

ON THE EXPRESSIVITY OF SOME FORMATIONS CREATED USING THE PREFIX *NE-* IN THE JOURNALISTIC DISCOURSE NOWADAYS

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Abstract

The press always manages through some functions to provide us with radiographies of actions, situations or persons, to persuade us of attitudes and behaviours on the one hand, and to place them in a certain expressive light, on the other hand. This light becomes therefore the stylistic touch of every publicist. The preference for some lexical word formations, mainly negative or privative, demonstrates the interest of our communication in one of the most widespread prefixes in our language, namely the forming prefix *ne-*.

Keywords: *expressivity, derivation, journalistic discourse, negative prefixes, Romanian prefix ne-*

Résumé

Par certaines de ses fonctions, la presse parvient toujours à nous donner des radiographies de certains faits, situations ou personnes, à nous convaincre de certaines attitudes et comportements, tout en les mettant sous un certain éclairage expressif. Cette lumière devient la marque stylistique de chaque publiciste. La préférence pour certaines formations lexicales, notamment négatives ou privatives, démontre l'intérêt de notre communication par rapport à l'un des préfixes à large spectre d'action de notre langue, à savoir le formant *ne-*.

Mots-clés: *expressivité, dérivation, discours publiciste, préfixes négatifs, préfixe roumain ne-*

The journalistic discourse of the past twenty years has been consistent in terms of lexical inventiveness, semantic recreation, desire for novelty and for spectacular. Due to their constantly “updated” content and through the addressees of this type of discourse, linguistic innovations propagate much more easily as they are better received compared to other ways of dissemination. Despite the fact that numerous

formations created and re-created appear as *lexical ephemerides*, their semantic and stylistic value should not be overlooked. Therefore, this writing focuses on one aspect of this expressive creativity, i.e. the forming prefix *un-*, which continues to be the most effective instrument in negative-meaning word formation¹, in all its nuances: opposition, contrariety, contradiction, absence, contestation, form of protest, qualitative inferiority.

Introduction. The derivative suffix-type nature of our language is a generally well-known fact (the number of suffixes exceeds 600)². Nonetheless, one should not neglect the fact that all other internal and external processes have also gained momentum commensurate with the dynamics of the changes in various sectors of public, social, economic and cultural life. Compared to suffix derivation, linguists have also highlighted over the past decades the productivity of prefixation in both technical and scientific style and journalistic style³.

The journalistic discourse represents the most dynamic area of literary language and it prefers the neologic prefixes, frequently encountered in “fashionable” words such as: *anti-academic*, *anti-celebrity*, *extra-option*, *extra-prize*, *hyper-inflation*, *hypertechnical*, *inactual*, *untreatable*, *unusable*, *non-author*, *non-pollutant*, *post-revolutionary*, *super-satellite*, *over-taxation*, *superpropaganda* etc.

Description and characterization.

In the present press, there is a significant number of negative-meaning words derived using prefixes⁴. The preference for such lexical formations originates in the denying, negative discourse of the post-December period and even beyond that point in time.

The first on this list is the prefix *un-*⁵, borrowed from the ancient Slavic language⁶, which, by selection of some neologic bases, competes with its worldwide

¹ The prefix *un-* is productive in all styles of the language, in all times and regions of the country. Cf. Alexandru Graur, Mioara Avram (editors), *Formarea cuvintelor în limba română*, vol. 2, *Prefixele* (FC II), București, 1978, p. 167.

² See Mioara Avram, *Formarea cuvintelor și cultivarea limbii române*, in LL, no. 4, 1983, p. 501; Theodor Hristea (coordinators), *Sinteze de limba română*, București, Editura Albatros, 1984, p. 67.

³ See Adriana Stoichițoiu-Ichim, *Prefixarea în româna actuală*, in LLR, I, 2nd vol., 1997, pp. 1-5; II, 3rd and 4th vol., 1997, pp. 12-15.

⁴ See Elenei Trifan’s paper, *Formarea cuvintelor în publicistica actuală*, Cluj, Editura Digital Data, 2010, pp. 47-51, for the monograph of this prefix.

⁵ According to FC II, pp. 161-168. For the productivity criterion, see also Ion Florea, *Sistemul prefixelor de negare în limba română literară*, p. 3(63), in electronic version <http://alil.academiaromana-is.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Sistemul-prefixelor-de-negare-%C3%AEen-limba-rom%C3%A2n%C4%83-literar%C4%83.pdf>

⁶ According to Marius Sala (coordinator), *Enciclopedia limbii române* (ELR), 2nd edition, București, Editura Univers Enciclopedic, 2006, p. 454.

spread synonyms *in-* and *non-*: *non-formal – informal; un-invasive – non-invasive, un-man – non-man, un-privatization – non-privatization, un-animate – inanimate – non-animate; un-conformist – nonconformist*⁷, as they pursue to gain supremacy in the usual register of the language as well as the literary standard one.

The occurrences of this prefix are various; they are often oriented towards adjective/noun/verb bases and less towards pronouns, adverbs, conjunctions⁸. Therefore, they gain a particular expressivity.

They are typically added to adjectives⁹ and their main semantic role is to negate the base, the qualitative inferiority, whereas the new creation has certain expressive virtues due to the depreciative context and the combinations with determined elements:

“The head of SDP (Social Democratic Party), Marcel Ciolacu, launched on Monday some harsh comments regarding companies which have been increasingly taking up the pump price; a request has been made for a most rapid decision on price capping for fuel. The second solution would be taxation by 90% of *unjustified* prices”:https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/coalitia-pasi-plafonareapreturilor-carburant-suma-putea-ajunge-litrul-motorina-benzina1_62b0884f5163ec4271cc5934/index.html

“Up to a certain extent, it is true that not being aware of your qualities, your potential, is as *unintelligent* as it is *unintelligent* to be unaware of your limits.” (Pleșu, *Old and New Anxieties*, p. 13).

“He who happens to be around an unbearable person, whether they are matutinal or crepuscular, will recognize them right away by the *untellable* olfactory combination they spread.” (Radu Paraschivescu, *Guide of the Unbearable Person*, p. 39)

“European money, *unsuitable (nonperforming)* education”¹⁰:
https://www.independentonline.ro/2022/04/05/Ialomita--Fonduri-europene-cheltuite-inutil-pentru-Invatamant-neperformant-24935?news_page=5

“What else can determine an actually reasonable man to move over on a main road so that somebody who is patiently waiting for a sign of mercy might get on that road? Except for an *undeclared* disease or a regrettable inability to adapt to the needs of the moment.” (Radu Paraschivescu, *Guide of the Unbearable Person*, p. 48).

⁷ It is considered that “prefixes with higher audible body are more resistant” according to Ion Florea, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁸ According to FC II, pp. 162-163, ELR, p. 453.

⁹ Participial adjectives are also included here.

¹⁰ The meaning attested by *Dicționar de cuvinte recente* (DCR)³ is “leading to poor results, unable to perform well”; and also as an euphemism for the credit impossible to reimburse, in the combination “bad (nonperforming) credit, s.v. *nonperforming*.”

“...let alone the forum writers who bear the verdict at all times, with an *uncrackable* sufficiency, and who, you see, try a fall with the world relying on their native genius.” (Pleșu, *Old and New Anxieties*, p. 16).

The conversions of the adjective trigger the same expressive note:

“The state has spent enormous amounts of money to fight the pandemic, sometimes skilfully, other times *unskilfully*.” https://adevarul.ro/news/politica/coalitia-pasi-plafonareapreturilor-carburant-suma-putea-ajunge-litrul-motorina-benzina1_62b0884f5163ec4271cc5934/index.html

“And yet I have not done the *undoable*.” (Pleșu, *Old and New Anxieties*, p. 12).

“A country – any country – is in jeopardy when the governors no longer distinguish between the essential and the *unessential*, between the important and the *unimportant*...” (Pleșu, *Old and New Anxieties*, p. 103).

All these lexical formations are used to express the opposition to the base term or the primitive term, which is not always present in the enunciation. The variety of contexts in which these negative terms may be found does not entail ambiguities of semantic nature; on the contrary, it favours the persuasive side of the message conveyed through media, by creating different pejorative connotations. The semantic content of the negative formations is highly suggestive and closely linked to the role of the publicists in interpreting reality.

The verbal nouns derived from this negative prefix target certain attitudes and behaviours typical of some situations encountered in national and international social and political life or cultural and scientific life:

“In their turn, the teachers and doctors are preparing to organize union protests in ‘a summer of *unhappy* people’.” <https://www.europafm.ro/transporturile-feroviare-britanice-in-greva>.

“The *non-governance* program – All the false promises launched by SDP (Social Democratic Party) for the youngsters. Promise included in the ‘2017-2020 Governing Program’”, <https://revistapresei.hotnews.ro>

“Beyond the political show, we will actually have an act of genuine *non-governance*, added the president of USR (Save Romania Union).” <https://romania.europalibera.org/a/ludovic-orban-a-refuzat-oferta-usr-de-a-intra-la-guvernare-dac%C4%83-anticipatele%C8%99ueaz%C4%83-spune-barna/30425228.html>

“Romania and other 4 EU countries, sued by the European Union for *non-implementation* of the standards applicable to audio-visual media” <https://www.antena3.ro/be-eu/romania-alte-5-tari-ue-date-in-judecata-comisia-european-neimplementare-standarde-mass-media-640130.html>

An expressive derivative covering several onomasiological fields is *unforgettability*. The reason for choosing this linguistic sign is the capacity of the

publicists to potentiate reality by resorting to words that are highly concentrated in terms of semantics.

The good quality music prior to 1989 draws our attention to the expression “*The right to unforgettability*”, <https://www.amazon.com/Dreptul-Neuitare-Vol-Variou-artists/dp/B06XXG43LM>

An article calling yet again our attention to the issue of communism is entitled: “*Plea for unforgettability*” <https://www.contributors.ro/pledoarie-pentru-neuitare/>

A volume of articles and essays on the Romanian people present abroad and their achievements beyond the national borders is entitled “*Exercising Unforgettability*” by Ileana Costea <https://www.amazon.com/EXERCITII-NEUITARE-vol-I-romanesti-surpriza-strainatate/dp/1936629429>

By adding to post-verbal nouns, the new formations specific to synthesis-enunciations or titles of articles concentrate information of which role is to amplify and render the message more dynamic. This potentiation is a consequence of the fact that there are no temporal, modal or personal limitations of which target is to develop the persuasive component of the message.¹¹

The prefix *un-* mostly negates the quality and expresses the opposition to such quality. It also brings additional meanings at times: discredit, negative characterization of competences, lack of some fundamental principles, strongly depreciative connotations.

“The virtuosity on streets, on national roads and on highways is achieved by getting out of the corset of the accepted norm and by proving everybody that they are in the presence of an *untameable* apache.” (Radu Paraschivescu, *Guide of the Unbearable Person*, p. 44)

“Even when ensnared, the unbearable person is *unreformable*.” (Radu Paraschivescu, *Guide of the Unbearable Person*, p. 48)

“...the still *unformed* publicists explain to the people, night after night, what justice and truth are about...” (Pleșu, *Old and New Anxieties*, p. 11).

A pungent irrefutable characterization of *un-smart* is provided by the publicist Andrei Pleșu¹²: “As for the *un-smart*, what is there to be said: it is almost under oppression: un-entire, limited, dull of comprehension, brain-hampered, thick-headed. You can hardly be crossed with it. Not to mention the fact that, to be honest,

¹¹ See Dumitru Irimia, *Structura stilistică a limbii române contemporane*, București, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1986, p. 205.

¹² The derivative *unsmart* which is said to have only the meaning of “in one’s *un-right* mind/out of their mind” is first listed in FC II, p. 162, 164.

we all have our moments of unrighteousness and unworthiness. We are all unsmart sometimes.” <https://revista22.ro/opinii/andrei-plesu/ne-trebnici-ne-vrednici-ne-toti>

Due to its old age and functional power, this formative element reserves the right to attach itself to words even where other prefixes have no power¹³. Most occurrences are stylistically motivated nouns selected by the authors for a specific purpose. These trigger some unique expressive creations aiming to invigorate the language and to provide the transmitter with stylistic originality: *untruth*, *unchurch*, *uncivil*, *unintellectual*, *unlove*, *unman*, *unwork*, *un-luck*.

untruth, *unchurch*: “Fleeing the untruth, the heterodoxy, means feeling the *unchurch*, whereas staying in truth by separating oneself from the *untruth*, the heterodoxy, means staying in Church.” <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://hristofor.files.wordpress.com/2018/07/eceziologia-adevc483rului1.pdf>

uncivil: “However, the way in which the media cover the political issues is probably nowadays more important than at any other time since the United States deals with important high-stakes issues, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic as well as America’s partisan «*uncivil* war» <https://ziarultimpul.ro/intrebari-cu-care-se-lupta-mass-media-politica-pentru-a-acoperi-razboiul-necivil-al-americii/>

unintellectual: “On the other hand, I cannot agree with your definition: intellectuals are those having a brain, while *unintellectuals* are those having hands.” (Pleșu, *Old and New Anxieties*, p. 33)

unlove: “*Unlove* is not the opposite of love. It is the opposite of good. Because *unlove* does harm. *Unlove* hurts, wounds, digs deep ditches in the esteem of those it grips.” <https://mirelaretegan.ro/blog/gandurile-mirelei/e-prea-scurta-viata-ca-sa-ne-intrebam-de-ce-nu-ne-iubesc-cei-ce-nu-ne-iubesc-id1167.html>

unman: “Alzheimer’s disease, the condition turning a man into an un-man”, <https://jurmed.ro/medici/alzheimer-ul-afectiunea-care-te-face-din-om-neom/>

unwork: “How does the state encourage laziness and the *unwork*: by increasing social benefits from 500 to 1,200 lei” <https://ziare.com/economie/stiri-economice/cum-incurajeaza-statul-lenea-si-nemunca-creste-ajutorul-social-de-la-500-la-1-200-de-lei-1632754>

¹³ “...the derivatives of *un-* are part of the body representing the authentic Romanian words, body to which *in-* does not even dare come close (un-being, unworthy, unshakable) and negates everything one pursues to negate, with such an ease that one can hardly find in other languages; moreover, it provides expressive idioms, probably with no equivalent, such as: hard – un-hard, when – un-when, will – un-will, rain – un-rain . Because it is true... one can play no negating game with *un-* in the entire kingdom of speech.” Constantin Noica, *Cuvânt împreună despre rostirea românească*, București, Editura Humanitas, 1996, p. 173.

un-luck: “Every time the opportunity presents itself, it transfers towards ‘the treason of the intellectuals’ all and any *un-luck(s)* of their governance.” (Pleșu, *Old and New Anxieties*, p. 22)

Conclusions

The formations inventoried represent an extremely heterogeneous part, both in terms of chronology (some were attested prior to 1989, others emerged after this temporal landmark, during the so-called “post-December period”) and in terms of stylistics. The expressive levels mainly consist in depreciations of the meaning due to negation cases: the neutral opposition, the subtle yet directly highlighted irony, lack of quality, the effects of contrariety, the act of contesting some situations, behaviours or mentalities.

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