe society. The new unit should possess certain qualities like euphony to attract the attention of the listeners; easily assimilated morphologically and syntactically, to be easily memorized, to possess expressivity to impress people in order to be easily kept in mind.

One more point of view of some linguists is that acronymisation now is gradually isolating itself from abbreviation, which is the result of lexical, individual and personal creativity. The term abbreviation is used by some linguists to denote initalisms and all other possible forms of shortening of lexical units. Some linguists use the term abbreviation, which include both types of initialisms: those which can be read like a word and those which can not.

Many acronyms and abbreviations, in general, have become international: UNESCO, NATO. Some others are used regionally or only in one language. The codification and decodification of acronyms is considered as an extra-linguistic fact. **The metasemiotic expressive function of acronyms.** Thus, acronyms have been used since times immemorial, but only now there is an impressing development of the given lexical units in all the fields of activity, and gradually they come into usage in all the languages of the world. The higher the level of development more sophisticated compressed units are created and used. The process of lexicalization of acronyms takes place on the basis of words existing in the vocabulary. Acronyms may be intentionally chosen so to form certain associations. Such nouns may function as personified metaphors, sometimes producing a metasemiotic effect. Let us take some examples: **ADAM** - Advanced Data Management System (Acronym). Adam - the firs of the world (lexicalized proper noun). **EDGAR** - Electronic Gathering Analyses and Retrieval System Edgar - male name. **EDIC** - Engineering Data Identification and Control. Edic - male name. **HERMES** - Higher Education Resource Materials. Education and Service. Hermes - God in Ancient Greek **CHEOPS** - Chemical Operation System. Cheops - name of pharaoh in Ancient Egypt. **ISIS** - Independent School Information Service. Isis - Goddess in Ancient Egypt. **IDA** -

International Development Abstracts. Ida - female name. Some more example like COBRA, BEATRICE, NELSON, PASCAL, PICASSO, FAUST, CLEOPATRA, PLATON, SOCRATE, HERMES, POSEIDON, DIONIS, AFRICA, ASIA, BABILOB, IRAC, PARIS, BOSS, etc. confirm the fact of intentional use of this or that proper name in creating acronyms [10].

The evolution of acronyms in various functional styles very often is accompanied by a metasemiotic usage of the codified combination of initialisms. In various sophisticated contexts the abridged units gradually start to acquire a certain stylistic connotation. Names of institutions, organizations, etc. may be chosen in order to sound more attractive and produce a strong emotional effect (including a humorous one) on people. The name of an organisation, institution, or social-political movement can bring success and prosperity or if the acronym is not attractive enough it may be the cause of failure. That is why the subjective character in creating new abbreviations is increasing in the fields of politics, economy and in all social life activities. That's why more and more elegant, fashionable and super compressed units come into being. It is for the information of consumers that it is important to have something jovial, euphonic, recognizable in form, related to some well-known names, that would make the new appellation more superior, attractive, interesting and people would get eager to know more of the object or phenomenon in question.

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