

4.2.3. Corruption of language

(1) *Corruption of language – academic articles research*

Corrupted language vs. corruption of language

Trying to understand *language* as a concept within linguistics, introduces many definitions dealing with the meaning of the term "language". Those definitions gather different scopes and perspectives of this term. One interesting perspective belongs to Valerija Majus Marinković (n.d., personal communication), who advances the idea that "where language stops to be a means of communication and becomes a deterrent, there one can look for causes and consequences of corrupting the language."

A possible starting point of these dilemmas is the very understanding of what language is and what it is not. There is still no consensus on where and when the *dilemma of what language is and what it is not* stated as such. This idea dates back from the Medieval period when writing in Latin the word *dialectos* which, towards the turn of the thirteenth century developed into the neologism *linguagium* for a regional lect or a lect with no written form. Nevertheless, there is a statement that this term was an inspiration for Greek Catholics (Uniates) conversant with Latin, who coined the derogative term *iazychie*, translated roughly as "quasi-language" or "corrupted language" (Kamusella, 2016, p. 174). However, *iazychie* is not fully synonymous with the corruption of language. In order to exist, there must be a previously existing language that can be corrupted, so quasi-language in this case cannot be the object of corruption of language.

Understanding "language"

When it comes to understanding language, it is important to note that the connection between people and language is determined on three different plans (Bugarski, 2006, pp. 12-13):

1. General-human or biological plan – as a *Homo Sapiens* that has the ability to talk and use symbolic interpretations, that differs us from other living species.
2. Group or social plan – language manifests as a specific language of one community that differs from a language of another community
3. Individual or psychological plan – on which every individual has its own "language" in terms of style of communication

Regarding the phenomenon of corruption, depicted as "departure from the original or from what is pure or correct" (Merriam Webster Online), first, it is important to define what is "pure and correct" in the sense of *functions of language*. Linguistically, the functions of language could be divided into several categories, among which two seem to be the most important –communicative function and cognitive function. Other functions that might be important as well are cultural function (that collects all the memories and traditions, and functions as a bridge between generations), aesthetic function (that ranges from the first sounds that children make to the literature), and magical function (that connects the essence of the word to what is believed that is its destiny – usually through *verbal taboo*¹) (Bugarski, 2006, pp. 38-40). In addition, there are many more different functions and subfunctions of language that evidence its complexity which leads to the overlapping of those functions in reality (for example, we usually give *aesthetic essence* to something that becomes the part of the *cultural heritage* of one group). Therefore, understanding the corruption of language is very challenging since language has many different functions and manifests itself in many different plans or contexts. For example, we can say that, on an individual level, there could be a miscommunication which could be interpreted as corruption, since it represents the departure of what is pure and correct. Here, the challenge regards the border between what might be regarded as corruption of language and what might not – for example, daily miscommunication with a shop assistant might be a case of corruption of language?

¹. *Verbal taboo* is usually manifested through the prohibition on naming certain persons, relatives, actions, or relationships for fear of being summoned by force of evil (Bugarski, 2006, p. 40).

The answer to this question is guiding this entire research, according to which corruption, in general, is the *inability of the individual to put the wellbeing of the community above their own interest* (adapted from the original definition given by Calil Simão, 2011, p. 27). In this sense using language for a selfish interest might represent a case of corruption of language or not. This is a dilemma that is going to be debated below.

Interpretation: what is the “wellbeing of the community”?

One of the most common tools for the corruption of language is *interpretation*. This concept is usually defined as the “act or the result of interpreting (explanation)” or a “particular adaptation or version of a work, method, or style” (Merriam Webster Online). We can say that one of the most popular examples of interpretation that represented the inability of the individual to prioritize the wellbeing of others is the Nazis’ interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche’s works (Hendricks, 2017).

The general opinion is that some complicated ideas constructed and invented by Nietzsche were of no use to Hitler, however, catchphrases like "the blond beast", the *Übermensch* (neither of which is a racial concept) and "beyond good and evil" could be put to different interpretations that lead to infinite misuse (Prideaux, 2018). On the other hand, even if that is correct, can it be claimed that they have put the individual interest above the wellbeing of the community?

Even though we perceive the Nazis through the idea of the *Führer*, this movement at first introduced collectivism and transformed a culture that was largely centered on the individual in Berlin. However, in other parts of Weimar, Germany there was a "strong expectation that private concerns should be subordinated to the common good", which led to the idea that each individualistic self-understanding of a Weimar citizen should often be pursued discreetly rather than be expressed publicly (Föllmer, 2010, p. 69).

One contemporary example of this would be the misinterpretation of the Quran by the extremists of Islam Republic. Among many notions in their analysis, when studying the jihadist manual, Quilliam expert counter-extremist organisation stressed that: "this entire binary construct is a later invention of Muslim theologians that is now obsolete, and so the justification of ex-communication (takfir) and military attacks against civilians on this basis is completely absurd" (Townsen, 2018).

We are aware that the collectivistic discourse of Nazism or Jihadist extremism in practice led to many sacrifices and cruelty. We can even presuppose that they truly believed that those individualistic sacrifices were for the greater good. If we can carefully presume that Nazism/ Jihadism is one radical view of the greater good, then what happens to our idea that corruption means putting individualistic views over the group wellbeing? Does that mean that the Nazis' interpretation of Nietzsche or Jihadists' interpretation of the Quran is not corrupting the meaning of its words (its language on the individual plan)?

To answer this, we should refer to the legal understanding of language. When it comes to methods of reading the law, one of them, and usually the first one to be used is the *language method of reading law*. This method uses the meaning of the codes, also known as the rules of language - lexis, syntax, and grammar - meaning, it is simply a linguistic interpretation (Methods of Understanding the Law). This method can be accompanied by other methods such as *historical understanding of law*, *systematic*, *logical*, etc, in order to fully understand the norms. Language of the legal document can be imprecise or the norms could be written in an imperfect language, offering space for interpretations, and even be manipulated. This challenge evidences that *language is really dependable on the context*.

The cases of the Nazis' interpretation of Nietzsche or Jihadist interpretation of the Quran can be understood in the context of the greater good or in the context of individualistic evil. Likewise, it can be seen that different language understanding of norms can be differently interpreted in various contexts.

Securitization of different security threats can be also understood within corruption of language.

Securitization is a term within the security and political studies that refers to the moment when an idea is abandoned to such an extent that the concept of security relates only to certain reference objects (such as the state) and to a certain type of security threats (such as military ones), the question “what is the quality which turns a question into a security issue” (Šulović, 2010).

In 2016, the Affair Chocolinda between the Croatian president Kolinda and the Serbian Ministry of Trade, started when the chocolates produced in Serbia were found in Christmas presents for kids in Croatia and the Croatian president said that she feels sorry for that mistake and that in those presents, the Croatian chocolate should have been packed instead. This one sentence produced a Social Media riot between Serbs and Croats, and the Serbian minister Aleksandar Vulin even said that these words are a sign of one step back within the international relations of Serbia and Croatia, making it much cooler (Šulović, 2010).

One misused sentence from both sides, Serbia and Croatia, could be interpreted completely differently. However, even if we cannot understand the original meaning behind the words of the president of Croatia, we can perceive that there are different interpretations of it and that the riot made it a question of security issue. Similarly, the *questions of migration and refugees* could be securitized in such a manner, and in many countries, they can be seen as a threat or not, depending on the context. Nowadays, we evidence that there are different contextual interpretations of *COVID 19 situation*, whether it is a securitized problem or just an unharmed disease. Seeing that different people experience COVID 19 differently (as a pandemic threat or an unnecessary drama about something harmless), we evidence that many discourses are depending on the context of interpretation.

To sum up, there are different types of corruption of language, that can be understood on different levels. For example, Hitler's understanding of Nietzsche or the Jihadist understanding of the Quran are a misuse of *individual language* on the basis of *group language (German)* – *i.e.*, misusing both cognitive and communicative functions of language. Corruption of language can be present on various plans, misusing different functions of language in several different contexts.

(2) Corruption of language – people's perceptions research

In what regards public perception towards corruption of language, some ideas might be taken into account. For example, the South African comic artist, AK (2019), when reflecting on Charlie Hebdo shootings in Paris in January 2015, said that "Satire, although using symbols metaphorically, and incorporating all sorts of visual iconography such as stereotypes, hyperbole, and paradox, is now generally regarded as hurtful and in some cases as hate speech." This statement evidences the importance of context and different interpretations when it comes to corruption of language. In the case of Charlie Hebdo, we can observe both visual and linguistic differences in perceiving satires. Something that was intended to be benign and funny was interpreted as an offence, furthermore, as a form of a hate speech. In the words of Boban Arsenijević (n.d., personal communication), overthinking what is right or wrong could lead towards political quasi-correctness, which is, in turn, leading to corruption of language. Regarding this, what we considered to be the aesthetic function of the language was misused and misinterpreted in an abominable way.

KL (2020) said that menstruation was used to call “those days” to avoid saying the *period*, *menstruation*, or *cycles* as it is considered to intrinsically have a negative meaning. As previously mentioned, one of the language functions is also a magical function, referring to the connection between the essence of the word and what is believed as its destiny – usually through verbal taboo. We can even say that "those days" are the contemporary form of verbal taboo. So verbal taboo is usually proclaimed through prohibition when naming certain things. It is believed that if we do not proclaim this taboo prohibition, we could summon some forces of evil, or in smaller cases a stroke of "bad luck", and in this case, there is stigmatization when naming it with the right name. Due to the process of creating verbal taboo "menstruation" somehow became an embarrassing and bad thing to say. Menstruation is still a taboo word, even among some communities in Balkans, and there is always caution when saying it. In some cultures, it can be so much stigmatized that it can

make people think that women having periods are "people who have committed a sin that is not forgiven until it ends" (UN Children's Fund, 2017). We could say that this might be a presumption from a feministic perspective, however, "those days" are a valuable example of how a magical function of language can be misused. This necessarily does not have to be an evil spirit or something terrifying; in this case, the verbal taboo is rather the avoidance of using the precise word so that one could not summon what is supposed to be perceived as an embarrassing, somewhat magical (irrational), essence of menstruation. If we consider the right to name things with the precise and right terms, we can say that this informal censorship, stigmatizing it as a mean of embarrassment, is indeed a corruption of the magical function of language.

Sociologist ZG (2020) was talking about a book by Veselin Čajkanović on Saint Sava in Serbia. ZG (2020) referred to him as the pre-war academic writer, on the justice of God killed by communists. He illustrated that in an analysis of how St. Sava is treated in folk songs and proverbs, by comparing it to the way President Vučić in Serbia is portrayed in the contemporary discourse: "that's someone who edits the whole of society, and it is given to it" (Gavrilović, 2020). Referring to the previously mentioned cultural function of language that collects all the memories and traditions, while bridging different generations, we can say that it is also misinterpreted since contemporary presidents can have prescribed and interpreted different attributes that are taken out of traditional discourse. This is not the first time in history that traditional and cultural discourses were misused to glorify and justify the ruler at that moment – from Egyptian Pharaohs to Hitler we can evidence different traditional essences prescribed to them from the traditional, cultural, or religious narratives. For example, justifying the pharaoh's ruling in the earthborn world, the people from Egypt considered the pharaoh to be half-man, half-god, while having the ability to communicate with gods (Editors of the Discovering Egypt.com).

Similarly, prejudices about Romanian people that are rooted in cultural discourses such as the ones that the country is a land of gypsies, that Romanians usually speak Russian, and that Romania is a dangerous country (Condrea, n.d.) could be misinterpreted and of a corrupted use. For example, if Romanian people are regarded as gypsies, speaking Russian, then, we might consider they are the perfect victim of corruption of the cultural function of language.

| LANGUAGE PLANS | FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE | EXAMPLE OF CORRUPTION |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| General-human or biological plan | Communication & Cognitive | Nazis' Nietzsche, Misinterpreting law, Securitization |
| Group or social plan | Aesthetical | Misinterpreting the satires |
| Individual or psychological plan | Magical | Verbal taboo of menstruation |
| | Cultural | Prescribing prejudices based on cultural narratives |

Table 4. Examples of corruption of language, taking into account the functions of language and language plans

As it is said before, the interpretation is the main tool for corruption of language. To sum up, we can say that *corruption of language* is an *interpretation of language* on general, group and individual plans, whereas the misuse of communication, cognitive, aesthetical, magical, cultural and other functions of language is leading towards *the inability of the individual to put the wellbeing of the*

community above their own interest, regarding the context of what wellbeing is. Furthermore, corruption of language is very dependable on the context and understanding of wellbeing. It is not a “corrupted language” that does not have the essence of the language, it is a selfishly perceived interpretation of the language in itself. This is influenced by the context, namely by what wellbeing and selfishness are considered to be at that moment.

(3) Corruption of language – Internet agenda research

The first 5 results after searching for corruption of language:

1. The Corruption of Language, Foundation for Economic Education
<https://fee.org/articles/the-corruption-of-language/>
2. Language change, Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Language_change
3. Philosophy and Corruption of Language, Caleb Thompson, J-Stor
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3751506?seq=1>
4. Ideology and the Corruption of Language, Public Discourse Journal
<https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2017/03/18571/>
5. Black Mist: The Language of Corruption, Language Connections,
<https://www.languageconnections.com/blog/black-mist-the-language-of-corruption>

Results show that Foundation for Economic Education does not define the corruption of language. It refers to it as a contemporary daily matter where people are trying to "persuade others of a certain point of view or to win an argument at any cost, regardless of where the truth lies". They say that corruption is a responsibility of individuals that "corruption of the language is merely a reflection of the corruption of the morals and ethics of the general public" (Snyder, 1980).

Wikipedia defines *Language change* as the variation in language's features over time. It can also be named as *corruption of language*, suggesting that “language change constitutes a degradation in the quality of a language, especially when the change originates from human error or is a prescriptively discouraged usage”.

Similarly, Caleb Thompson (1992, p. 12), in his work *Philosophy and Corruption of Language*, is stressing that it is the abuse of language that is measured against the human interest, it is not just a matter of using abstract political vocabulary in ambiguous ways, but it also represents the vocabulary of moral evaluation.

Randal Smith (2017) talks about language filled with *ideology* and refers to Plato distastefulness about sophistry, saying that, in a way, it is a corruption of language: "the belief that language was not primarily used for the expression of truth but the acquisition of power."

Furthermore, there are many texts like the one on the Black Mist blog that talk about words of corruption, meaning that there are phrases that represent the corrupted actions such as *little envelope*, the *help of a friend*, *oil money*, etc. However, this is not specifically related to corruption of language, it is more a matter of corruption in general.

Since there is not a definition of corruption of language in itself, this research aimed to explore and analyse both academic and non-academic sources on the topic, in order to depict what corruption of language might be.

Figure 3. Interpretation of language in different contexts