

# COMPLEX ASPECTS OF HATE SPEECH AND THEIR PROBLEMATIC REPRESENTATION IN DICTIONARIES

Ruxandra Vişan\*

**Abstract:** The paper discusses an official response provided by the spokesperson of the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC), addressing previous criticism by a popular Romanian journalist of several statements by Patriarch Daniel, the head of the ROC. Taking its cue from previous research by van Dijk (1995), the paper examines the lexical choices in the representation of an outgroup in the text, which include the abundant use of derived words based on a rich range of negative prefixes, most of which are salient to Romanian speakers. Emphasizing the role played by these evaluative prefixes to create “epithets” which target the group represented as holding views different from those of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the paper argues that the text, which does not include direct insults, and which relies on “sarcastic irony” (Dyrel 2016), emerges as an instance of covert hate speech. The paper goes on to discuss the role of Romanian dictionaries in identifying instances of “overt” and “covert” hate speech.

**Keywords:** covertness, hate speech, epithet, ideology, lexical negation, prefixation, dictionary

## 1. Introduction

During the Covid pandemic of 2020, the Romanian authorities imposed several restrictions on the ceremonies of worship of religious relics organized by the Romanian Orthodox Church (henceforth ROC). These restrictions focused on elements such as the number of participants and distancing, since Romanian Orthodox ceremonies often involve a great number of people, as well as worship which includes kissing and touching sacred objects. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 2020, on the Feast of Saint Demeter, Patriarch Daniel (the head of the ROC) publicly deplored the restrictions imposed by the authorities, likening these pandemic measures to the repressive pre-1990 Communist regime in Romania, and stating in front of the gathered congregation that one of the reasons for which the former Communist regime had fallen was because it had banned relic worship. Patriarch Daniel’s statements were subject to acerbic criticism from a highly popular Romanian journalist well known for his satirical writing, Cristian Tudor Popescu, who condemned what he perceived as the Patriarch’s manipulation of his congregation, and who strongly criticized the link of causality that had been made between the fall of the Communist regime and the ban of relic worship (see Cristian Tudor Popescu’s article published in the newspaper *Republica* on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October, Popescu 2020). The journalist’s criticism was given an official response on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October by the spokesperson of the ROC, Vasile Bănescu, which was first issued on Bănescu’s Facebook page (with Bănescu explicitly stating that this was his response as the ROC’s spokesperson). This response was subsequently taken over by several significant media channels, including the Romanian National Television and other major networks and publications.

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\* University of Bucharest, Department of English, ruxandra.visan@lils.unibuc.ro.

The present analysis focuses on the response by the ROC's spokesperson, laying emphasis on the way in which lexical morphology helps to shape a discourse of pejoration, and then going on to discuss the extent to which present-day Romanian dictionaries can represent the dimension of pejoration. Previous researchers have already underlined that the study of derivational processes constitutes a rich and promising area of research regarding discourse analysis (Twardizsz 2012: 293) and have discussed the role of prefixation and suffixation in "disseminating particular ideas, attitudes and biases" ((Twardizsz 2012: 290). Drawing attention to the use of evaluative prefixes of negation and of approximation, the paper will attempt to show that, while the response of the ROC's spokesperson overtly professes to be a defence against unfounded attacks against the policy of the ROC and against Patriarch Daniel, it emerges in fact as an instance of covert hate speech regarding religion and belief, meant to target not only the journalist directly responsible for criticizing the Patriarch's statements, but all those who might share views which are not in accordance with the ROC's professed ideology. It is significant to note that this response is similar in register and style to several texts issued in recent years by the ROC, with Vasile Bănescu as spokesperson, in order to convey reactions to various current issues portrayed as diverging from the ideology of this religious institution. Some of these texts have featured aspects related to religion and belief, while others have concentrated on gender and sexuality issues, several of them concerning the LGBTQ community in Romania.

The Romanian source text of the response Bănescu made on the 29<sup>th</sup> of October 2020 is provided in Table 1 below. Since the analysis highlights the use of lexical morphology, the English target text is provided as a parallel text to the Romanian one. The target text is an "overt translation" (House 1997), which attempts to preserve cultural specificity. For the purposes of this analysis, all lexical items which include negative and approximation prefixes were emphasized in both texts. Special attention was given to the translation of all those items perceived as keywords in the representation of the targeted group, and a literal translation was provided at times in brackets in those areas where it was harder to establish formal equivalence between the two texts, and where the translation attempted to achieve "dynamic equivalence" (Nida 1964).

Table 1. Source text accompanied by translation

Source Text	Target Text
<i>Buna ziua tuturor! În urma deversării în spațiul mediatic a unor atacuri <b>suburbane</b> la adresa Bisericii și a Părintelui Patriarh, vă rog să primiți această reacție a mea în calitate de purtător de cuvânt al Patriarhiei.</i>	Hello everyone! After the surge ( <i>spillage</i> ) of <i>suburban</i> attacks in the media on the Church and on the Holy Patriarch, please accept my reaction as the spokesperson for the Patriarchy.
<i>Cum să comentați altfel decât în dificila cheie a compătimirii creștine, colcăiala <b>cripto-socialistă</b> din câteva nuclee mediatice infestate de <b>cristofobie anti-</b></i>	How could we comment, other than in the difficult terms of Christian compassion, upon the <i>crypto-socialists</i> teeming in a few media areas ( <i>media</i>

*ortodoxă și din care se ițesc capetele pleșuve și deloc limpezi, analfabete cultural și religios ale unor pseudo-jurnaliști trăitori în bula lor de fiere, nu în realitatea obiectivă și imediată care îi contrazice constant?*

*Atacurile furibunde și imunde la adresa Bisericii, numită obsesiv-compulsiv „goldporație”, la adresa unei personalități ca cea a Patriarhului, numit în mod agramat „Înalt Preafericitul”, zvârcolirea unor inși desfigurați de grimase de ură incontrollable care nu au nici cea mai vagă idee despre istoria reală, frecvent însângerată a României creștine, a creștinismului și a Bisericii Ortodoxe, ipocrizia convenabil camuflată cameleonic, dar constant monstruoasă a acestor oameni mici și veninoși care în anul de răscruce morală a României, 1990, îi demonizau și răstigneau public de pe pozițiile gazetărești ale „adevărului” pe protestatarii reali și curați din Piața Universității, unde comunismul travestit pervers în democrație era denunțat lucid, toate acestea, dar și multe altele (ne)păstrate în memoria noastră comună, spun tot ce e cu adevărat important despre acești oameni împuținați moral, doldora de sine, săraci cultural și pustii sufletește, care fac din invectivă, ironie obraznică, ridicolă paradă etică și schimonosire a realității instrumente de analiză „jurnalistică”.*

*nuclei) infested by anti-orthodox Christophobia and where one can see raised bald heads harbouring minds which are foggy, illiterate from a cultural and religious point of view, the minds of pseudo-journalists who live in their bubble of venom, and not in the objective, immediate reality which constantly contradicts them?*

The furious and *salacious* attacks on the Church, which has been called a “goldporation” in an obsessive-compulsive manner, the attacks on a personality such as that of the Patriarch, *ungrammatically* referred to as “His Happy Holiness”, the writhing of people *disfigured* by *incontrollable* hate grimaces, people who do not have the vaguest idea of the real, often bloody history of Christian Romania, of Christianity and of the Orthodox Church, the hypocrisy, conveniently and chameleonicly camouflaged, but constantly monstrous nevertheless, of these petty, venomous people who in 1990, the year that saw Romania at a moral crossroads, demonized and crucified publicly, from their journalist positions which professed to be “truthful”, the real and clean protesters of Piata Universității, where Communism, perversely disguised (*transvested*) in the garb of democracy, was lucidly denounced, all this, along with many other things (*un*)kept in our collective memory, imparts everything that is truly important concerning these people who are morally diminished, full of themselves, culturally poor and sterile in their souls, who turn invectives, irony, ridiculous ethical concerns and the mangling of reality into the instruments of their “journalistic” analysis.

*Să ne rugăm, firește, și pentru ei, pentru acești jalnici campioni ai fentării adevărului și ai grosolanei înjurături publice mascate nătâng în critică semidoctă a unor lucruri pe care, orbiți de furie anticreștină, sunt incapabili să le înțeleagă!*

*Acești oameni foarte sărmani caracterial au mai multă nevoie de rugăciunea noastră a tuturor și a Bisericii spre care scuipe mai sus decât pot ei crede.*

*Credința în Adevăr (nearticulat), credința în Hristos mărturisit de Biserica vie, reală, neidealizată, dar nici strâmb imaginată de simplii gazetari eșuați în vedetism, această credință ne va dărui claritatea și frumusețea morală ce ne vor salva și ne vor înălța dincolo de „bâlciul deșertăciunilor” în care diavolul cu chip de om cumsecade, cap limpede, omniscient și neobosit justițiar ne invită permanent să trăim. Pe unii chiar cu un suspect și, desigur, vremelnic success. (Bănescu 2020, emphasis added)*

Let us pray for them, certainly, for them too, for these pathetic champions who seek to betray truth and to glorify rude public slurs, stupidly camouflaged behind the semiliterate criticism of things which - since they are blinded by antichristian fury - they are simply incapable of understanding!

These people of poor character are in more need of our prayers than anyone else and certainly in need of the Church upon which they dare to spit, attempting to aim higher than they can ever conceive.

It is faith in Truth (*undetermined noun*), faith in the Christ of the live, real, unidealized Church, yet not that church falsely imagined by mere hacks who lamely aspire to stardom, it is this faith which will bestow upon us the clarity and moral beauty which will indeed save us and make us rise above this vanity lured by the devil masquerading as a good, level-headed, omniscient man and as a tireless vigilante. Some have been successfully lured there on dubious grounds, but, certainly, only temporarily so. (My translation, emphasis added)

It is essential to emphasize that the text in Table 1 is not a personal opinion expressed by a social media user who is a member of the general public, but a position expressed by the spokesperson of the Romanian Orthodox Church for the general public. As such, this is a text which has significant potential to “spread” and “justify” its message, since it was disseminated by several significant media channels in Romania and, at the same time, issued by an institution invested with high moral authority in this country. “Spread, incite or justify” are the three key verbs employed in the attempt to give an international definition of hate speech in *Recommendation No. R (97) 20*, one of the reference documents currently provided by the Council of Europe on its website regarding hate speech. *Recommendation No. R (97) 20* defines hate speech as “covering all forms of expressions which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants or people of other origins”. Another reference

document provided by the Council of Europe, *Recommendation 1805* (2007) on blasphemy, religious insults and hate speech against persons on grounds of their religion, states that for speech to qualify as hate speech regarding religious beliefs, “it is necessary that it be directed against a person or a group of specific persons.”

Insults have been identified as a feature of hate speech in various discussions. Nevertheless, it has been argued that language does not need to include insults in order to convey a message of hate (Baider 2019, among others). It has been emphasized that the derogation of a target group can take place in the absence of explicit insults, since, for instance, “a racist opinion may be subtly expressed by minimal intonation variations” (van Dijk 1995: 22). Focusing on the various linguistic means employed to derogate the Other, Baider (2019), and Baider & Constaninou (2020) have argued that “covert hate speech” is in fact quite frequent, and more current than “overt hate speech.” In an attempt to explore the boundary between “overtness” and “covertness” regarding hate speech, this paper aims to show that, in spite of the absence of direct insults, explicit threats or taboo words, the text in Table 1, which possesses a high potential to disseminate and justify its message to a wide Romanian public, counts as an instance of covert hate speech against a group singled out as not sharing the ideology embraced by the ROC, and thus emerges as one of the “forms of hatred based on intolerance” (a key phrase employed in Recommendation No. R (97) 20). The paper will go on to discuss the problematic lexicographic representation of the dimensions that help to shape “covert hate speech”.

In section 2, the paper will focus on the use of the third person plural in the text, as a means to establish intergroup distance. Centring on prefixes, section 3 will discuss the way in which lexical morphology is employed in the text in order to emphasize the negative evaluation of the targeted group. After a brief exploration in section 4 of the role of sarcastic irony in intensifying intergroup distance, section 5 will dwell upon “epithets” as means of expressing pejoration, and upon the way in which the negatively prefixed adjectives in the text are recategorized into epithets which derogate the targeted group. Section 6 will discuss the representation of “epithets” and hate speech in dictionaries, dwelling upon the way in which present-day Romanian dictionaries deal with such dimensions.

## 2. Intergroup distance: “Those” as a target

The journalist who expressed his criticism of the Patriarch’s statements, Cristian Tudor Popescu, is not directly mentioned in the text under analysis. The author of the text in Table 1 chooses to adopt the ironic use of the third-person plural and thus to refer only indirectly to the journalist, by placing focus on a group of people portrayed as sharing views contrary to the ROC’s ideology. This group is designated by a distal demonstrative pronoun, the Romanian *cei*, which translates as “those” into English.

One could argue that by not making direct reference to the individual whose comments led to this response, and by choosing to explicitly refer to a group, the author seeks to soften a face threat. As Jorgensen (1996) underlines in a discussion of Brown and Levinson (1987), indirectness is employed not only to soften a threat to the positive face of the hearer, but also in order to preserve face, “primarily by allowing the speaker to

avoid responsibility for the potentially face-damaging interpretation of the utterance” (Jorgensen 1996: 616). Nevertheless, while he avoids responsibility for the face threat, by shifting attention to a whole group rather than explicitly focusing on a particular individual (who is nevertheless highly recognizable to Romanian readers from allusions present in the text) and by choosing not to directly designate Cristian Tudor Popescu, but those who might share beliefs contrary to those of the ROC, Bănescu intensifies rather than diminishes the face threat. The threat emerges as directed not only to the journalist, but to all “those” who oppose the ROC. Moreover, at the beginning of the text, the author makes reference to the “crypto-socialist” infestation in the media, and also employs a Romanian verbal noun derived from the verb *a colcăi* ‘to teem with’ to represent the perceived crypto-socialist influence. This verb is used in Romanian to refer not only to large crowds moving around, but is often employed in collocations such as *a colcăi de șobolani/a colcăi de gândaci* ‘to teem with rats/to teem with cockroaches’.

In his critical discourse analysis approach, Teun van Dijk sees ideologies as structured along an *us* versus *them* dimension (see also Allport 1954/1979), with the people of the *us* group presenting themselves in positive terms, and portraying the other groups in negative terms (van Dijk 1995: 22). “Those” is doubly employed in this text, on the one hand as a synecdoche, since there is a person clearly perceived as the voice of an opposing group (the journalist directly responsible for an attack against the Church), and at the same time to refer to what is perceived to be a multitude of people, whose presence is threateningly perceived as an “infestation”. Strengthening the *them*-against-*us* rhetoric, the use of *those* reinforces intergroup distance, and shifts the focus from one individual to a whole group, which thus becomes the target of the attack.

Having played a prominent role in the genocide of the Jews of Nazi Germany, the trope of vermin is employed early in the text, and it operates a conceptualization of the target group as engaged in threatening behaviour and devoid of humanity (see Jeshion 2018), categorically opposed to the values promoted by the ROC, which is represented later in the text by adjectives such as “real”, “objective” or by nouns such as “truth” and “reality”. The text tropes those who oppose the Church not only as vermin, but also in terms of demonization, since it culminates with the image of “the devil in disguise” intent on luring others from the right path, and includes keywords and phrases related to monstrosity (“monstrous”, “venomous”, “ugly”) and demonic possession (“grimaces”, “writhing”, “devil in disguise”).

While van Dijk underlines that virtually all discourse structures can express underlying ideological principles, he identifies several preferential discourse structures for expressing and conveying ideological meaning (1995: 22) and discusses polarized lexicalization as a frequently used means of emphasizing the contrast between the positive values of the ingroup and the negative ones of the outgroup (1995: 23). The othering of the group not sharing the ideology of the ROC is achieved in Vasile Bănescu’s text not only by the dehumanizing tropes mentioned above, but also by certain lexical choices which markedly contribute to create a negative representation of this group’s views and values. Several of the keywords used in setting the contrast between the ingroup (the Church and its followers) and the outgroup (those who dare to criticize the Church) are lexical items derived through negative prefixation or through evaluative prefixation expressing approximation, which are present in a significant number in this text.

### 3. A focus on negative prefixation: (Un)kept memories and antichristian views

#### 3.1 Surface structures

In order to refer to the othered group, Teun Van Dijk employs the derived keyword “outgroup”, where *out-* is used as a separable prefix. The morphophonologist Guierre (1979) has drawn a now classic distinction between separable and inseparable prefixes, stating that separable prefixes attach to a free root, leading to a compositional meaning of the newly-formed word, made up of the meaning of the base and of the meaning of the prefix. For instance, the English *un-* in *unorthodox* is a separable prefix since it is attached to the adjectival base *orthodox* and because *unorthodox* means *not orthodox*. The combination of the free root with a separable prefix is considered to be semantically transparent, and the prefix has a full meaning. This is not the case of inseparable prefixation, where the prefix does not retain its full meaning (the *re-* in the English *receive* for example, which attaches to a bound root). According to Guierre (1979), the morphologically/semantically separable prefixes are generally stressed in English pronunciation, unlike inseparable prefixes, which tend to be unstressed. Discussing Guierre’s distinction between separable and inseparable prefixes, Videau & Hainote (2015) have emphasized the close interaction between phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics, and pragmatics, showing that even inseparable prefixes can be made more prominent in pronunciation. However, Guierre’s classic labels still serve to underline that speakers are able to perceive the prefixes in semantically transparent derivatives as salient.

Negative prefixes are among those lexical items which can be employed in discourse in order to “emphasize the positive implications of ingroup opinions and values and the negative ones of those of the Others” (van Dijk 1995: 25). It is important to stress that the author of the present text signals his use of prefixation as a mechanism in othering the outgroup, by employing what Teun van Dijk (1995) has called “surface structures”. By surface structure van Dijk understands a variable phonological or graphic structure which is the conventional realization of an underlying discourse meaning. Among the surface structures discussed, he mentions special intonational contours or certain graphic choices, which attract attention to a specific underlying meaning, and which are meant to express or control the way in which a certain event is interpreted by the speech participants (van Dijk 1995: 18).

The author of the text in Table 1 chooses a marked spelling for a word with a negative prefix in the text, namely *(ne)păstrate* which translates into English as *(un)kept*. The graphic choice *(ne)păstrate* is employed in the text to refer, on the one hand, to what the author perceives as the heroic efforts of the ROC in the struggle against dictatorship, and on the other, to the political protests against the new regime (which was regarded by the protesters as a continuation of Nicolae Ceaușescu’s communist dictatorship). The protests took place in 1990 in Piața Universității (The University Square in Bucharest) and were brutally repressed at the time. It is significant to note that the use of the keyword *kept* in the text also represents an allusion, immediately decodable to the Romanian public familiar with the events of the 1990s, that readers should recall the existence of a now controversial article that the voice of the outgroup, the journalist Cristian Tudor Popescu, wrote in 1990 to condemn the actions of some of the protesters in Piața Universității.

*Ne-*, whose close equivalent is the English *un-*, is the most frequent and productive negative prefix in Romanian and, since it is spelled in brackets, acts here as a surface structure in van Dijk's sense. In *(ne)păstrate/(un)kept*, the author makes conscious graphic use of the brackets to mark the prefix as separable from its base. The underlying meaning which the author wants to convey by this graphic choice is that, while some Romanians preserve their memory of tragedy and of those who sacrificed themselves for freedom, others choose not to do so (and were even the agents of tyranny), which establishes a sharp contrast between the ingroup and the outgroup, who chooses *not* to embrace these positive values.

As registered by the most recent edition of *DEX* [= The Explanatory Dictionary of Romanian] (2016), which is the most authoritative dictionary of Present-Day Romanian, the standard Romanian spelling of prefixed words, including those relying on the learned prefixes *anti-*, *cripto-* *pseudo-* does not usually include a hyphen. Prefixed words are however sometimes hyphenated in Romanian to mark lexical status or to signal a stylistic choice. While prescriptive Romanian grammars recommend the obligatory use of the hyphen only in the case of prefixed nonce words based on pronouns, numerals, proper names or abbreviations (such as *ante-1990* or *pro-NATO*), the hyphen is not prescribed for the spelling of other "unlisted morphological objects" (Katamba & Stonham 2006), namely prefixed words based on adjectival, nominal or verbal bases, unregistered (as yet) by dictionaries and created routinely by morphological rules. A hyphenated spelling may however occur in such cases or even in the case of items listed by dictionaries, in order to make the prefixes in question more salient to readers, and this is what Romanian prescriptive grammars call an "emphatic" or "optional" use of the hyphen.

In the text in Table 1, the author hyphenates *anti-ortodox* (anti-orthodox), which is a word unlisted by dictionaries, but he does not employ the hyphen in the spelling *anticreștin* 'antichristian', which is in fact a word already registered by *DEX*. Even if these graphic choices were made in an overly prescriptive attempt to mark as non-standard an item which is not yet registered by the dictionary, the effect of this graphic choice is that of drawing attention to *anti-ortodox*. Another unlisted morphological object, *pseudo-jurnalist* 'pseudo-journalist' is also hyphenated, and thus also emphasized, while *cripto-socialist* (crypto-socialist) is also spelled with a hyphen, although in fact *DEX* already lists it with the standard, unhyphenated spelling. The graphic choice for this last word indicates both that the author still perceives it as a marked, unregistered word, and that he also wants his readers to perceive it as marked.

The orthography chosen in the above cases emphasizes that the author is well aware that prefixes can be made more prominent in order to express the underlying meanings he wants to convey. To Romanian speakers, for whom the hyphen in prefixed words is a sign of a special status, the spellings chosen by the author of the text function as surface structures, drawing attention to all the prefixes which follow in the text, and emphasizing that *anti-*, *pseudo-* and *cripto-* are separable prefixes.

### 3.2 Separable prefixes

By examining the significant range of negative prefixes which have been employed in the text in Table 1, the outgroup emerges as both "antichristian" and "antiorthodox", with *anti-* as a separable prefix and both words as semantically transparent. Other keywords employed in the text for the target group based on negative prefixes are



“incontrollable”, “incapable”, and “salacious”, which is an approximate translation for the Romanian *imund* (whose etymology is the Latin *immundus*). While the degree of semantic transparency may not be as high as in the case of “antichristian”, the negative *in-*, present in *incontrolabil* and *incapabil* (which are in fact both French borrowings into Romanian, and not Romanian derivatives) is separable and quite salient to Romanian speakers. In fact, Romanian possesses a wide range of negative words with the prefix *in-* (with the variants *im-* or *i-*, which preserve the phonological rules of classical Latin, Maiden et al. 2021: 414) formed in Romanian or borrowed from French and scholarly Latin (often together with their positive counterparts). Romanian speakers are well able to separate *in-* from its base in *incontrolabil* and *incapabil*, but *imund* ‘salacious’ is opaque to them (Maiden et al. 2021: 441), even if it is based on the same prefix *i(n/m)-* as *incontrolabil* and *incapabil*. Nevertheless, both separable and inseparable prefixes can be made prominent in pronunciation (Videau & Hainote 2015), and it is important to underline that even the *i-* in *imund* can receive contrastive stress in Romanian. It is also relevant to point out that this adjective occurs in the phrase *atacurile furibunde și imunde* ‘salacious and furious attacks’, where the author uses two coordinated, rhyming adjectives to create a euphonic effect. The presence of the rhyming syllables (*bun-de/mun-de*) in this binary structure, allows for focus to be placed on *i-* as a separate syllable, making *i-* salient to Romanian readers and drawing attention to its similarity to the separable, transparent *in-*.

Other words derived with negative prefixes that the author uses to refer to the targeted group are *agramat*, whose approximate equivalent is ‘illiterate’, but whose literal translation would be ‘having no grammar’, and *analfabet*, also ‘illiterate’, whose close translation would be ‘not alphabetized’. Both these words are borrowings from French, and the *a(n)-* prefix (whose ultimate source is ancient Greek) is not separable, which means that Romanian speakers perceive these two words as unanalysable wholes. Nevertheless, *a(n)-* (borrowed into Romanian either directly in the eighteenth century, or indirectly in the nineteenth century via French or other modern languages, Maiden et al. 2021: 441) is recognizable as a negative/privative element to Romanian speakers, due to other derivatives which are semantically transparent, for example the Romanian derivative *atehnic* (anti-technical, unskilled in technology) among other analysable words (Maiden et al. 2021: 441). The members of the outgroup can be thus perceived as deprived of a grammar or of an alphabet, a representation which is further amplified by the presence of key phrases such as “morally diminished” or “culturally poor” in the text.

The members of the outgroup are also described as *desfigurați* ‘disfigured’. The prefix *des-* has a privative meaning in Romanian, and although the word *desfigurat* is based on the French borrowing (*défigurer*), the Romanian prefix *des-* takes the place of the original French *de-*, which, as in the case of *incontrolabil*, makes the prefix separable from the base and leads to a significant degree of semantic transparency. While the base *figurat* has only the meaning ‘figurative’ in Romanian, the root is recognizable as the same as the one in the Romanian word *figură*, whose most frequent meaning is that of *face* or *countenance*. The targeted group thus emerges as one which is not only culturally and morally deprived, but also physically impaired (literally without a face). Certainly, the author also relies here on the readers’ background knowledge of Cristian Tudor Popescu’s distinctive face and mannerisms, and by representing him as a monstrous, demonically possessed figure (writhing and grimacing in sheer hatred), he reinforces the

dehumanization of the whole group who embraces the journalist's views, a group which he tropes as teeming vermin at the beginning of the text.

The targeted group also emerges as *suburban* 'suburban', which is a Romanian word with strong pejorative connotations (that recall the use of *sub-* in the English *subhuman*). *Suburban* in Romanian means 'uneducated' (a person unable of behaving in an urbane manner), and *sub-* retains a full meaning in a word that emerges as semantically transparent and functions as "productive" prefix that tends to have predictable meaning (see Aronoff 1976). Originally an approximation prefix which acquires negative connotations, *sub-* has a primarily spatial value, and Romanian speakers are well aware of this value. Even if *sub-* is a neological prefix borrowed from Latin, *sub*, which translates as 'under' is also one of the most employed locative prepositions in Romanian and part of its inherited Romance lexis.

Apart from the negative prefixes discussed above, two more neological prefixes expressing approximation are employed to refer to the outgroup: *semi-* in *semidoct* 'semiliterate' and *pseudo-* in *pseudo-jurnalist* 'pseudo-journalist'. Both these words are semantically transparent, and have clear pejorative connotations, the role of *semi-* and *pseudo-* not being one of mitigation or of attenuation, but one of disparagement, in a manner similar to that of privative prefixes. A former compounding element in Ancient Greek which was borrowed into several languages, *pseudo-* came to be combined with native words in Romanian, and, unlike *semi-*, which does not carry a derogatory meaning in all contexts in which it is employed, it has become usually associated with negative connotations. *Cripto-*, whose meaning is the same as that of the English *crypto-*, is a prefix seldom used in Romanian, and it carries the same intense negative connotations as *pseudo-*, encoding the subjectivity of the author.

Not all the negative/evaluative prefixes in the text serve to derogate the outgroup, as the negative prefix *ne-* is in fact employed in the representation of the Church and of its followers. The very productive prefix *ne-* leads to a range of readings in Romanian, depending on the base to which it is attached, but it is seldom that *ne-* leads to pejorative connotations nowadays. *Ne-* attaches mainly to participles leading to what Lieber 2004 calls a "contradictory" meaning or to what others call its "reversative" meaning. As such, many of the words prefixed by *ne-* in Romanian emerge as mainly neutral or positive. Thus, the Church is presented as an unambiguous source of truth, "unidealized" (*neidealizată* 'not-idealized', hence real). Another use of *ne-* occurs in the word *nearticulat*, which literally translates as 'un-articled' in English, and which refers to nouns which have the zero article in Romanian. This word is meant to underline the difference the author perceives to exist between Truth (which he spells with a capital <T>) and various truths (also an ironic allusion to Cristian Tudor Popescu's former newspaper, whose Romanian title translates as *The Truth*). It is also his way of conveying that there can be only one truth, namely that of the Church. Another instance of *ne-* in the text, which also emphasizes its contradictory meaning, similar to the one already discussed in *nepăstrate* 'unkept', occurs in the ironic representation of the targeted journalist as a *neobosit justițiar* 'tireless vigilante'.

The representation which the author of the text wishes to give for the ingroup is a categorically positive one, and the use of *ne-* is to be contrasted with the use of all the other negative prefixes which were employed in the representation of the outgroup. Since

language ideologies correlate with nationalistic ideologies, it is perhaps significant to underline that the frequent *ne-* is by no means a borrowed prefix in Romanian, but part of Romanian's Romance morphology, while, with the exception of *des-*, all the prefixes used in the representation of the targeted group are borrowings. More research is certainly needed concerning the language ideological connotations which Present-Day Romanian speakers assign to words derived with neological prefixes, but if we focus on the significant role of etymology regarding (language) ideology, we can perceive a contrast between *ne-*, which is used in the representation of the Church as a source of un-disputed truth, and the borrowed, "un-Romanian", and hence the more recent prefixes which are employed to represent the group opposing the Church. In a discussion of the ethnonyms of the ingroup, Mullen & Leader (2005: 195) underline that these often derive from native words designating "real humans" or the "the people". While no ethnonym is overtly present in the text, the use of *ne-* (in opposition to the learned, and obviously foreign *pseudo-* and *cripto-*) allows for a representation of the ingroup in terms of "native" morphology.

With the marked exception of *ne-*, the negative and approximation prefixes employed in the text enhance the negative values associated with the outgroup. It is however essential to remember that lexical negation, and negation in general, is also used for euphemistic reasons, "to disguise unpleasant subjects by referring to them by means of apparently inoffensive expressions" (Leech 1983: 147). It is not random that the author of the text chooses to rely on lexical negation (and on approximation) in order to represent the outgroup, instead of opting for overt insults. The prefixed words employed to refer to the targeted group are not listed by any dictionary of Romanian as "pejorative" (a usage label preferred by Romanian dictionaries). With some exceptions (see *analfabet/illiterate* for which *DEX* includes a second meaning labelled as "figurative"), most of them have meanings that are not even lexicographically registered as non-literal. While emphasizing intergroup contrast, the negation carried by the learned, formal register prefixes in the text serves as a formal disguise for insults and performs a function similar to that of irony. As will be argued below, instead of mitigating violence, the ironic tone intensifies it, and further enhances intergroup distance.

#### **4. Sarcastic irony: Compassion for the unforgivable Other**

Along with metaphors and insults, irony has been identified among the linguistic means employed for negative polarity in hostile discourses towards those who do not share the dominant national, religious or sexual ideology (Baider 2019, Baider & Constantinou 2020). According to Baider (2019), who emphasizes the essential role of "contempt" in hate speech, the part played by irony is quite similar to the one played by metaphorical analogies, since both irony and metaphors are indirect means of expressing contempt, both allowing an exploration of the subjectivity of the speaker and revealing a subjacent system of evaluation. Baider (2019) further underlines that "compassion" resides at the opposite pole of "contempt", since it involves an openness to the others' point of view.

Relevantly, after stating his intention to offer a response to attacks towards the Church whose representative he is, the author of the text in Table 1 does not overtly adopt

the position of an acerbic critic or of a detractor of his opponents, but that of a Christian who is “compassionate” towards the target of his comments, expressed in a rhetorical question: “How could we comment, other than in the difficult terms of Christian compassion, upon the *crypto-socialists* teeming in a few media areas (*media nuclei*) infested by *anti-orthodox* Christophobia (...)?” (Bănescu 2020).

The positive connotations of the keyword “compassion” (a close equivalent of the Romanian *compătimire*) and the author’s professed aim of providing a compassionate comment instead of a cutting response are ironically reversed by the use, in the same sentence, of the “contemptuous recategorization” (Baider 2019) of the outgroup as vermin infesting society. The “compassionate” stance of Christianity is yet again evoked, later in the text, in an appeal where the author urges his readers to pray for those portrayed in his text as having erred against the Church:

Let us pray for them, certainly, for them too, for these pathetic champions who seek to betray truth and to glorify rude public slurs, stupidly camouflaged behind the *semiliterate* criticism of things which - since they are blinded by *antichristian* fury - they are simply *incapable* of understanding. (Bănescu 2020)

There is a marked opposition between the focus of this hortative sentence (the appeal to Christian prayer) and its topic (the group of people negatively portrayed as “antichristian”). The author openly professes to pray for a group of people portrayed as incapable of understanding the ways of the Church, and hence incapable of perceiving the power of his prayers. The condescending “for them also” reinforces the disparagement and contributes to the interpretation of this urge as a mock prayer and as such, as an instance of what Dynel (2016: 231) calls “sarcastic irony”, defined as “a distinct subtype of negatively evaluative irony, necessarily directed at a victim and intended to express biting criticism, and thus pejoration”.

It has been argued that sarcastic irony “offers a way to attack another person while denying responsibility for the attack” (Jorgensen 1996: 629, Dynel 2016: 221). The use of sarcastic irony in the text in Table 1 serves to detract from the responsibility of the author, who, as an official spokesperson of the ROC, makes it appear that he is not formally accountable for any kind of attack. However, while, as discussed by Jorgensen, sarcastic irony could be interpreted as mitigating the harshness of criticism and as enhancing solidarity in those cases in which the speaker and the hearer share a collective standpoint (Jorgensen 1996: 629), the use of salient negative prefixes and of dehumanizing metaphors in the text emphasizes that the speaker’s intention is by no means that of enhancing solidarity, but the opposite one, that of intensifying intergroup distance. Thus, instead of softening the face threat, irony reinforces negative feelings towards the outgroup, as Baider & Constantinou (2020) have already argued in their discussion of covert hate speech. At the same time, irony serves to disguise hostility and allows the speaker to preserve face, which increases the effectiveness of the message the author wishes to convey to his target readers, who are well aware of his prestigious status as a representative of the Romanian Orthodox Church.

### 5. Epithets: “Those illiterate fools!”

The presence of “insults” (Allan & Burridge 2006) and “slurs” (Sosa 2018), regarded in terms of “pejoration” (Meibauer 2016) or of “impoliteness” (Culpeper 2011), has been deemed as a defining element of hate speech. Analyses of hate speech have often focused on what Allport calls “antilocutions” (1954/1979) that are “prejudiced speech, which include ethnophaulisms as well as other linguistic factors in hostile prejudice, such as derogatory outgroup jokes”, as Mullen & Leader (2005: 192) explain in a discussion of Allport’s work. “Ethnophaulisms” (Roback 1944, quoted in Mullen and Leader 2005: 192) is a term used to refer to what other researchers have called ethnic slurs or racial epithets. In his study of the semantics of racial epithets, Hom (2008: 416) defines racial epithets as “derogatory expressions, understood to convey contempt and hatred towards their targets”, but then emphasizes the “shifty and scalar contents” of epithets in general, going on to underline that epithets are in fact dependent on their context of use and can be employed both to praise and to derogate. The definition provided above for racial epithets appears in fact to be suitable for the whole subclass of derogatory epithets, which certainly includes not only ethnophaulisms, but anti-LGBTQ epithets and other labels which involve the derogation of the outgroup.

According to Milner (1978), epithets often appear in binominal qualitative phrases (N of an N in English, N de N in French, Romanian and other Romance languages, see Vişan 2013) of the type *that idiot of a man, that fool of a woman, that nuisance of a child, that treasure of a housekeeper*, and are among those “nouns whose presence in the sentence indicates a point of view and requires the notion of self” (Banfield 1982: 55). Milner (1978) considers them “quality names”, which represent the speaker’s estimation of an object or a person, because unlike ordinary lexical nouns, they have no virtual reference, but only actual reference in use in a speech act.

Unlike ordinary nouns, which are classificatory and, hence, referentially autonomous, epithets do not designate a subset whose members can be identified by common objective characteristics, the only common property of the nouns in a class of imbeciles (or fools or idiots) being that they are all “performative” (Milner 1978). “Ordinary nouns” cannot appear in contexts such as those in (1)-(4):

- (1) Imbecile!
- (2) That imbecile of a friend of hers!
- (3) \* Father (*as an epithet*)!
- (4) \*That father of a friend of hers! (*as an epithet*)

Nevertheless, Milner (1978) points out that a shift in category can occur, which allows even “ordinary” nouns to become “epithets” and appear in contexts such as those in (5) and (6). In examples (5) and (6) “journalist” is reinterpreted as a “quality name”, and no longer functions as the name of a profession:

- (5) Her husband is such a journalist!
- (6) That journalist of a husband of hers!

The examples above are also (marginally) possible in Romanian, although they would be employed far less frequently than examples such as the one in (7):

- (7) Pseudo-jurnalistul de vecin!  
 pseudojournalist-the of neighbor  
 ‘That pseudojournalist of a neighbor!’

Because it encodes the subjectivity of the speaker, the evaluative prefix *pseudo-* contributes to the interpretation of the resulting noun as an epithet.

Romanian possesses not only a class of epithet nouns in the sense in which Milner defines “idiot” or “imbecile”, but can often nominalize adjectives, recategorizing them as epithet nouns (Vișan 2013), as in the example below, which is based on the adjective *analfabet* ‘illiterate’, one of the adjectives employed by the author of the text under analysis to refer to the outgroup).

- (8) Fratele tău e analfabet.  
 brother-the your is illiterate  
 ‘Your brother is illiterate.’
- (9) Analfabetul de frate -tu n- a venit la întâlnire!  
 Illiterate-the of brother-your not has come to date  
 ‘That illiterate fool of a brother of yours didn’t show up for the date!’

Significantly, it is not the literal, non-evaluative meaning of the adjective *analfabet* which allows nominalization into an epithet, but the subjective meaning of it (*analfabet* not as objectively illiterate, but as ignorant and uneducated). There is thus a shift of category from the classificatory meaning of *analfabet* ‘not literate’, registered as the first meaning by Romanian dictionaries, to its non-literal, insulting meaning, which Romanian dictionaries register as the second meaning of *analfabet*.

It is well-known that many adjectives can become evaluative with a figurative reading and have literal, non-evaluative counterparts (Banfield 1982: 6). Milner (1978) points out that evaluative adjectives and epithets share the feature “non-classificatory”, as neither evaluative adjectives nor epithets designate a well-defined class whose members have a certain, objective property. Both epithets and evaluative adjectives belong to the class of linguistically subjective lexical items, and appear in exclamative contexts.<sup>1</sup>

- (10) Doamne, ești incapabil!  
 god are incapable  
 ‘God, you’re incapable!’
- (11) Incapabilul ... ăla de om!  
 incapable-the that of man  
 ‘That incapable fool of a man!’

<sup>1</sup> For a definition of exclamatives at the semantics-syntax interface, see Zanuttini & Portner 2003.

While the demon and vermin tropes are present in the text in Table 1, the author skilfully avoids using words such as ‘devil’ or any other words related to infestation and disease, in attributive structures (of the type *X is Y*, “Crypto-socialists are devils”) or in other structures which would overtly mark them as epithets. Thus, in spite of the violence carried by the reference to demonization and infestation in the text, none of the keywords in this respect are employed to directly label the outgroup as demons or as vermin. However, all the negatively prefixed adjectives employed in relation to the outgroup have a subjective, evaluative reading and can be used as epithets in Romanian.

Apart from the occurrence in the binominal qualitative construction (Milner 1978), there is a relevant test in Romanian which can indicate that a noun or an adjective can function as an epithet (Vişan 2013), namely the noun/nominalized adjective can be used in the vocative case (as Romanian possesses vocative morphology). Returning to the list of negatively prefixed adjectives employed by the author of the text, we notice that they can *all* be employed in both the vocative case and binominal qualitative constructions, which are all unambiguously interpreted as insulting by all Romanian speakers. Here are several examples in this respect:

- (12) Agramato!  
illiterate  
‘You illiterate fool!’
- (13) Antiortodoxul de ministru!  
antiorthodox-the of minister  
‘That anti-orthodox fool of a minister!’

Examples (12)-(13) include epithets, due to the overt use of the negatively prefixed adjectives in exclamative contexts such as the vocative (equivalent to the English *You idiot!* construction, which targets the addressee’s face, see Meibauer 2016) or the binominal qualitative construction (interpreted in some analyses as predicate inversion structures, *Y of an X*, with the underlying structure *X is a Y*, see den Dikken 1998). Certainly, while the exclamation mark is graphically present twice in the text (see Table 1), the author’s use of the third person makes it impossible for the vocative (“You demons!”) to be employed. Unlike the vocative, binominal qualitatives (“That devil of a journalist!”), as well as their counterpart attributive structures (“That journalist is a devil.”) are however quite possible in the third person. In a discussion of the differences between second-person slurring and third-person slurring (see also discussions by Meibauer 2016 and Culpeper 2017), Jeshion (2018: 103) emphasizes that, while second-personal uses of slurs are “typically *callings*” whose function is to instil within the target a “sense of worthlessness”, third-personal uses are meant “to lower the target’s worth as persons in the eyes of others, and do so by defining their social identity, and consequently social standing as lesser, as unworthy of full or equal respect as a person” (Jeshion103-104).

In spite of the author’s avoidance of binominal qualitative structures, which would have provided an explicit connection with the target (*Y of an X = X is a Y*), the abundant use of negative prefixes in the text, which are (made) transparent and salient to Romanian speakers, places an exclamation mark on the other group as “the lesser group”. This exclamative dimension turns the third person into a target, in a manner similar to the way

in which the overt vocative morphology of Romanian provides a connection with the addressee (“*You idiot!*”) and also to the way in which qualitative binominals place a focus on the subjective evaluation (“*That idiot of a person!*”). The link to the target which leads to epithets is thus in fact present, encoded within the marked use of negative prefixes (*anti-Christian! pseudo-journalist! sub-urban!*), which become akin to red flags pointing to “them”, and which are decodable by all Romanian speakers who read the text.

In his exploration of ideology, van Dijk (1995) argued that “surface structures”, which encode prejudice or social inequality without explicitly expressing it, are “deviant” and “out of the ordinary” and violate communicative rules and principles. Such surface structures are “signals” of special meanings. The abundant use of separable negative prefixes here, as well as the graphic marks which the author of the text employs in order to emphasize some of these prefixes, are part of a “surface structure” which sharpens the contrast between the ingroup and the outgroup, acting like an exclamation mark for the readers of the text. The exclamative context triggers the recategorization of the negatively prefixed adjectives in the text as subjective, non-classificatory epithet nouns, and hence as insults. In a manner similar to the function of negative prefixes, sarcastic irony contributes to enhance the offensiveness of these “emotionally toned labels” (Allport 1954/1979: 81) by increasing the *us* versus *them* distance and, thus, by placing emphasis on the Other as a target.

## 6. Dictionaries, epithets, and overt/covert hate speech

Previous analyses that focus on Romanian dictionaries have underlined the need to examine the lexicographic representation of epithets and slurs (see Ștefănescu 2015, Vișan 2022, forthcoming), and they have emphasized the essential role of dictionaries in the way in which present-day society conceives of the complex dimensions of hate speech. It is significant to underline that “every single lexicographical decision has a language relevance and therefore, in the end, a political dimension” (Bergehnoltz & Gouws 2006: 14), and that dictionaries have kept their prestige and authority as reference books with a relevant role in language policy. Certainly, dictionary definitions and dictionary labels play a significant part in the way in which the boundaries between “overt” and “covert” hate speech are conceptualized at this time. “Covert” hate speech emerges as a way of avoiding “overt” markers, and, in order to be able to achieve a better understanding of what counts as (overt or as covert) hate speech, one should certainly further examine the way in which various lexicographic texts, which rely on decontextualization, choose to “mark” the dimension of pejoration.

Recent analyses by Nunberg (2018) and by Pullum (2018) have argued that offensiveness is not part of the conventional meaning of slurs, but belongs to features that one can label as “metadata”. Standard dictionaries can include the “metadata” in usage labels such as “disparaging” or “offensive”, which are, in fact, always dependent on the way in which a particular community chooses to represent those terms at the time (Nunberg 2018: 280). Underlining the role of dictionaries in the labelling of hate speech, Pullum (2018) has reprised Nunberg’s account of slurs in terms of “metadata”, arguing



that it is important to provide a clear representation of insults, slurs, and obscenities in present-day lexicographic works, and that lexicographers should attempt to highlight those facts which “may influence pragmatic interpretation or have other effects on the impact of an utterance in context” (Pullum 2018: 170).

Some of the existing analyses of Romanian dictionaries (Vişan 2022, forthcoming) have argued that, at this time, present-day Romanian dictionaries, such as the widely used *DEX*, do not lay emphasis on “disparaging” and “offensive” connotations, and, at the same time, openly take a stance which steers away from the “prescriptive” end of the prescriptive-descriptive continuum, overtly professing a “neutral”, “descriptive” aim. At present, few entries in *DEX* include the lexicographic labels *peiorativ* ‘pejorative’ or, less often, *depreciativ* ‘deprecatory’, and most of these entries are those of words which can be labelled “ethnic slurs” according to definitions such as Hom’s (2008). As is underlined in Ştefănescu (2015), the labels and definitions of some of these entries were altered in order to include labels such as “pejorative” and “deprecatory” due to the fact that these words came under public scrutiny. Nevertheless, while some of the entries for ethnic slurs have come to include a “metadata” dimension in Romanian dictionaries such as *DEX*, the entries for other words, which also have high derogatory potential, such as gendered epithets (see Vişan 2022) or derogatory epithets for various religious denominations are not marked by similar “metadata” dimensions. A relevant example in this respect is the word *păgân* ‘pagan’, still employed in Romanian as a disparaging name for non-Christians and for atheists, which is not marked as derogatory for any of the meanings included in its entry. Relevantly, popular online dictionaries for other languages, such as the Merriam-Webster (in its current edition), are careful to include the label “often offensive” for the second meaning of the English word *pagan* (“a person who is not religious, or whose religion is not Judaism, Islam, or especially Christianity”).

As previous analyses have shown, labels meant to indicate pejoration are underrepresented in present-day Romanian dictionaries, which currently downplay the “metadata” dimension which Pullum (2018) perceives as essential for a clear representation of (potentially) discriminatory lexis. Moreover, a particularly problematic aspect of the Romanian *DEX* is its lack of examples to accompany its definitions. The absence of a contextualization of the potentially pejorative meanings in this dictionary leads to a further underrepresentation of what dictionaries in other cultures would represent as “often offensive”, and hence as a potential part of what emerges as “overt” hate speech. As was argued in the sections above, Bănescu’s text avoids direct insults, and relies on negative prefixes and on sarcastic irony in order to convey its message. The author of the text carefully avoids (the limited number of) words overtly marked by labels such as “pejorative” or “deprecatory” in the best-known Romanian dictionary. Since a Romanian dictionary such as *DEX* already opts for the under-labelling of pejoration and for perfunctory definitions of derogatory meanings, Bănescu’s use of negative prefixes as a “covert” strategy to convey insults in terms of religion and belief emerges as particularly effective in the Romanian context. Who could accuse the author of the text of employing hate speech if none of the words and phrases he employs are in any way represented as even remotely associated with potentially pejorative connotations in the most authoritative Romanian lexicographic text?

## 7. Conclusions

The paper has attempted to emphasize the role of lexical choices which rely on “derivation” in maintaining an ideological pattern based on the “negative other-presentation of the outgroup” (van Dijk 1995: 26), and to underline that the negative prefixes (or the evaluative prefixes conveying approximation) in the text contribute to create “epithets” (Milner 1978). Since the text tropes the ROC as an undisputed instance of truth and of homogeneity, the use of derivational morphology operates an othering (in terms of impurity and corruption) of those “separate” people who “deviate” from the Church’s policy. The members of the outgroup are represented not only as misguided, but as dehumanized (see Jeshion 2018), as unwanted vermin infesting society, and finally as demons unworthy of Christian forgiveness.

Relying not only upon the use of evaluative morphology and polarized lexicalization in order to belittle and denigrate its target, but also upon “sarcastic irony” (Dynel 2016), the analysed text, which possesses a significant potential of disseminating its message, emerges as violent and offensive in terms of religion and belief, in spite of the author’s skilful avoidance of overt insults or threats. Some of the keywords and phrases employed in the Romanian media regarding the ROC’s response were “attack”, “harsh”, “acid”, “venomous”, “virulent”, “slurs” or “imprecations” (see for instance an article by Cristescu 2020), which underlines that the pejoration present in the text was not missed by its readers. Only apparently mitigating the hostility of the epithets in the text (which rely on evaluative prefixes which are emphasized), the use of irony represents an effective strategy in further reinforcing these epithets (see also Baider & Constantinou 2020) in a discourse marked as officially belonging to one of the most authoritative institutions in Romania. As a spokesperson and as the representative of a high-profile institution, the author of the text is well aware that he risks being officially reprimanded for the use of overt insults in a public response, and thus that “covertness” is the only available choice he possesses in order to express the insults he wishes to convey, without facing consequences for his actions. Significantly, while the journalist Cristian Tudor Popescu did face consequences for his open criticism of Patriarch Daniel, as the National Antidiscrimination Council in Romania ruled that the journalist’s satirical text included offensive remarks, and imposed a fine on him for “infringing upon the right to dignity” and for going “beyond the boundaries of the freedom of speech” (Bîrzoii 2020, quoting the National Antidiscrimination Council’s decision), Vasile Bănescu received no penalty for the response that was analysed above.

Certainly, as Baider (2019) has already underlined, hate speech does not only occur in online comments, but can emerge at all institutional levels. At present, the official guidelines for spokespersons in Romania include keywords such as “clarity” and “conciseness”, see *Manual pentru purtătorii de cuvânt și structurile de informații publice și relații mass-media* (2012). However, there is not only a lack of explicit restrictions regarding non-literal meaning, which is notoriously difficult to represent in reference materials, since classical definitions of literal meaning are problematic (see Ariel 2002); there is also a general lack of explicit linguistic restrictions included in such guidelines (see also a discussion by Culpeper 2017 concerning English linguistic guidelines regarding hate crime). Moreover, since Romanian dictionaries seldom offer contexts or

usage labels to indicate the categorial shift of certain adjectives and nouns into epithets, it is at present problematic to argue the presence of adjectives/nouns recategorized into epithets in any text, based only on the meanings registered by dictionaries, in a context where dictionaries retain their prescriptive authority and are still abundantly used in Romania as aids concerning legal issues. Nevertheless, while present regulations and current dictionaries may fail to register the derogatory potential of certain lexical items in context, the “markers” of hostility are present in the text. In an attempt to explore the mechanisms underlying covert hate speech, the paper has focused on these “signals” (van Dijk 1995), trying to show that the analysed text successfully serves to derogate the targeted group.

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