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VIZIUNI TEORETICE ȘI PARTICULARITĂȚI LINGVISTICE ALE LIMBAJULUI NAȚIONALIST ÎN SOCIETĂȚILE MODERNE

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Rezumat: *Limbajul naționalist a devenit în ultima vreme nu doar un mijloc de comunicare, ci și un simbol al identității naționale, al unității, modernității și legitimității politice. În acest sens, limbajul devine un simbol al continuității culturale și al profunzimii istorice a națiunii, esențial pentru construirea unei identități naționale coerente, conservarea și promovarea unei limbi naționale fiind considerată necesară pentru menținerea integrității și continuității națiunii. Totuși, în multe circumstanțe, acest limbaj funcționează prin definirea celor care aparțin națiunii (grupul de interior) și a celor considerați „ceilalți" (grupul exterior), generând excluziune socială etnică, diviziune și diferențe.*

Cuvinte cheie: limbaj politic, limbaj naționalist, identitate națională, coeziune socială, excluziune socială.

NATIONALIST LANGUAGE AND ITS LINGUISTIC PARTICULARITIES IN THE TECHNIQUE OF MANIPULATION

Abstract: *Nationalist language sometimes carries strong emotional appeal and is a strong tool in political rhetoric, because it tends to emphasize identity, unity, pride, but a sense of threat or competition from "the other", too. It also uses fear, anger or nostalgia to stir feelings, and in this study we will show how nationalist language can also lead to manipulation, division and ultimately social exclusion. The article is devoted to the*

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analysis of manipulative strategies and tactics in the nationalist discourse with specific linguistic tools. This type of linguistic construction defines who belongs to the nation and who does not, drawing clear distinctions between insiders (true nationals) and outsiders (foreigners, minorities or those deemed unpatriotic). As a specific feature, nationalist rhetoric often relies on passionate appeals to love for the nation, pride and sacrifice, sometimes invoking a sense of historical victimhood or heroism, and it is also used to justify political sovereignty, territorial claims and policies aimed at preserving or strengthening national unity, which can manifest in calls for independence, resistance to external influences or efforts to assimilate minority groups. While it aims to unify people under a shared identity, it can also be used to manipulate public opinion, create divisions and exclude certain groups, shaping an "us" vs. "them".

Keywords: nationalist language, manipulatory techniques, us vs. them, othering, discrimination, outsiders.

Introduction

Nationalist rhetoric frequently distinguishes between *true* members of the nation and *outsiders*, such as foreigners, minorities or political opponents and this division can lead to social polarization and justify discrimination against those who are considered not fully part of the national identity. Nationalist discourse selectively interprets history to serve political goals and by glorifying a nation's past and portraying external or internal groups as threats, leaders can manipulate public feeling to justify certain policies, conflicts or exclusions. Some nationalist movements use fear-mongering tactics, claiming that the nation is under threat from external enemies, immigrants or ideological adversaries and this behaviour can create social divisions and justify authoritarian policies in the name of *national security*. By framing criticism as *unpatriotic* or *betrayal*, nationalist language can suppress debate and opposition which limits democratic discourse and fuels an environment where dissenters are marginalized or persecuted.

The discourse we are analyzing obviously uses manipulative methods to shape public opinion, control narratives and consolidate power, and we will present in this respect a set of linguistic techniques and examples that prove behaviours and sentiments such as:

-Emotional appeal, using pride, fear, anger or nostalgia to provoke strong emotional reactions: "Our nation is under attack!" (fear), "We must

restore our former glory!" (nostalgia), "Only true patriots love their country!" (guilt/shame);

-*us* vs. *them* mentality, which creates an artificial division between the in-group (nation, patriots) and out-group (foreigners, immigrants, political opponents): "Real citizens put their country first!" (exclusionary), "Foreigners are taking our jobs!" (scapegoating), "Anyone who criticizes the government is a traitor!" (silencing dissent);

-historical mythmaking selectively glorifying national history while ignoring or distorting negative aspects: "Our ancestors were always victorious!" (ignores failures), "We have never started wars, only defended ourselves!" (revisionism), "We have a divine mission to lead!" (justification for aggression);

-propaganda and slogans with short, powerful phrases that are easy to repeat and difficult to challenge: "Make Our Nation Great Again!", "One People, One Nation, One Leader!", National Unity Above All!";

-scapegoating, blaming minorities or internal enemies for problems: "Our economic crisis is caused by outsiders!", "Immigrants are diluting our culture!", "The opposition wants to destroy our values!";

-censorship and control of media which limit opposing viewpoints and controls the narrative through, such as banning books, websites and news outlets that criticize the government/state-controlled media spreading nationalist ideology/jailing journalists or whistleblowers;

-militarization of language, which uses war-related metaphors to justify aggression or repression: "We are in a battle for our survival!", "Enemies of the nation must be crushed!", "Patriots must fight against traitors!";

-euphemisms and misleading terms that soften harsh realities by using polished, vague language: "Border protection", instead of mass deportations, "re-education camps, instead of forced labor camps", "Defensive action", instead of military invasion;

-manipulation of democratic institutions through nationalist rhetoric to justify authoritarian control: "Elections must be postponed to protect national stability!", "Only true patriots should be allowed to vote!", " The leader is the voice of the people!";

-cult of personality resenting a leader as the embodiment of the nation: "Only our leader can save the country!", "The leader's enemies are enemies of the nation!" and implementing slogans promoting a single ruler, giant posters and leaders' statues.

We have selected only a few of the representative examples precisely to

illustrate the invasion of terms by which the nationalist language aggressively and manipulatively invaded the social sphere, in all its forms.

Justifying discriminatory policies, nationalist rhetoric could and can be used to legitimize policies that exclude or oppress certain groups, such as ethnic minorities, religious communities or political opponents, and this can manifest in laws restricting citizenship, language rights and political participation. By emphasizing ethnic, religious and cultural differences, nationalist language can deepen social divisions, leading to tensions, discrimination and even violence. Extreme nationalist rhetoric, bearing an intolerant nature, has historically contributed to ethnic cleansing, civil wars and genocides [1, pp. 320-333]. While nationalism can foster a sense of belonging and unity, its language can also be weaponized to manipulate public opinion, deepen societal divides and justify exclusionary or oppressive policies, the impact depending on how nationalist rhetoric is framed and whether it promotes inclusion or exclusion.

In a previous study related to the theories on nationalist language as a modern means of social cohesion and national unity we addressed ideas of theorists such as B.Anderson, E.Gellner, A.D.Smith and E.Hobsbawm, but in this paper we will try to extend this topic seen as a negative phenomenon on societies because when language is crafted to manipulate emotions, shape perceptions and control public opinion, it becomes a powerful tool for influence. Mentioning nationalist language's features we may notice that rhetoric reduces complex economic, political and social issues to simplistic slogans, making it easier to rally public support but harder to find real solutions.

Moreover, authoritarian leaders have historically used nationalist language to justify their rule, portraying themselves as protectors of the nation and framing dissent as betrayal, and while nationalism can foster unity and pride, when its language is used manipulatively, it can lead to misinformation, intolerance and conflict between *us* and *others,* as well. Foreigners are depicted in dehumanizing/demonizing terms. In this way they are reduced to either harmful stereotypes or to scapegoats for societal problems. The process of *othering* can involve various stereotypes, depicting immigrants as criminals, terrorists, or economic burdens.

Manipulative techniques in the nationalist discourse are aimed to shape public opinion, control narratives and consolidate power, tools extensively used in every political speech so that the speaker will achieve his/her target in delivering the speech.

National rethoric and linguistic features in the books of researchers on nationalism issues

Michael Billig, a British academic, Emeritus Professor in Social sciences, introduced the concept of **"banal nationalism"** in his 1995 book *Banal Nationalis*m which refers to the subtle and sometimes unnoticed ways in which nationalism is a phenomenon of radical political movements perpetuated and embedded in the daily routine, through everyday symbols, language and practices, also in democratic and stable societies.. The author asks why people do not forget their national identity, and he suggests that in daily life nationalism is constantly flagged in the media through routine symbols and habits of language [2, p.15]. Billig argues that nationalism is often thought of in extreme terms, such as fascist movements, wars and ethnic conflicts. We also may read in his book that nationalism is seen in daily discourse, media reports, political speeches and even sports commentary that reinforce national identity without overt propaganda. When discussing the linguistic features of nationalist language in the book, Billig focuses on how language plays a central role in reinforcing national identity in a manner that is taken for granted.

Billig highlights the use of inclusive pronouns such as *we*, *our* and *us*, which help solidify a collective national identity. These pronouns construct a sense of belonging and unity among members of the nation, often making the national community seem natural, self-evident, and uncontroversial. Phrases like *we as a nation, our country* or *the government must act in our interest* assume a shared national identity without question and even the way weather forecasts or news reports refer to the nation (*our troops, our economy*) subtly reinforce national belonging. For example, in discussions about national sports teams or politics, the language reinforces in a delicate manner an *us* versus *them* mentality, fostering a sense of shared identity.

National identity is also framed as something natural or timeless through linguistic devices and Billig argues that by using language that implies the nation-state is a given, people accept it as a permanent and unquestionable structure. Phrases like *our country, our history or our culture* contribute to this perception, which makes the nation-state appear as if it has always been a central organizing principle of society [2, p.55]. Billig discusses about national language and its symbols, about how national symbols, like flags and anthems, are embedded into daily life and treated as natural components of the national landscape. Linguistically the use of national language in everyday conversation, even if it's talking about *our*

language or *our flag* reinforces the idea of belonging and this is done in a way that makes these symbols seem mundane or unremarkable, even though they carry strong nationalist undertones [2, p.41].

Billig keeps explaining how *flagging* national identity refers to the casual and habitual references to the nation, which could be the routine inclusion of national references in discourse such as talking about *national values, our institutions* or *our economy* which serves to continually remind people of their national identity without overtly emphasizing it, and this type of languagecertainly works to make the nation invisible in its omnipresence.

Another linguistic aspect consists of the use of metaphors and symbolic language as a common feature of nationalist discourse. For example, terms like *motherland* or *fatherland* personify the nation, appealing to emotional connections and ideas of loyalty, care and protection, these metaphorical references evoking a sense of duty and attachment to the nation.

The author also points to the language that promotes a sense of unity and belonging. Terms like *together, united* and *solidarity* are used to strengthen the idea of a common purpose or shared national interests and we conclude that this type of language encourages people to think of their national community as cohesive and indivisible. On the flip side, nationalist language also works to exclude certain groups, whether based on ethnicity, religion and other criteria, as well. By using language that defines the *outsiders*, such as *foreigners, immigrants* and *non-citizens*, nationalism creates a sense of *otherness* that marks individuals or groups as not belonging to the national community. The identity of the in-group (the host society is often contrasted with migrants' identity even with regard to their own society. There is a criticism of migrants as renegades, "those who leave" coming from their own society of origin [7, p.99].

Another relevant feature Billig identifies is the routine and repetitive nature of nationalist language, aationalist symbols and language being constantly recycled in everyday life, without much thought or active recognition. And this repetition helps maintain the continuity of national identity with examples including the recitation of the national anthem, the presence of national flags in public spaces or the casual use of terms like *national pride.*

Michael Billig's analysis reveals that the linguistic features of nationalist language are subtle, habitual and ingrained in everyday life and rather than being a dramatic expression of nationalism, it's the everyday,

banal elements of language that continuously fortifies national identities, and this daily reinforcement is a condition to sustaining nationalistic sentiment, even in relatively peaceful times. In one of his book chapter's Billing resorts to Michael Ignatieff[36] statement according to which "Modern nationalism is the language of blood: a call to arms which can end in the horrors of ethnic cleansing. It claims a right to kill in the name of bloodlines, ethnicities and territorial integrity, and it excludes those who do not belong to the imagined community" [3, p.6].

Michael Ignatieff's ideas on nationalism, including nationalist language, are closely tied to his broader concerns about identity, politics and the ethical implications of nationalism. Although he did not focus exclusively on nationalist language in the same way Michael Billig does in *Banal Nationalism*, Ignatieff's writings on nationalism engage with the role of language in the construction of national identities. Ignatieff sees nationalism as a powerful political and emotional force, deeply tied to language and at the same time he understands nationalism not just as a political ideology, but as a set of cultural practices that evoke strong attachments to a particular nation or community. Nationalist language, in his view, serves as a crucial tool for expressing these emotional bonds and constructing a sense of collective identity. Ignatieff emphasizes that language is not just a means of communication, but a medium through which national identity is constructed, and describing national language, along with symbols, rituals and historical narratives, it becomes a powerful part of how individuals experience belonging to a national community.

In *The Lesser Evil*, Ignatieff discusses how language works to consolidate and defend national identity in situations of conflict or crisis, nationalist language being able to create a sense of solidarity and belonging, but also being exclusive or divisive, particularly in contexts where there are minority groups or competing identities. In many nationalist discourses, language is used to mark certain groups as *outsiders* or *threats* to the

36 Michael Ignatieff is a Canadian academic, author and politician, best known for his work in both the intellectual and political arenas. One of the most influential intellectuals in the English-speaking world, Michael Ignatieff's story is generally understood to be that of an ambitious, accomplished progressive politician and writer, whose work and thought fit within an enlightened political tradition valuing human rights and diversity. His ideas on nationalism extend beyond theoretical analysis into practical concerns about the use of nationalism in global politics, particularly in conflict, multicultural societies and during times of war. Below are the key implications of Ignatieff's writings on nationalism:

nation's cohesion. When migrants are seen as outsiders and excluded from the social, economic, political and cultural life of the host community they become targets for more and more discrimination: unequal access on the labour market, education, healthcare etc. [7, pp.96-97]. This *othering* can be done through the language of cultural superiority or more overtly through negative stereotypes and exclusionary rhetoric. He is critical of how nationalist language can be manipulated by leaders to stoke division and resentment and he emphasizes the responsibility of intellectuals and politicians to be aware of the consequences of the language they use in shaping national narratives. The ethical use of language is a concern for Ignatieff, particularly in multicultural societies where linguistic choices must be more inclusive and mindful of diversity.

Ignatieff makes a distinction between *civic nationalism* (which is based on shared values, political rights and citizenship) and *ethnic nationalism* (which is based on shared ethnicity, language and culture). He suggests that civic nationalism is more inclusive, as it ties national belonging to shared political values, rather than to language or ethnicity, and for Ignatieff, the language of civic nationalism is more likely to promote tolerance and pluralism, whereas the language of ethnic nationalism can be more exclusionary, creating rigid boundaries around who belongs to the nation and who does not. In summary, Ignatieff's ideas on nationalist language are embedded in his broader analysis of the ethical and political dimensions of nationalism and while not specifically focused on linguistic analysis, he explores how nationalist language plays a crucial role in constructing identity, mobilizing populations and justifying political actions with strong ethical implications.

Hannah Arendt[37], in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) treated 19th-century anti-semitism, imperialism and racism. In the preface to her book she emphasizes that "Never has our future been more unpredictable, never have we depended so much on political forces that cannot be trusted to follow the rules of common sense and self-interest-forces that look like sheer insanity, if judged by the standards of other centuries" [4, p.7].

Arendt viewed the growth of totalitarianism as the outcome of the di-

37 One of the most influential political theorists of the twentieth century, Hannah Arendt, was forced to leave Germany in 1933 and lived in Paris for the next eight years, working for a number of Jewish refugee organizations. In 1941 she immigrated to the United States and soon became part of a lively intellectual circle in New York. She held a number of academic positions at various American universities until her death in 1975.

sintegration of the traditional nation-state. She argued that totalitarian regimes, through their pursuit of raw political power and their neglect of material or utilitarian considerations, had revolutionized the social structure and made contemporary politics nearly impossible to predict. Arendt argues that nationalist language plays a critical role in creating and sustaining the ideological frameworks of totalitarian movements and that the nationalist rhetoric serves to isolate individuals from one another and from the wider political community, fostering a sense of exclusion and defining the *Other* in stark terms, which is a major characteristic of totalitarian ideologies. According to Arendt, nationalist language contributes to the creation of an atmosphere of fear, where loyalty to the nation is placed above all else, including rational discourse or moral considerations, in the same context, analyzing how nationalist rhetoric contributed to exclusionary and authoritarian ideologies in the 20th century[4, p.8]..

At the same time, Arendt highlights how nationalist movements employ a language of myths and exaggerations, appealing to emotions and collective identities rather than rational or democratic engagement. This language fosters a sense of victimization, a core theme in totalitarian propaganda, and offers simplistic solutions to complex problems by positioning the nation as the victim of outside forces or enemies. The narrative of *us* vs. *them* becomes central to such movements, reinforcing the idea of national superiority or uniqueness.

In her analysis, Arendt also points out how totalitarian movements, particularly those that became dominant in Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia, manipulated nationalist discourse to further their political goals. They took advantage of existing grievances, fears and the desire for a unified national identity to spread their totalitarian visions, thus laying the foundation for the authoritarian structures that followed. Arendt tries to discover satisfactory answers to the question of "how the all this insanity happened at the cradle of the civilization" [5, p.1332]. To give an outline of Arendt's contribution in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, we may state that she clearly identifies nationalist language as a powerful tool used by totalitarian movements to construct a divisive and exclusionary political narrative that isolates individuals, promotes a victim mentality and dehumanizes perceived enemies, all of them central elements in the formation and perpetuation of totalitarian regimes. Rogers Brubaker, professor of Sociology in California examines how nationalist rhetoric influences citizenship laws and inclusion/exclusion in different societies, highlighting

the contrast between ethnic-based and civic-based nationalism, emphasizing that every state attaches certain rights and obligations to the status of citizenship [6, p. 5].

In his essay *Notes on Nationalism* (1945), George Orwell critically analyzes the concept of nationalism and the way it shapes language and discourse, Orwell's reflections on nationalism being particularly concerned with how the language of nationalism is used to manipulate and control political thought and action. His argument focuses on the irrationality, the contradictions and the emotional intensity that nationalism obrings, mostly in times of war or political upheaval.

Orwell critiques how nationalist discourse thrives on emotions rather than reason and nationalists, he argues, frequently use language that oversimplifies complex political or social issues, reducing them to a binary *us* vs. *them* mentality, the same views as the previous theorists mentioned in their works. This rhetoric serves to obscure the realities of a situation and to promote blind loyalty to a particular nation, at the expense of logic or ethical consideration. The author also highlights how nationalist language creates clear distinctions between *us,* the members of the nation or group and *them*, the outsiders, enemies or others.

This binary framing is reinforced through emotional and charged language, portraying the national group as virtuous and under threat, while enemies are depicted as inherently evil or inferior. This divide plays into the broader narrative of nationalism, helping to justify extreme actions and policies against perceived threats. Orwell notes that nationalist language involves contradictions and inconsistencies; for example, a nationalist might simultaneously condemn a foreign enemy for doing something that their own nation is also guilty of. This form of doublethink (holding contradictory beliefs at the same time) is pervasive in nationalist rhetoric, making it difficult to question the narrative and Orwell sees this as an intentional tactic to prevent critical thinking and to maintain loyalty to the nationalist cause.

Orwell also observes how nationalism stifles independent thought. Nationalist rhetoric labels any criticism of the nation or its leaders as unpatriotic or traitorous and this creates an environment where dissent is not only dangerous but is portrayed as morally wrong, further consolidating the power of nationalist ideologies and restricting the space for open debate. Orwell emphasizes that nationalism appeals to deeply emotional feelings, rooted in pride, fear and hatred and this emotional power helps rally

people to the nationalist cause and makes it difficult to resist. The language of nationalism often manipulates these emotions by portraying a nation as besieged or oppressed, justifying extreme measures or policies in the name of national survival or pride. Being a social construct of fear and oppression, alienation and marginalization of migrants, for instance, cause discrimination, exclusion, hostility and lead to insecurity, social isolation disconnection [7, p. 96].

Orwell connects nationalism to imperialist ideologies, noting that nationalist rhetoric can be used to justify the expansion of national power and the oppression of other nations. While nationalism often presents itself as a fight for national self-determination, it can, in practice, support imperialist expansion and the subjugation of others. Finally, Orwell contrasts nationalism with universalism, criticizing the way nationalism often prioritizes the interests of a particular group over the universal values of justice, equality and human rights. All the way through I have said, 'the nationalist does this' or 'the nationalist does that', using for purposes of illustration the extreme, barely sane type of nationalist who has no neutral areas in his mind and no interest in anything except the struggle for power. Actually such people are fairly common... [8, p. 64]. Some nationalists are not far from schizophrenia, living quite happily amid dreams of power and conquest which have no connexion with the physical world [7]. Coming back to our core idea, in Orwell's essay, nationalist language tends to frame the nation as more important than broader human concerns, leading to a narrow, exclusionary worldview. Orwell examines various linguistic features and strategies that are used in nationalist rhetoric, mentioning vague and emotional language such as words to evoke strong feelings of pride, loyalty and superiority: *freedom, glory, greatness* and *honor* are used in ways that are emotionally powerful but lack specific, concrete meaning and this vagueness allows for wide interpretation and manipulation, uniting people under a common emotional appeal without the need for clarity or rational debate.

Black-and-white thinking is also used by nationalist rhetoric and simplifies complex political issues by presenting them in binary terms: *us* versus *them*. This dichotomy encourages individuals to see the world in terms of clear-cut categories, where the in-group, the nation, is virtuous and noble, and the out-group, foreigners or enemy nations, is portrayed as evil or threatening, this kind of language helping to foster a sense of unity within the nation by creating an external enemy. Nationalist discourse frequently relies on myths, historical narratives and collective memory to strengthen a

sense of national identity, and by invoking symbols and legendary figures, nationalists create a shared past that binds people together. The language used to evoke these myths is often grandiose and idealized, presenting the nation's history in a way that elevates its significance and righteousness. Besides Goerge Orwell, to come closer to the present days, John Breuilly[38] argues that nationalism is a form of politics and in many circumstances a political tool rather than a purely cultural movement, his book rethinking the relationship between the popular and political behaviour [8, p.14].

George Orwell also points out that nationalist movements sometimes use repetitive, catchy phrases to instill a sense of unity and unquestioning loyalty and these slogans are often simplistic and emotional, making them easy to remember and repeat. Their purpose is to create a form of ideological shorthand that bypasses complex thought, encouraging quick, unquestioning allegiance. This kind of discourse frequently involves justifying actions that might otherwise be considered morally questionable and Orwell notes, in this respect, that nationalists tend to rationalize their own nation's behavior and find ways to deny or ignore any contradictions in their actions. The language used is designed to maintain an idealized image of the nation, even in the face of evidence to the contrary. For example, atrocities committed by one's own side may be downplayed or redefined as necessary sacrifices for the greater good.

Nationalists use euphemistic language to soften the impact of violent or aggressive actions and words like *collateral damage* or *military intervention* may be used to hide the harsh realities of war or conquest, euphemisms making it easier for people to accept morally dubious actions without questioning their ethical implications.

Conclusions

We have noticed in the present study that theorists whose works we analyzed and presented offer a sharp critique of how nationalist language distorts reality, suppresses independent thought and fuels conflict, suggesting that nationalism, with its emotional intensity and tendency to simplify complex political issues may lead to irrationality, injustice and a dangerous disregard for the rights and humanity of others. Their analysis of nationalism illustrates how the manipulation of language plays a central

38 Professor Breuilly's expertise lies in modern German history and the comparative history of modern Europe. He is also involved in modern urban history, the history of socialism and liberalism, the history of bourgeois culture and the history and theory of nationalism and of modernisation.

role in shaping political ideologies, the language of nationalism being used to obviously stir emotions, create divisions and justify actions that might otherwise be difficult to rationalize.

These methods manipulate public perception and create an illusion of national unity while often silencing dissent and justifying authoritarian policies and recognizing these techniques is crucial for critical thinking and resisting propaganda. The key to understanding how nationalism works, according to theorists' views is identifying the linguistic tools it uses to influence and control public perception. All the authors we approached are critical of how nationalist language can be manipulated by leaders to stoke division and resentment and they emphasize the responsibility of intellectuals and politicians to be aware of the consequences of the language they use in shaping national narratives.

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