

Anthroponyms in Taboo Discourse: The Case of Romanian Swear Phrases¹

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*But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:
Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.
Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.
But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*
(Matthew 5:34-37)

Abstract

Swearing is a special kind of speech act, whose use is restricted by certain pragmatic parameters that are determined by a given situation of communication. Structurally, curses display a standard pattern of construction. The initial position in the utterance is often occupied by a curse verb (e.g. *a (se) fute* 'to fuck'), followed by the unstressed form of the second person (singular/plural) pronoun (*-te/-vă*), whose role is to identify the receiver of the act of swearing. The final position is usually filled by the anthroponym of a real or fictional individual, who is 'invited', *in absentia*, to perform the activity designated by the swear verb.

This paper proposes a semantic classification and pragmalinguistic analysis of anthroponyms in Romanian curses, according to several criteria regarding the referents of the anthroponyms, such as: (a) ethnic belonging (curses with anthroponyms that are specific to certain ethnic groups); (b) sociocultural impact (curses with names of famous individuals); (c) belonging to a transcendental reality (curses that contain hagionyms). Swear phrases in this last group are used only in extreme circumstances: morally and emotionally, their effect is similar to the one of imprecations that refer to the mother of the cursed person.

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Preliminaries

The temptation to settle accounts with someone or something exists in every one of us, in a latent or manifest state. The smothering or expression of one's hubris is determined, on the one hand, by a person's cultural genetic predisposition and, on the other, by his / her individual planning ability. In other words, the way in which we choose to repress our dissatisfaction (should we choose to do so at all), depends both on the psychological and physiological behaviour of the civilisation to which we belong and whose values we praise whenever we get the chance, and on individuals' temperamental structure, provided by the configuration of their DNA.

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Situated by history and, implicitly, by mentality at the intersection of opposite civilisations, the Romanian people have always struggled, almost in vain, to cure, by means of recurrent sessions of Western therapy, the temperamental excesses of the Levant, which stretches even beyond the Danube River, up to the lower boundary of the Carpathians. The Romanians' natural drive to engage in polemics, triggered by the innate reflex to put things into the order of one's choice and by the scrupulousness to clear any moral debts at once (including those of a vindictive type), determined them to arm themselves with an artillery of words that come in useful when cooling one's quick temper. A well-delineated category of verbal ammunition that is always at hand consists of expletives and, within this class, swear phrases that contain anthroponyms, in particular. Of the abundant and ever-rejuvenating lexical material provided by swearing, we have decided to pay considerable attention in the present study to the above-mentioned type of curse phrases. However, it should be noted that the inventory of Romanian swear words does not only comprise constructions with anthroponyms; on the contrary, the structures that are outside the scope of our research are numerically and stylistically overwhelming. The limitations of this study are accounted for by the fact that it is part of a more extensive project that deals with different contexts in which anthroponyms occur in standard and non-standard contemporary Romanian.

Aims, Corpus and Methodology

Our objectives are to record the main Romanian swear phrases that contain anthroponyms and to explain the syntactic means of their formation and the discursive implications that these structures have in communication. This study does not aim at achieving an exhaustive presentation of the category of Romanian curse words. We will only discuss the subtypes that are considered characteristic frequency-wise and germane to the typological profile of the Romanian language with respect to the parameter investigated.

The corpus exploited was compiled by the authors. It includes authentic expressive speech acts (i.e. swear words), taken from spoken² or written (Internet) spontaneous interactions.

As support for our arguments, we will turn to precepts that are specific to the following linguistic fields: functional grammar, pragmatics, speech act theory, and sociolinguistics.

Swearing: A Culture-Bound Speech Act

In every language, one can find words and phrases that are specifically used on the occasion of certain personal and social events (greetings said at birthdays, baptisms, weddings; condolences expressed at the loss of someone dear; congratulations for professional achievements; commonplaces uttered when meeting someone, bidding farewell to someone, or seeing someone again, and so on). To the same extent, one can notice a series of verbal

² The examples were gathered from the speech of urban communities (Baia Mare) and rural ones (neighbouring villages) in Maramureş county.

means of expressing failure, lack of accomplishment, frustration, hate, envy, anger, discontent in general – swear phrases.

The lexical fields preferred for the selection of the referent-terms mentioned in Romanian expletives are:

(a) Kinship (mother, father, siblings, ancestors, and so on); to curse about one's mother, in particular, and about other relatives, in general, means to disconnect one from his / her guardians (to whom a son / daughter is initially tied biologically and, subsequently, by divine covenant). At the same time, taking physical possession of one's mother is perceived as humiliating the descendants (see also Majuru 2011): 'an expletive phallically attacks an opponent's maternal religion; it annuls the one who is cursed, wishing him / her to return to the mother's womb and never come back' (Anghelescu 2014).

(b) Sacredness (God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Virgin, angels, saints, the cross, the Host, candles, and so on); curse phrases that contain such words are derived from individuals' wish to violate the biblical prohibition on saying God's name.³

As regards the number and fancifulness of swear phrases, the Romanian language is resourcefully fit to compete on an international level and claim the first position (alongside Hungarian, as far as we know, and also other languages).⁴ However, with respect to the

³ Considering swearing as resulting from the conjunction of two opposite forces, blasphemy and euphemism, Benveniste (2000) states that the prohibition to use the name of God (and of other saints – authors' note) bridles individuals' inclination to profane what is sacred: 'In itself, the sacred prompts an ambivalent kind of behaviour, we are well aware of this. Religious tradition wanted to preserve only the divine type of sacredness, by excluding the damned one. In its particular way, blasphemy aims at re-establishing this balance, by profaning God's very name. We blaspheme the *name* of God, because all we know about God is His *name*. It is the only way to reach Him, move Him, or hurt Him: by saying His name' (Benveniste 2000: 220).

⁴ In an article that is aimed at highlighting the national specificity of Romanian swearing, Crețu outlines the idea of a comparative study of swearing in relation to various peoples: 'French swear words are gentle, graceful, revealing one's indignation, not one's grudge, and keeping within a certain limit of common sense. Italians (hot-blooded Latin spirits) are more foul-mouthed, but their swearing only amounts to a lot of noise, without it entering a taboo area. Germans curse tersely and acrimoniously, without embroidering pointlessly. The English, who are perfect gentlemen, perform a manly, well-targeted attack: they hold something only against their rivals, whom they rebuke sharply and coolly by means of an almost semantically bleached "Fuck you!" Swear words act as a slap or a glove thrown in an enemy's face. This is because they rely on hurting one's sense of honour, which is essential in this cultural code of ethics, and on the logical reaction of the person who does not want to leave his / her honour tarnished. Swearing is nothing more than a challenge to a virile settling of accounts. How does swearing work with us, Romanians? There are usually two fields that are the most referred to in the imaginary of autochthonous swear phrases (and there actually exists such an imaginary, albeit rudimentary and employed in order to obtain revenge): sexuality and sacredness. As history taught us to make due, to get along by using all sorts of schemes, we do not swear plainly, but obliquely; it all looks like the tactic of harassing one's attackers and avoiding direct, decisive confrontation. Romanians do not abuse their hostile interlocutors openly, but aim at what they believe hurts the interlocutors the most. They have got something against an enemy's mother, whom they joyfully and proudly subject to all sorts of verbal debaucheries, against the deceased in the enemy's family, and in extreme situations even against his / her sister. Or, if need be, they may even pick on the opponent's God and, thereupon, on everything falling under the scope of sacredness. [...] Thus, Romanians try to strike the heaviest blow where they think it will hurt the most, to desecrate what they believe is the most precious to the adversary whom they wish to spite. Can you imagine an English person attempting on the moral integrity of a deceased individual? It is a bit difficult to picture... With the Romanians, this is not a problem! We attack with the same self-satisfaction all of the most treasured values that a person can hold, those

moments when expletives are uttered, Romanian is well individualised. We are a people that turned cursing into culture – and even cult –, since we use it not only in circumstances that (utterly) require its actualisation (see above), but also in times of peace and utmost joy. Swearing has become a verbal expression that complements any psychological behaviour, a verbal ‘protocol’. It is an automatic reaction that reveals a kind of national ‘weakness’ manifested in the inability to abstain from using swear words and the innate ability to attach – at times wittily and facetiously, at times fiercely and cuttingly – what seems to be the most appropriate verbal tag in a given situation.

After being under the relative control of censorship before 1989, taboo expressions proliferated in all language registers and social strata after the fall of the communist regime. The restriction on one’s freedom of expression, which only smouldered in the pre-revolution period or was manifested with great hesitation, is mirrored by the present-day complete freedom of speech, in which, as one might have expected, less canonical language items were introduced. Thus, the various means of expressing imprecations migrated from the periphery of language and entered the basic vocabulary of many speakers, who use them in numerous combinations and almost abusively, concentrating some of the most varied states and experiences.

Swearing as Expressive Speech Act

Defining Aspects

Starting from a theoretical framework that consists of the classifications of speech acts coined by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1993), we will analyse swearing as an expressive type of speech act, by means of which a locutor manifests a certain mental state (which is usually – but not exclusively – discontent) in relation to the interlocutor, the rest of the discourse, and the context of communication (see Searle 1993: 6). As a result of the utterance of specific performative expressions (swear phrases), the allocutor’s reality is altered in the sense suggested by the meaning of that articulation: ‘It is believed that this category of speech acts contributes significantly to the dynamic of interpersonal relationships and reflects the existence of an emotional and attitudinal side of communication, which is at least as important as the strictly informative component’ (Necula 2010: 185).

As a subtype of insulting,⁵ swearing is a speech act with deprecating connotations, whose illocutionary aim is to express the verbal materialisation of a markedly subjective psychological state. This act is realised directly or indirectly, depending on certain sociolinguistic rules: the permission / appropriateness vs the interdiction / inappropriateness to perform it, with respect to the parameters of the situation of communication (the interlocutors’ status, the nature of the speakers’ relationship, and so on. According to Apte:

that define him / her. Every curse that is not related to this field is a gentle caress, a sign of affinity, or an innocent glance’ (2001).

⁵ Insulting is an expressive speech act that bears negative connotations; by performing it, ‘the speaker achieves a kind of symbolical aggression of the interlocutor, whose self-image is thereby harmed’ (Necula 2010: 187, orig. Romanian).

To a large extent the sociocultural context of speech and the backgrounds of the participants in social interaction determine the use of taboo words. Such factors as enculturation and socialization, age, gender, social status, degree of religiosity, and educational level influence the level of taboo words in speech (2001: 285).

There exist several degrees of intensity in swearing and they can be set, on the one hand, depending on the speakers' status and, on the other, on the illocutionary resources that a community possesses for the performance of that specific act.

The addresser's subjective attitude is intentional and focused (or not) on the addressee. According to the conditions and 'canonical' circumstances that would lead to the verbalisation of expletives and the perspective of analysis that Benveniste (2000) adopts in the discussion of swearing, one could define imprecation as the word

that we 'let slip' under the pressure of a sudden and violent feeling, of impatience, anger, or failure. Nevertheless, this word, albeit laden with meaning, is merely expressive, not communicative. [...] The same expletive can be said in completely different situations. It simply conveys the intensity of a reaction to these situations. [...] It does not convey any message, open any dialogue [it may, perhaps, actualise the complement of the adjacency pair: another expletive, authors' note]; it does not demand a reply, nor even the presence of an interlocutor. Nor does it describe the utterer. He / she betrays his / her presence, but does not reveal himself / herself. He / she lets the expletive slip, give vent to an emotion. (Benveniste 2000: 221)

As this analysis will show, to approach swearing as an expressive speech act facilitates the delineation of the role that this class of speech acts plays in relation to other types of speech acts and in the dynamic of interpersonal relationships.

The Pragmatic Algorithm of Anthroponymic Expletive Speech Acts

In Romanian, there is a great diversity of syntactic patterns (some fixed, others flexible) based on which expletives are built. On this level, one can notice the preference to develop the formation patterns of expletives with anthroponyms around a verbal head; nevertheless, it should be stated that there are situations in which the verb is omitted or when the phrase has a noun head.⁶

The verbs that convey the meanings of the main Romanian expletives are used especially in the subjunctive, conditional, and imperative mood.

The subjunctive is the mood of *actions / states presented as possibilities (as potentiality)* (see GBLR 2010: 235; GR 2013: 45). It is used in imprecations to enhance the illocutionary force (it expresses intense feelings, 'verbal explosions', see Ghiorghiaș 2004). In the contexts of occurrence illustrated, the subjunctive is not marked by a morpheme: *Futu-*

⁶ Prototypically, Romanian expletives contain the following elements:

- a) verb + pronominal clitic + noun (+ possessive): *fută-te mă-ta* ('your mother fuck you'), *futu-ți morții mă-tii* ('fuck your mother's dead (relatives)');
- b) pronominal clitic + verb + locative: *te bag în pizda mă-tii* ('(I) shove you in your mother's cunt').

ți Cristoșii / Dumnezeii mă-tii! ('Fuck your mother's Gods and Christs'); *Fută-te X* ('X fuck you': *Fută-te Alain Delon!*, *Fută-te Hector!*, *Fută-te Hitler!*, *Fută-te Stalin!*, and others). We also consider the verb in the constructions *Fut pe Ilonka!* and *Fut pe Izaura!* in the subjunctive mood (without the morpheme *să*), despite its formal resemblance to the indicative, as the desiderative meaning of the verb is salient.

The conditional mood (also called conditional-optative) expresses *volitional modalisation* (desire) (see GBLR 2010: 238; GR 2013: 51). The most productive structures are those in which a pronominal clitic is inserted between the auxiliary and the main verb (cf. also Ghiorghiaș 2004). Worth noting is the recent entry of certain verbs (e.g. *a bea* 'to drink') in the stock of verbs that are specifically used in expletives, followed by various syntactic positions: subject (*Be-te-ar Zoli!* 'May Zoli drink you!'; *Crăpa-te-ar Zoli!* 'May Zoli whack you!'); locative (*Duce-te-ar Iani la cimitir / la Zoli!* 'May Iani take you to the cemetery / to Zoli!'); direct object (*Fute-l-ai pe Ceausescu!* 'May you fuck Ceausescu!'); sociative (*Fute-m-aș cu Petre Roman!* 'May I / I'd fuck Petre Roman!'); instrument (*Da-o-ar Zoli cu bomba-n tine!* 'May Zoli hit you with a bomb!').

As the mode of compelling, the imperative contributes to securing the precise, ultimatum value of utterances. As regards expletives, the dynamic insulting meaning of imperative expressions is turned into an exclamative, desiderative one. This is why the illocutionary force of some expletives – which is constitutively 'cutting' and harsh – is toned down by virtue of the associations of these imprecations with exclamation: *Du-te-n pula lui Zebedeu / Zevedeu!* ('Go in Zebedee's dick').

Two basic types of pragmatic algorithms can be delineated in Romanian, from a semantic and morphosyntactic perspective:

A. The *explicit / analytic* type, consisting of two or several components that are necessarily expressed:

a₁)

I. The swearing marker, actualised in the (performative) verb *a fute* ('to fuck, to screw'), in particular, and also in other 'strong' verbs that pertain to the semantic field of sexuality (*a băga* 'to shove, stick in', *a cupla* 'to copulate'), aggression (*a crăpa* 'to whack, to kill', *a tăia* 'to cut, to slit', *a trăzni* 'to smite'), or drinking (but with sexual connotations: *a bea* 'to drink'), in the subjunctive / conditional / imperative mood, 1st / 2nd / 3rd person singular +

II. A form that designates the allocutor (dative pronominal clitic, *-ți*, 2nd person singular) +

III. A form that designates the subject that is affected by the action expressed by the verb, actualised in a compound nominal direct object (*Dumnezeii / Cristoșii mă-tii* 'your mother's Gods / Christs'), within which a possessive link⁷ is established between the possessed object (the anthroponym) and the possessor (the short form *mă-*, from

⁷ A distinction can be made between *alienable possession* and *inalienable possession* (for a definition of these concepts, see Munteanu Siserman (2008: 67-69)).

mamă ‘mother’), reinforced by a second possessor (the allocutor), morphologically indicated by means of the genitive determiner *-tii*. The postverbal pronominal clitic, *-ți*, and the genitive determiner, *-tii*, are co-referential; however, this does not imply the existence, on the textual-discursive level, of an anaphoric connection. Both pronominal forms designate the unique referent (the expletive target):

E.g. *futu-ți Dumnezeii / Cristoșii mă-tii* (‘Fuck your mother’s Gods and Christs’)

In many instances, expletives are constructed in partial agreement with the aforementioned pattern. Two differences may occur: the possessed object (the anthroponym) becomes, in the new swearing context, the agent of the performative act, whereas the direct object (the patient) is expressed by a pronominal clitic in the accusative (*-te*):

E.g. *fută-te Dumnezeu* (or *Dumnezo*, a regional vocative form) / *fută-te Cristos* (‘God / Christ fuck you’)

a₂)

I. See a₁) I.: *fut* +

II. A form that designates the patient that suffers the action (anthroponym in the accusative): *pe Ilonka*

E.g. *fut pe Ilonka!* (‘Fuck Ilonka!’)

B. The *implicit* type (characterised by verb ellipsis: the complete form of the expletive is obtained by means of inference); three subtypes occur:

b₁) (verb) + a form designating the direct object (the patient) (*Cristoșii / Dumnezeii*) + ± (*mă-tii*) (‘(By) your mother’s Gods / Christs’) (see above)

b₂) (verb indicating direction) + a form designating the destination (an accusative that shows direction) (*în pizda / pula*) + possessor (*lui Mărie / lui Stalin*) (‘In the cunt / dick of Mărie / Stalin’)

b₃) (verb) + a form designating the agent of the action (*Iștenu*’ < Hungarian *Isten* ‘God’) + relative (explanatory) construction (*care te-o făcut*): *fută-te Iștenu*’ *care te-o făcut!* (‘(May you be fucked) by the God that made you!’)

Semantic-Stylistic Analysis

Certain expressions develop an offensive function (therefore, they act as expletives) due to the way they refer to the semantic fields to which they belong and which, in emotionally unmarked contexts, are approached with great common sense: religion, family, ethnicity, sexuality, aspects regarding the functioning of the human body, and others. Nevertheless, the insulting nature of these structures is not provided by the words that they comprise, but by the meanings to which they give way and which are attached, within a specific community, to negative sociocultural values and attitudes. Put differently, ‘[w]ords referring to offensive concepts become offensive words’ (Jay 2000: 153). In the case of expletives, as in other

situations, anthroponyms whose ‘initial referents’ (see Gary-Prieur 2009) are seen in a disagreeable light by the community or are involved in negative activities borrow the pejorative values of their bearers.

Based on the anthroponyms they contain, the expletives discussed in this paper may be grouped according to several criteria:

(a) Ethnic belonging: expletives that comprise names specific to certain ethnic groups, especially minorities: *Fut pe Ilonka* (‘Fuck Ilonka’), *Fută-te Pișta* (‘Fuck Pișta’) (for the Hungarian minority), *Fută-te Ițic* (‘Fuck Ițic’, for the Jewish minority). In the former case, both first names (the female one, *Ilonka*, and the male one, *Pista*, adapted to Romanian spelling – *Pișta* –, a hypocoristic of the first name *Istvan*) are transparent with regard to the ethnicity they suggest, and they are probably related to the tense sociohistorical relationships between the coexisting Romanian majority and the Hungarian minority. In the latter example, the forename refers equally to the image of the Jewish people in Romanian space, which is also illustrated in a number of jokes with / about representatives of this ethnic group. This seems to be the motivation for the use of the anthroponym in the aforementioned expletive, as the jokes in question foreground the stereotypical negative image of the extremely clever Jewish individual, but who employs this skill in view of obtaining an advantage and deceiving the person with whom he / she wishes to engage in commercial exchanges. Therefore, one can easily notice that in these examples, as well as in others analysed below, the verb *a fute* (‘to fuck, to screw’) is not used denotatively but figuratively (with the meaning ‘to hurt, to harm’).

(b) The possibility of identifying the referent in real life: expletives that contain names of real individuals: *Be-te-ar / Crăpa-te-ar / Tăia-te-ar Zoli* (‘May Zoli drink / whack / cut you’; Zoli is a former nurse at the morgue of the county hospital in Baia Mare. According to ‘urban folklore’, he had sexual intercourse with a young woman who had been clinically dead and, during the intercourse, she recovered her vital signs. Thus, on the one hand, Zoli is considered a rapist of dead bodies and, on the other, for the girl’s family he is a saviour); *Duce-te-ar Iani la cimitir / la Zoli* (‘May Iani take you to the cemetery / to Zoli’; Iani is said to be the name of a driver who takes the dead to the mortuary and from there to the cemetery).

Thus, it is clear that, for the identification of the referent (the doer of the action indicated by the verb) and, implicitly, for the proper decoding of the message conveyed by an expletive, there must exist a ‘conversational history’ shared by addresser and addressee. In other words, they must be able to access the same baggage of ‘encyclopaedic knowledge’. In the absence of this property, the intended effect of the utterance remains unresolved.

(c) The impossibility of identifying the referent in real life: expletives that contain names of fictional characters, especially from literature, films, and mythology: *Cupla-te-ai cu Muma Pădurii în dosul șurii* (‘May you copulate with Muma Pădurii [lit. ‘mother of the forest’] behind the barn’; Muma Pădurii is a female character in Romanian mythology, a spirit of the forest that is usually depicted as an old and ugly woman and is claimed to be able to perform shapeshifting); *Fut pe Isaura* (‘Fuck Isaura’, based on the first name of the heroine in the

Brazilian soap opera *Escrava Isaura* ‘Slave Isaura’, which aired in Romania in the early 90s); *Fută-te Aladin (cu lampa lui fermecată)* (‘Aladdin fuck you (with his magic lamp)’, probably because of the character’s dishonest occupation); *Fută-te / Du-te-n pula lui Hector* (‘Hector fuck you’ / ‘Go in Hector’s dick’; with respect to the hero’s physical strength).

(d) The sociocultural impact of the original bearer of a certain anthroponym: imprecations that include the names of famous individuals from various fields:

- politics: *Fută-te Ana Pauker* (‘Ana Pauker fuck you’; Ana Pauker was one of the promoters of the establishment of the communist regime in Romania); *Fută-te Hitler* (‘Hitler fuck you’); *Fută-te Iliescu* (‘Iliescu fuck you’; Ion Iliescu is a Romanian politician, the first president after the fall of communism, but a former member of the party that governed the country during the totalitarian regime); *Fută-te Iorga* (‘Iorga fuck you’; Nicolae Iorga was a key figure in interwar Romanian culture and politics, whose views in this context were centre-right and anti-Semitic); *Fută-te Lenin* (‘Lenin fuck you’); *Fută-te Stalin* (‘Stalin fuck you’); *Fute-l-ai pe Ceaușescu* (‘May you fuck Ceaușescu’; Nicolae Ceaușescu was president of the Socialist Republic of Romania from 1967 until the demise of communism); *Fute-m-aș cu Petre Roman* (‘May I fuck Petre Roman’; Petre Roman is a Romanian politician, former prime minister in the period succeeding the Revolution of December 1989);

- film and television: *Fută-te Alain Delon* (‘Alain Delon fuck you’; apart from the reference to the famous French actor – but based on it –, the name *Alain Delon* can also be interpreted in a more restricted context: it is antiphrastically used as the nickname of a disagreeable man who is known in the community of residence by a jacket he wears, which is reminiscent of the French actor’s fashion style);

- music: *Trăzni-v-aș mămicile cu fulgeru’ de la Metallica* (‘May I smite your mommies with Metallica’s lightning’) (*aforisme.ro* 2007, a post by JohnCena);

- sport: *Să moară mă-ta călcată cu tractoru’ de Michael Schumacher* (‘May your mother die run over by a tractor driven by Michael Schumacher’) (*aforisme.ro* 2007, a post by futuva-n gura).

As the examples listed above show, the sociocultural impact is only rarely related to persons whose fame was established in the immediate present (for instance, we have yet to come across any expletives with the names of the current president of Romania or with the prime minister, although both are relatively controversial figures). On the contrary, the anthroponyms mentioned in the imprecations discussed pertain to people who gained fame in time.

(e) Belonging to transcendental reality (metareality): expletives that comprise names from the field of sacredness and religion: (*Futu-ți*) *Cristoșii (și biserica) mă-tii* (‘Fuck your mother’s Christs (and church)’), *Fută-te Cristos* (‘Christ fuck you’); (*Futu-ți*) *Dumnezeii mă-tii* (‘(Fuck) your mother’s Gods’), *Fută-te Dumnezeu* (‘God fuck you’); *Fută-te Dracu* (‘The Devil fuck you’); *Fută-te Noe* (‘Noah fuck you’); *Fută-te pula lui Adam* (‘Adam’s dick fuck you’); *Fută-te Sfântu Petru / Sâmpetru* (‘Saint Peter fuck you’); *Fută-te / În pula lui Zebedeu / Zevedeu* (‘Zebedee fuck you’ / ‘By Zebedee’s dick’; a biblical figure, Zebedee is the father of the apostles James and John); *Iștenu’ care te-o făcut* (‘By the God that created you’; from Hungarian *Isten* ‘God’). These expletives are only used in extreme circumstances, as locutors

believe them to be the most serious ones – alongside those whose referent is the mother / children of the expletive recipient – on the scale of moral and emotional values. However, imprecations containing the names of Noah, Adam, or Zebedee display a lower affective-ethical impact than those with the names of God and Christ.

Jay (2000: 197) highlights the old age of curse words that refer to sacredness, pointing out that their offensive nature endured throughout time. Moreover, at least as regards blasphemies that do not include religious names, Jay considers that the emotional impact of these curses has significantly diminished over the past decades: ‘Speakers are highly likely (+) to use profanities because profanity (e.g. *damn*) is less offensive than sexually explicit language (e.g. *cunt*) or aggressive speech (e.g. *fuck you*)’ (2000: 197). Likewise, it should be noted that, in the aforementioned examples, the verb *a fute* (‘to fuck’) is used figuratively (with the meaning ‘to destroy, to hurt, to inflict pain’).⁸

Conclusion

Used to verbalise certain feelings and attitudes, which are usually – but not exclusively – negative, expletives are, on the one hand, ‘normal because they obey semantic and syntactic rules’ (Jay 2000: 11) and, on the other, ‘unique because they provide an emotional intensity to speech that non-curse words cannot achieve. Curse words have so much power that they become words that, once learned, must be suppressed in formal contexts’ (Jay 2000: 11). Therefore, expletives pertain to the informal, colloquial register and, when they convey positive emotional values, they are markers of speakers’ belonging to a community (see also Wray 2002: 297).

Of all the types of expletives that exist in Romanian public space, the present paper only discussed those that contain anthroponyms, in view of explaining the peculiarities of the formation pattern of these expressive speech acts and the functions that the said anthroponyms fulfil on the discourse level. As it was highlighted, the contexts from which the expletives analysed were selected are affective-exclamative, which is why the semantic and morphosyntactic structure of the imprecations was explicit (characterised by the presence of a performative verb) or implicit (defined by the ellipsis of the verb). On the semantic-stylistic level, the anthroponyms found in expletives are related to referents that are famous within a micro- or macro-society. In the community in which the swear phrases are used, the names of the original referents are associated with certain well-established sociocultural values, borrowed from the name bearers. The connection between the entrenched features of these individual ‘models’ (see the explanation for *paragons* in Bergien 2013a: 21 and 2013b: 334) and the target allocutors of the expletives is ensured by the anthroponyms in question and

⁸ One can notice that even expletives that contain explicit sexual language are subjected to semantic bleaching. On the one hand, the offensive effect of expletives with sexual references is reduced as a result of their abusive employment, regardless of context (in this respect, see in Romanian *în / ce pula mea* ‘in / by my dick’, in English *my ass*, or in French *con, cu* – the semantic bleaching is more advanced in the case of the French examples). On the other hand, this led to their being used by men and women alike, determining an asexual genital destination (for instance, the Romanian phrase *ce / în pula mea* ‘what / by my dick’ focuses an interlocutor’s attention towards what is at times a utopian direction, as proven by the occurrences of this phrase with female speakers; see also Felecan 2012: 69).

indicated by means of an explicit process (the presence of a verb) or an inferential one (the co-text that includes the verb is recovered through the activation of certain cognitive processes). These cues steer the interpretation towards the semantic direction that corresponds to the context from which the expletive was selected (for instance, the swear phrase *Fută-te Iorga!* ‘Iorga fuck you!’ will not be related to Iorga’s quality as important cultural figure, but to his anti-Semitic attitude and, perhaps, his involvement in the demise of the Iron Guard). Thus, the allocutor is characterised from the locutor’s strictly subjective perspective: the former is considered to deserve the sanction from the party invoked, whereas the latter believes it is his / her duty to apply this sanction.

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