APPROACHES TO HATE SPEECH IN CYBERSPACE. A METADISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

Lavinia SUCIU, Muguras MOCOFAN
Politehnica University Timişoara, Romania

Abstract: The new communication technologies, which are in constant evolution, overwhelm the current communication interaction, from the enunciation level and the overlapping of interactive roles to the multi-modality of the message and the proliferation of forms of representation and signification. This is the context in which researchers' concerns focus not only on the changes in communication but also on the new trends in its evolution. At this level, we include the study of verbal and non-verbal behaviours, the ways of conceptualization and of alternative representation of content. From this perspective, the present paper focuses on analysing the results of a project aimed at creating an education campaign on intolerance in the cyberspace that was conducted by first year students at the master's degree specialization *Communication, public relations and digital media*. The articles reflect the students' attitude towards the phenomenon known as cyberbullying, they are targeted at young people and are transmitted in the digital environment. Our study proposes a metadiscursive analysis of the 47 papers, aiming at revealing the way in which students build and transmit a message about a serious problem that is currently taking place in the digital environment. The approach taken allowed us to identify certain particularities in the communication of the young people, and, as a result, some benchmarks can be drawn regarding the achievement of the desired effect in the communication targeted at the youth.

Keywords: hate speech; multi-modality; metadiscursive approach; markers; effect.

1. Introduction

The characterization of the present age as one centred around communication and information, that is profoundly and significantly marked by new technologies, has become axiomatic. The life of today's individual, be it professional or personal, gravitates around the up-to-the-minute technology. For a young woman or man of the moment, life without a phone, tablet or laptop becomes a difficult imagination exercise, and the life of parents and grandparents – deprived of the benefits of modern technology - is a difficult to understand curiosity. But the easy access to information, the speed of sending the message, the strengths that new communication technologies bring to our lives are counterbalanced by the emergence of negative phenomena in the virtual environment, whose real consequences are not only possible, but also augmented in range or gravity, precisely because of and by the particularities of this environment. These phenomena include the one known as *cyberbullying*, a manifestation of intolerance and a result of misunderstanding the freedom of expression. The amplification of the effect of this form of aggressive discourse is due to factors related to the transmission environment, especially the large audience and the immediate rating (through forms such as *likes, shares, retweets, "piling on"*).

Communication updates a variety of ways of representing content, based on code alternation and the emergence of artificialized languages, the rules of which, unlikely to

be determined due to the surprising pace of change, make the subject of many research studies. The new trends and directions of evolution of verbal and non-verbal behaviours in the individual and collective, societal and global spheres are the current points of interest, at different levels of knowledge.

Moreover, in the last period of time, the need to adapt the mode of transmission of information to the taste of the young generation (at least) in the multidimensionality of the message, sometimes praised, often contested, but empirically verified, has often been revealed. Therefore, one of the directions of the present research is meant to detect the directions of *"evolution"* of the language used by the young generation, so as to encourage them to read and to prepare in advance for their demands, expectations and concerns (Roșu 2013).

Thus, the present study is developed taking into account this tendency, with the aim of identifying the way in which the young people conceptualize a problem they are facing, and especially the way in which they express their position in relation to it, addressing their peers. Starting from a project that the students of the first year at the Master's degree program, in the specialization *Communication, Public Relations and Digital Media*, received as a task for the *Digital Media* discipline, we intend to spot in the today's youth discourse both constant and unusual elements in conceptualizing, expressing, choosing and combining the forms of representing content with regard to the hate speech used in the virtual environment. We believe that highlighting these aspects contributes both to the delineation of an up-to-date picture of how young people communicate to/with their peers, and to the identification of their concerns or of their horizon of expectation.

2. Analysis

2.1. Project description

The project that students of the first year of the interdisciplinary Master's degree program Communication, Public Relations and Digital Media had to accomplish was to prepare and present a proposal for a campaign to educate young people on the issue of hate speech, which then appeared and was transmitted online. The development of the project took place during the didactic activity at the Digital Media discipline, provided in the curriculum of the Master's degree program, in the second semester of the first year of study.

The task involved the accomplishment of four forms of communication, each with a different communication channel:

- article
- poster
- advertising spot
- radio news

Work patterns involved both teamwork (for the spot) and individual work (for article, poster, radio news). Our paper has as an object of study the collection of 47 articles written by students addressing different aspects of cyberspace intolerance. In figure 1 we present the articles topic.

It is important to note that these articles have been subject to validation on the part of the general public (as number of hits and/or comments), after their release in the

electronic environment since June 2018, while they could be accessed at the address *www.mediadigitala.ro*.
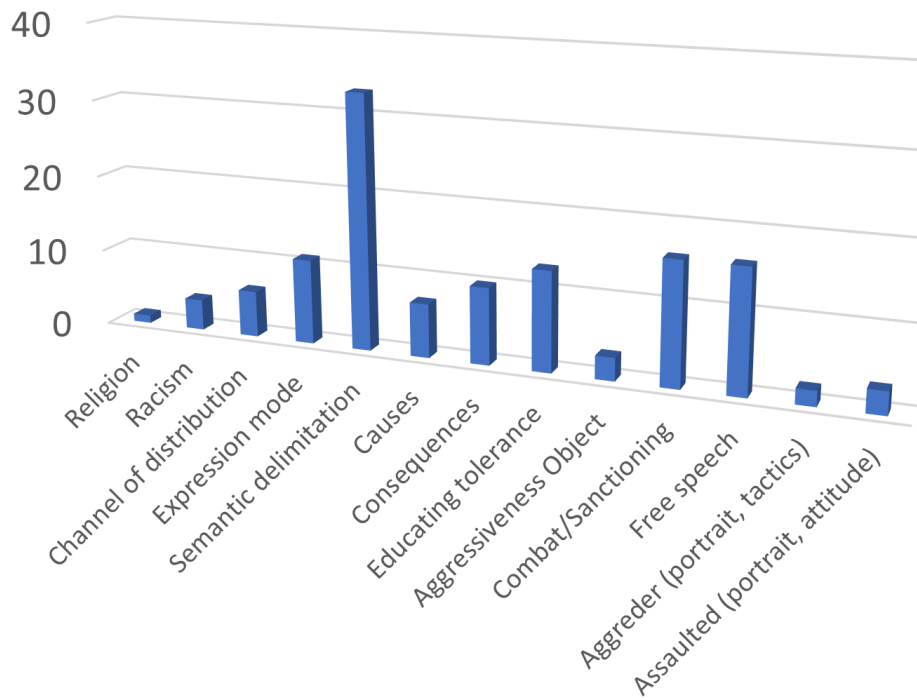

Figure 1. Topics of articles

2.2. Analysis grid

Since it was an interdisciplinary study program, we have proposed an interdisciplinary analysis of the project, focusing on the following aspects:

- Sources researched to gather information,
- Search engines used to obtain information,
- The way of defining / conceptualizing the "hate speech" phenomenon,
- The way of expressing the conceptualization.

In order to identify the manner in which student discourses on cyberspace intolerance were devised and written, we used a metadiscursive analysis grid based on Ken Hyland's model for the academic discourse (Hyland 2005, Mauranen 2001). The analysis grid was tailored to the specific objectives set for the task of discourses that are the subject of our study and is focused on the discovery of two large groups of markers: *textual* and *discursive-interactive* ones.
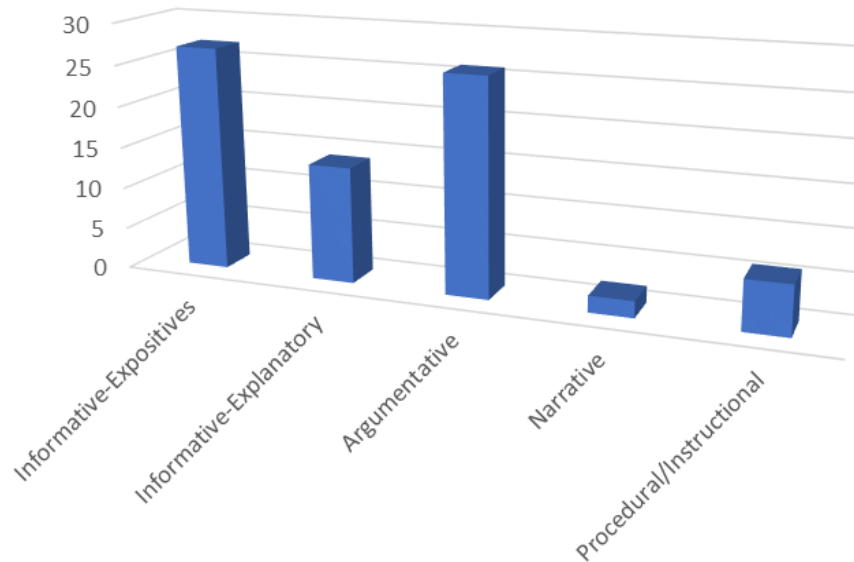
Figure 2. Steps markers

Textual markers capture the elements relevant to writing, involving textual particularities of the approach, organization of ideas, and drafting. The following categories and subcategories in the grid explain these markers:

- *Structure markers*
  - o logical connectors: *so, though, although, therefore*.
  - o introductory and conclusive structures: *In the following...; we remember that...; In conclusion; First; Finally, To begin; Thus; let us take it with the snow; let's make it clear.*
- *Code glosses*: *for example; which means; in other words; i.e.; like.*
- *Endophoric markers*: *Below; previously mentioned; next / following; in the following.*
- *Evidentials*: quotations; references in text; references to reports / statistics.
- *Discourse markers:*
  - o Informative-expository: figures, factual data, names.
  - o Informative-explanatory: explicitness, correspondence, comparisons, enumerations.
  - o Argumentative: affective lexis, definitions, testimonials, examples, intensity   markers.
  - o Narrative: action verbs, spatial and temporal landmarks (for some time, now), surprise elements, moral teaching (usually expressed in the form of persuasion).
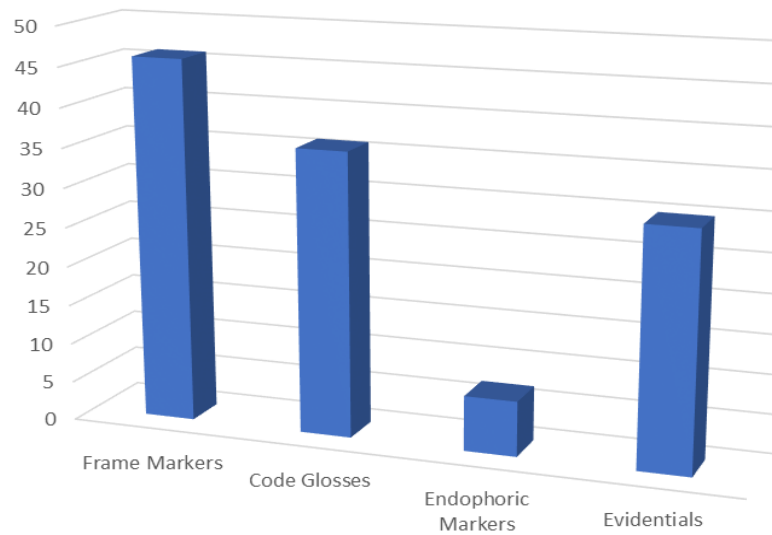 - o Procedural / instructive: recommendations, indications, set of stages / steps to go.

Figure 3. Structural markers

- *Markers of text organization / drafting*:
  - o Classical structure (tripartite): Three-part text construction - Introduction (definition of the term), Development of the subject (by amplifying an aspect that is considered significant) and Conclusion (expression of a personal opinion, a morality principle, an appeal).
  - o Particular structure: presentation of the subject in general / of an aspect related to the subject matter, absence of conclusion.
  - o Use of subtitles: highlighting the issues treated in relation to the subject.
  - o Paragraphs: division of the text into paragraphs.
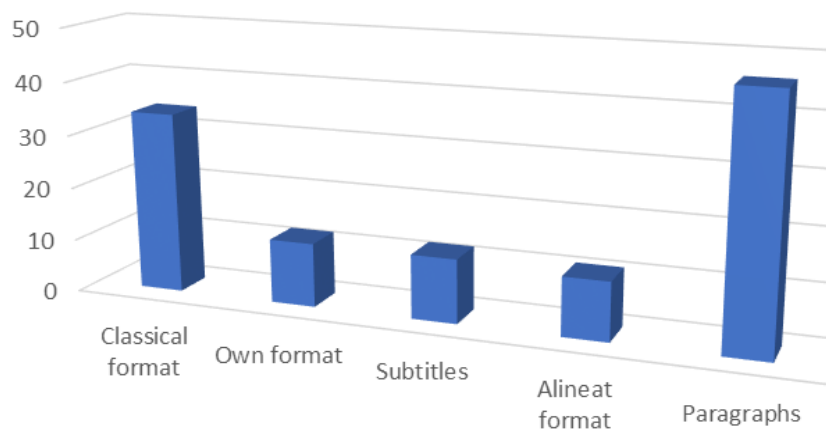 - o Use of indentation: marking of the paragraphs by indents.

Figure 4. Text organizing and structuring mode

17

In the category of **discursive-interactive markers** we included *interpersonal markers, interactivity markers, type of code used* to represent the content, *style* and *relevance indicators*.

Interpersonal markers reflect the extent of the sender's involvement in the discourse, how s/he relates to her/his own discourse and to the receiver, the relationship between the sender and the receiver through the discourse. Specifically, these markers are:

- markers of subjectivity (of person) (indicative and generic): *I / you / us (I would like to clarify, I say, we started to pursue, we all have the right)*
- attitudinal markers (marks of affectivity / involvement): *I support; Maybe; Of course; Needless to say; Probably; Obviously...*
- relational markers: the imperative mood *(Do not forget, hate is not an option! Do not take hate any further!)*; first person plural, *we*, denoting the sender-receiver association *(let's clarify, Depends on us,...)*
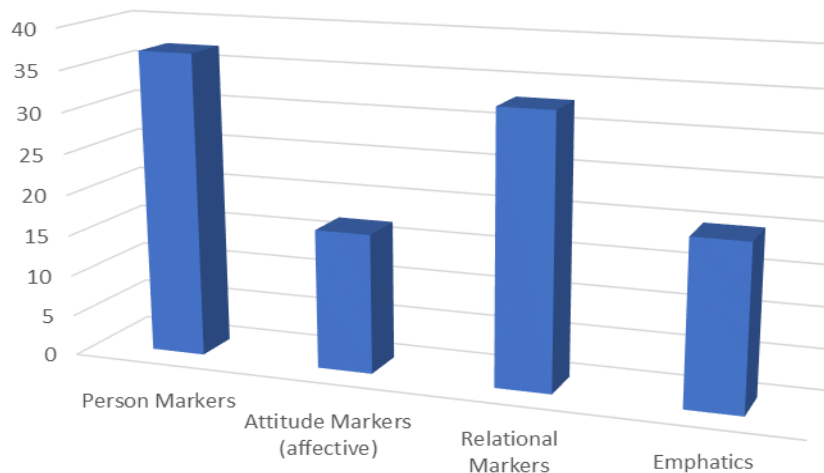- emphatic markers: *Actually; Moreover...; It is important to ...; Best of all; Of course; Certainly.*

Figure 5. Interpersonal markers

The type of code concerns the exclusive use of verbal language or the alternation of verbal and visual codes in the construction of the discourse. We note that, in the meaning of the visual code, we consider the dissociation between the image and the image of the text, the latter being rendered by the use to a certain type of font, by the size and colour of the font, the spacing and layout of the text, the use of the blank.

- verbal language
- image
- text image: using a different font; using red colour to mark references in text, concepts, ideas, and persuasion; marking subtitles with bold font and layout on a distinct line; capitalization and font size to underline the idea; Particular layout of the text in the page by positioning and blanks for highlighting.
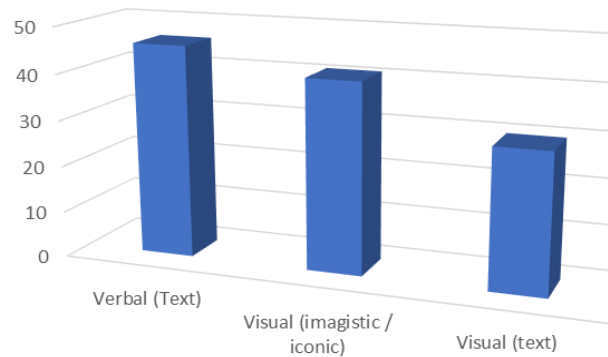
Figure 6. Types of code

Interactivity markers reveal the implicit / explicit presence of the receiver and her/his involvement in the discourse by the sender. They materialize in:

- rhetorical questions: *Is hate innate in humans? What do you teach your child?*
- dialogue elements: answer to an implicit question *(Yes ... yes, yes, it is legal to swear at our politicians)* or to an explicit one *(Why do we give birth to such discourses? It's simple!...)*. Explaining definitions or terms: direct address *(You are probably familiar, in case you were wondering)*, repetition / summary / paraphrase of a previous sequence *(As I said, the words do not matter!)*, real / rhetorical questions *(What is it to/ could be done?; What did your parents teach you?)*
- enjoining elements: encouragement, exhortation, call *(Let's say STOP, let's look at, let's help them)*
- elements of orality: ellipses that mark pauses in speech *(And then ...)*, lexis *(OK; here)*; pictographs as substitutes for non-verbal communication *(:)))*)*; paralanguage *(Is that cllllear?)*
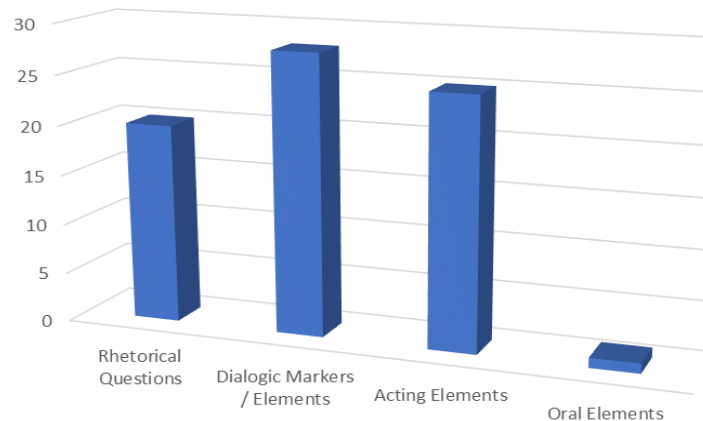

Figure 7. Interactivity markers

19

Style:
- Neutral / impersonal: impersonal verbs, passive voice, absence of singular and plural first person personal pronouns.
- Affective: language expressing feelings, emotions, experiences, presence of singular and plural first person personal pronouns, intensity markers.
- Gnomic: *recommendations, imperative mood, instructions, lexis reflecting the top position of the sender, real / rhetorical questions.*
- Injunctive / motivational: rhetorical questions, encouragement, persuasion, appeal.
- Familiar: Current language, non-specialized vocabulary.
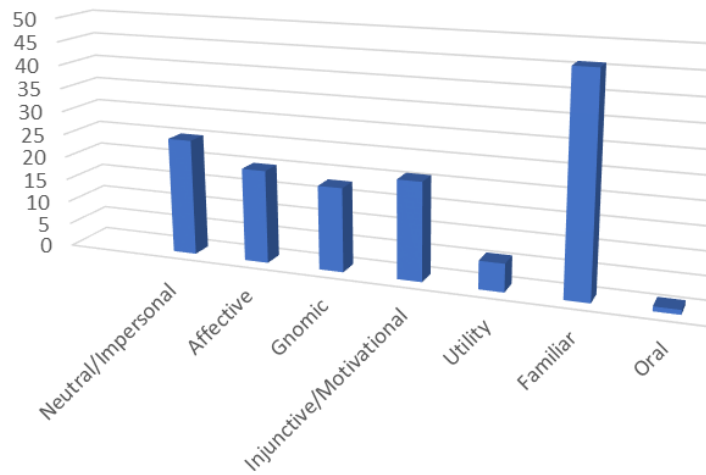- Oral: Interjections, three-dot ellipses, exclamations, interrogations, pictographs.

Figure 6. Articles style

Relevance markers quantify the receiver's position versus the discourse in the form of hits / comments.

2.3. Interpretation of results

It is important to note that, in the communication context specific to online discourses, involving the hyper-textual dimension of communication particular to the virtual space (Cornis-Pope & Woodlief 2002, Mucchielli 2010) evidentials (in the form of acknowledging the use of a source of information to complement / elucidate / develop the subject) have become endophoric markers. In this sense, their function is to provide the reader with content to reveal / clarify the intention of the sender. For illustrative purposes, we refer to the discourse in which the sender mentions a link whose content is a TV series with the purpose to support and consolidate the ideas exposed in the discourse. Therefore, the endophoric marker works as a type of argument. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JebwYGn5Z3E

Another remark relates to the choice of English language both for the title and for its use throughout the discourse. On the one hand, the choice is dictated by the environment where the verbal exchange takes place. Although some Internet concepts reveal a manifestation of the Babel tower type (Crystal in Chevereșan 2012), which allows for the updating and focusing the potential receivers' attention by simple posting, the virtual environment seems to be, however, the replica of the real environment from this point of view. English language, which governs real-world interconnections, ensures greater visibility in the virtual space.
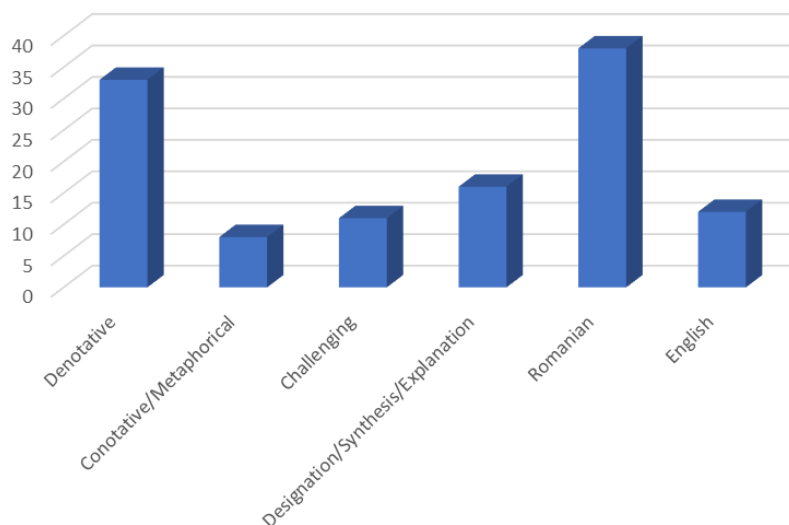

Figure 7. Meaning of the title

On the other hand, the explanation is relative to the communication function of the language, which, beyond the capacity to express ideas, thoughts, and feelings, offers the possibility of guiding the receiver in deciphering the intention with which the message is transmitted by the sender. We note that English is used in the title and / or in the development of the subject through text and image in particular in speeches built on an argumentative-motivational structure. The fact can find an answer taking into account the issue of terminological equivalence. Hate speech and cyberbullying, which are terms for the phenomenon of intolerance and online harassment, are English-language words and come into use as such. Both are made up by compounding - cyberbullying by agglutination, and hate speech by juxtaposition - which gives them two important features, especially for the digital environment: conciseness and strength. Keeping their meaning in the Romanian language, for cyberbullying involves paraphrase (mockery / intolerance / harassment in the digital environment), which considerably diminishes the argumentative force of the term. The translation of hate speech as "discursul urii" does not seem to cover the same semantic area, while "discursul intolerantei" loses impact. Therefore, the use of equivalent structures and annulment of terminological identity

would blur the effect estimated for the denomination of the category of this type of discourse.

3. Conclusion

The study led us to enunciate two conclusions: one referring to the analysed articles, namely the construction and expression particularities identified in the youth, and the second one on the phenomenon that makes the subject of the articles.

The treatment of articles based on the meta discursive analysis grid involved the inventory of two types of markers: textual and discursive-interactive, each of which including a set of relevant subcategories both for the organization of ideas and for their expression. Following the analysis, some aspects are worthy of being revealed.

From the content point of view (the aspect treated in the article), we found that in defining the phenomenon of intolerance and the way of expressing it as hate speech, the emphasis is on the distinction between *free expression* and *hate speech*. The fragility of the semantic boundary between the two notions, as a result of erroneous perception, becomes essential for the profound understanding of the phenomenon, with everything it implies (the severity of the consequences), and their delimitation becomes the starting point in the education of tolerance towards our fellow beings.

Despite the fact that free expression and combat are issues covered by an equal number of articles, according to the grid, understanding of the concept of free expression is a component of the education in the spirit of tolerance. The discourses centred on defining and explaining free expression are an integral part, in fact, of those who deal with the education of tolerance, which prioritizes this dimension of the subject in relation to the others. We believe that the articles reflect the position of young people about the problem of bulling: prevention of the phenomenon is more important than fighting it.

Numerous articles address the subject by reference to the societal context, although reference is made to events, films, harassment cases, etc. beyond the borders of the country, and in spite of some speeches that contain the markers of the general and the impersonal. In some articles, anchoring into Romanian society may be found at the explicit level (articles built on the narrative approach, where a story / an incident / experience is reported), in others, at the implicit level. The fact that only one article brings religion into question as cause of intolerance justifies implicit reference to the society we live in: in Romania, we are not confronted with conflict situations generated by religious beliefs.

As far as drafting is concerned, we signal the general incidence of the familiar style, whether it is neutral, subjective-emotional or motivational. In the main, articles retain the classical structure (introduction, development of the subject and conclusion); still, there are a few that update a particular structure (lack of a conclusion, for example). Most articles are built on paragraphs, but few use indentation.

Another conclusion generated by the study concerns intolerance. Known as the familiar term bulling, it has become a real problem that young people are currently facing. Taking a variety of forms, depending on the environment - real or virtual - but equally menacing and grave, the lack of permissiveness and respect for those around us generates authentic monsters, vampires of tranquillity, joy, lust for life, reconciliation with

oneself and with the others. Therefore, the discourse of any manifestation of intolerance must be countered by casting it aside and be a discourse with a positive content that should convey the joy of living in harmony with one's peers. The students' urge to tolerance and to learning it is based on the precept evoked by one of the analysed discourses: *"words only have power when we give them power"*.

References

1. Chevereșan, C. 2012. *Dialoguri în era E-Reader*, Iași: Institutul European.
2. Cornis-Pope, M. & Woodlief, A. 2002. "The Rereading/Rewriting Process: Theory and Collaborative, Online Pedagogy" In Marguerite Helmers (ed.), *Intertexts: Reading Pedagogy in College Writing Classrooms*. NY: Routledge, p. 153-172.
3. Hyland, K. 2005. Metadiscourse, available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/285591598_Metadiscourse [accessed January 2019]
4. Mauranen, A. 2001. "Reflexive academic talk: Observations from MICASE" In R. Simpson & J. Swales (Eds.), *Corpus linguistics in North America: Selections from the 1999 Symposium*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, pp. 165-178.
5. Mucchielli, A. 2010. "Abordarea comunicațională" In Ph. Cabin & J.-F. Dortier (coord.), *Comunicarea*. Iași: Editura Polirom, pp. 177-187.
6. Roșu, I. 2013. *De la traduction intralinguistique à la traduction interlinguistique. Étude de cas: le roman de Tristan et Yseult (premier chapitre)*. (Bachelor Thesis, Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara).