

## A PRAGMATIC AND METASEMIOTIC APPROACH TO ABRIDGED LEXICAL UNITS

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Evoluția unităților lexicale prescurtate, sudate și abreviate în diferite stiluri funcționale este tot mai des însoțită de folosirea lor metasemiotică. În contexte sofisticate, abrevierile și, mai ales, acronimele, treptat capătă o anumită conotație stilistică. Denumirile organizațiilor, instituțiilor, asociațiilor, diferitelor programe, proiecte, întâmplător sau intenționat, capătă forma unor cuvinte din limbă, nume de persoane celebre, denumiri de constelații, continente, orașe, mișcări social-politice, zeități etc., care implică ideea de succes și prosperitate. Dacă acronimul nu este suficient de atractiv, reprezentând un nume metaforic peiorativ, el ar putea diminua, într-o anumită măsură, popularitatea instituției respective. Caracterul subiectiv în formarea acronimelor metaforice, care exprimă conotații deosebite, se observă în politică, economie, știință și activitatea socială.

The linguistic innovations in the human society are a step forward towards progress. What seems to be paradoxical today becomes reality tomorrow. All the innovations have the right to exist in case they are applied rationally in time and space and are reflected in the human activity. The capacity to create words is a natural manifestation of linguistic competence of all the speakers of the existing languages, capable in a given situation to put forward new denominations referring to new perceptions of reality, stating other appellations for segments already denominated. The speaker actualizes this capacity using different resources of lexical creation offered by the linguistic system. The language is the most mobile and the most flexible of social factors reflecting the current development of the society. The speed of linguistic innovation is extremely rapid, the new opportunities to create new lexical units in the act of communication is so impetuous, that the speaker often has to violate ingeniously the established and recognized norms, which seemed to be the pillars of the human language. In this competition the procedures of neologisation (derivation, composition, abbreviation, etc.) which follow the existing laws, the linguists observe the appearance of a new linguistic phenomenon – various abridgements in general and the acronymisation in particular, which surpass quantitatively many other classic procedures of renovation of the vocabulary of a language.

The rapid evolution of science and technology impose the creation of new notions and linguistic forms to describe them. The abundance of advertising messages, literary works, and various kinds of information is flooding the language, the speakers bravely try to single them out and distinguish their meanings, imposed by the expressivity of style and freshness of the vocabulary, attracting the information consumer, enhance his or her interest by the novelty of ideas and linguistic forms. Advertising is permanently manifesting itself as being inventive and creative, using all possible lexical innovations. 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 have 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.

In some of our previous publication, concerning various abridged lexical units like shortenings, blendings, abbreviations and acronyms and their various combinations we mentioned the fact that the existing level of political and economic development requires the use of more compact lexical units to express a greater volume of information. There is constant stream of curtailed or abridged specific metalinguistic units, easy to use, having a pragmatic character, helping to express as much information in as little space and time possible. Abbreviations (including acronyms and initialisms) and many other possible compound formations of theirs, alongside shortenings and blendings, are used to codify linguistic information in order to optimize communication. The accelerating development of science and technology, economy, business, etc. brought to the creation of

hundreds of thousands of compact linguistic signs in order to cope with the huge amount of information to be communicated. Abbreviations, blendings and other abridged units have become an efficient means of stocking and communicating a considerable volume of information in a concise way without any losses. This compression of the expression plane has become extremely economical. Practically all the countries in the world have started to actively use compact units created in their countries and abroad. An impressive international vocabulary is continuously being replenished (most of the units are coming from English) in the majority of the existing languages, abbreviated and curtailed ones including, in order to improve communication.

The areas where abbreviations and shortenings are created and used in large numbers are in the fields of politics, economics, local administration, organizations, research activities, military domain, etc. Borrowings from Latin get English names of the corresponding lexemes and may be pronounced with Latin words, English words or both English and Latin depending on the functional style of the given register: e.g. (*exempli gratia*) – for example, a.m. – in formal register *ante meridiem* is used corresponding to the colloquial variant *in the morning*, the same in the case of *p.m.* – *post meridiem* / *in the afternoon*. Many initial abbreviations are read like separate words usually named acronyms (radar, laser, NATO), some of them may be read both way (VAT: *Value added tax*) – [væt] or [vi ei ti]). Very often we find hybrids of shortenings and abbreviations: *CoSIRA* (*Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas*). *Blending or fusion*, combining two or more shortened words or mixed forms of clipped and unclipped units. Other terms used are *portmanteau word* and *telescoping*. In modern English the number of fusions has radically increased. For example: *smog* (*smoke* + *fog*), *brunch* (*breakfast* + *lunch*), *positron* (*positive* + *electron*), and *motel* (*motor-car* + *hotel*), *ballute* (< *balloon* + *parachute*), *dawk* (< *dove* + *hawk*) There are other kinds of blends where the degree of blending is less obvious (*glasphalt*) and cases where the blending is very difficult to recognize the shortened elements of the lexical units: *arcology* = *architectural ecology*. People get used to them and start using only the abridged variant.

Do all the abridged units possess both denotational and connotational meanings, equivalent to the original component units? Do they lose or gain anything? Thus, in English we find the Latin origin e.g. (*exempli gratia*) and its equivalent *for example*, The Latin abbreviation e.g. in English is a stylistic synonym of *for example*. At the first sight one could think that abbreviations are void of denotational and connotational meanings. A closer inspection of the material does not support this possible point of view. There are plenty of acronyms homonymous to the existing units. They may be intentionally chosen in order to compress information and form certain metasemiotic associations. Having analyzed the existing dictionaries we have found out that homonymy of abbreviations, and especially of acronyms, is incredibly high. Some of them have more than a hundred homonymous lexical units (see PET) and may be used to provoke positive or some other connotations. Acronyms like **radar** – *radio detecting and ranging*; **laser** – *light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation* are used now as integrated lexemes in many languages of the world. Among acronyms there are quite a number of homonyms of proper and common names. They may function as personified metaphors, sometimes producing a humorous effect or making it sound as something very important. Thus, for example: **ICARUS** – *Industrial Computer Applications, Retrieval and Utility Systems*, **HERMES** – *Higher Education Resource Materials: Evaluation and Services*, **EDGAR** – *Electronic Gathering, Analysis and Retrieval System (US)*. We have observed that the intentional use of this or that name is found in many cases, i.e. while abbreviating a certain combination of words, some of the elements are left aside in order to have an acronym identical to a given name. See, for instance, **EDGAR**. In case of **DAISY** (*1. Dairy Information System (Reading University-GB)*, *2. Decision-Aiding Information System (University of Pennsylvania, Wharton School of Finance and Commerce – US)*). **DAISY**(*Daisy*) – *Druckindustrie – Abrechnungs – und Informations – System*) [2] both in English and German the letters SY do not represent two different words; they are part of the word *System*. We find many acronymic names, which do not always consist of pure initial letters. In order to get an attractive appellation the authors contribute to the creation of a desired attractive and fashionable term that would be metasemiotically charged.

The decoding of many proper noun homonymous abbreviations demonstrates the fact that they, in their turn, possess two or more homonymous meanings: **ADAM** – *Advanced Data Management System (MITRE Corp. – US)*, *Aid in Design and Evaluation of Data Management (IBM-US)*, *Automatic Data Management System (US)*, *Automatic Document Abstracting Method (Ohio State University – US)*, **EMIE** – *Education Management Information Exchange (GB)*, *Educational Media Institute Evaluation Project*. Many acronyms have homonyms both in English and other foreign languages as well. Thus, **MIDAS** – has 11 homonyms in English and one in Polish [13].

Analysing acronyms like ORACLE, ORION, ADAM, AESOP, ARISTOTLE, AFRICA, BABILON, BEATRICE, CALLISTO, CARL, CASTLE, CLEOPATRA, LOLITA, LORA, LOUISA, MINERVA, MINERVE, OLIVIA, CLARA, PATRICIA, SAM, EROS, ESOPE, EUCLIDE, FABIUS, FRANCIS, FRED, FREDDY, COSA NOSTRA, COSMOS, PARIS, LEEDS, ODESSA, PATRIC, PATRICIA, PEAR, PEARL, PENELOPE, PLATON, POTOMAC, RAPIDS, SINBAD, SIRIUS, SMART, SOCRATE, SOCRATES; SOFIA, SOKRATES, SOKRATUS, SOLAR, MARS, ORION, ASTRA, SPARTAN, DAISY; DAVID; DAVIS, DRAGON, EARL we observe well-known names found in the Bible, World Literature and World History, Natural Sciences, etc. Most people are familiar with all these appellations and the metasemiotic impact on them would be considerable. The use of common names homonymous equivalent acronyms can also be used to achieve a certain degree of expressivity and interest: *CAR, INTIME, INFORMAL, INFER, INCLUDE, IMPRESS, IMPACT, HOST, HEN, IDEA, GOLD*. MIDDLE, RAPID, SIMPLE, LION, TIGER, TIME, WISE, WISDOM, EAGLE, PADRE, PAPA, KISS, JOVIAL, *LAMP*, KIWI, MAGIC, MEDIC, MAID, MALL, MANA, MASTER, MIRACL, MIRROR, MISS, NAME, OSCAP, ANTIDOTE, ANTILOPE, ART, ATLAS, AUDIT, CAPTAIN, CORRECT, PAPA, SAFARI, SALT, FAME, MANIAC. Cf. some examples with homonyms in Romanian: COPAC, COPACEL, APA, (18 homonyms), AULA [1, 12, 13].

Many acronyms and initialisms have come to the point of not just representing a combination of words they gradually developed features of independent lexical units with new global meanings. Thus, for example, LASER – well known as Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation (there also such homonymous combinations as: Learning Achievement through Saturated Educational Resources; London and South Eastern Library Region; Learning Achievement through Saturated Educational Resources; London and South) may be used as a noun, adjective, verb: to lase – print some materials by using a laser printer; a laser aircraft – an aircraft with a laser engine, laser – in the meaning of quantum/laser amplifier, etc. [1].

**Double compression abbreviations** is a very good example of discourse economy/saving of time, space and money. Thus, in "Acronyms and Initialisms Dictionary", Michigan, 1998 we find: *LIF – Laser Interference Filter; LFL – Laser Flash Lamp; LID – Laser Intrusion Detection; LIED – Laser Initiating Explosion Devise*. In other dictionaries we can find some more (12): *LMI – Laser Microfilming, Inc., LVIS – Laser View data Information Service*. Thus, the acronym *laser* here is further compressed as a component part of new abbreviated lexical units [12]. More than 500 word combinations in the English technical terminology can appear in their abbreviated variants with the initial letter of *LASER* in them. 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. We can sum up that the creation of abbreviated units and their metalanguage, the compiling of numerous dictionaries in the domain are part of 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 express the constantly growing volume of information.

We can conclude that acronyms have been used since times immemorial, but only now we have an impressive 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 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 impact on people. The name of an organization, 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 various social life activities. That is 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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