Abstract

This paper compares and analyzes mass media language in Bulgaria before and after the breakdown of the communist regime with the goal to reveal the effect of political setting, communist vs. democratic, on the form of public discourse in the media. The comparison reveals statistically significant differences in the types of grammatical constructions used in the communist and democratic media (active vs. passive), as well as differences in grammatical properties of nouns (animacy, concreteness, and properness) and verbs (tense and evidentiality). I propose that the observed differences are best explained within a sociocognitive model of context proposed by van Dijk (2008). From this perspective, linguistic characteristics of the democratic and communist discourse examined in the paper reflect speakers’ shared beliefs about the system of social meanings and fundamental principles of their respective societies, such as humanism vs. institutionalism, individualism vs. collectivism, and the differences in the perception of time.

Key words: Critical Discourse Analysis, mass media language, socio-semantics, Bulgarian media.

1. Introduction

The fundamental goal for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is to understand the nature of the relation between discourse and the socio-political context in which it originates (Fowler et al. 1979; Fairclough 1992; van Dijk 1993; Fairclough & Wodak 1997; Wodak & Chilton 2005). This study, building on previous work within the CDA paradigm, compares and analyzes mass media language in Bulgaria before and after the breakdown of the communist
regime with the goal to reveal the effect of political setting – communist vs. democratic – on the form of public discourse in the media.

After the breakdown of the communist regime in Eastern Europe, the mass media underwent a massive transformation from being controlled and subsidized by the state to being privately owned and operated (cf. Schlesinger 1995; Ognianova 1997; Raycheva 2003; Galasińska & Krzyżanowski 2009). The change in the type of ownership is often assumed to be responsible for the change in narrative strategies and content. For example, mass media discourse became more colloquial (cf. Kostomarov 1994 on Russian; Zambova 2001; Balabanova 2007: 64 on Bulgarian; Kronja 2008 on Serbian; Polyarush 2010 on Ukrainian). Colloquial elements make newspaper articles accessible to a wider population of readers. In the context of free market this helps to achieve greater readership, which is crucial to the newspapers’ financial stability, since their revenues are directly linked to circulation (Fairclough 1995; Albarran 2004). The colloquialization of media discourse in post-communist countries mimics the process in the Western media, whose “tendency to move increasingly in the direction of entertainment and to become more ‘marketized’” (Fairclough 1995: 10) has long been observed in the literature.

The importance of the economic factor and its effect on discourse is also emphasized in Chen’s (2004) comparative study of communist and democratic mass media in China. Chen argues that the differences in linguistic strategies employed by a democratic newspaper, the UK Times, and a communist newspaper, the China Daily, are due to their different economic models. As a basis for the comparison, Chen uses the distribution of comparators, grammatical devices that enrich narration, such as e.g. the modal could be. Modals allow for speculations and hence enrich the narrative (Labov 1972). Chen attributes a higher frequency of comparators in the Times as opposed to that in the China Daily to the commercial orientation of the former.
From these studies economic conditions emerge as a differentiating factor between communist and (post-communist) democratic discourse. However, it seems that the difference between the two cannot be reduced to the economic factor alone – communist and democratic discourses originate in two radically different political settings, which might have a non-trivial effect on language. Indeed, previous studies have shown that certain characteristics of communist discourse, such as e.g. high frequency of impersonal constructions, is a direct result of the communist ideology at work. Such constructions deemphasize the role of an individual society member and promote institutional control (cf. Hollander 1972 on Soviet Press; Galasiński & Jaworski 1997 on Polish; Manoliu-Manea 1989; Ilie 1998, 2005 on Romanian). Little, however, is known about how and to what extent the political change after the breakdown of the communist regime affected grammatical characteristics of texts, i.e. the micro level of discourse (Fairclough 1995). In order to address this question, I conduct a comparative socio-semantic study of mass media language in Bulgaria under the communist regime in 1980 and under a democratic government in 2005. The news reports were compared on such criteria as sentence structure, and grammatical properties of nouns (animacy, concreteness, properness) and verbs (tense and evidentiality). The analysis reveals systematic statistically significant differences between the texts from the two periods, which, I argue, should be explained as an effect of a broader socio-political context on language.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 is a background section on the Workers’ Cause and the Word, the newspapers from the communist and the democratic period, respectively, analyzed in this study. Sections 3 – 5 are case studies of how grammatical features are distributed in the communist and the democratic discourse. I specifically focus on (i) the mapping of thematic roles, (ii) nouns’ individuation, and (iii) tense and evidentiality. The case studies show that grammatical features in question are distributed
differently in the texts from the two periods. Section 6 argues that these differences cannot be attributed to marketization, and should be interpreted as the effect of the political change on language. I propose that the observed results are best explained within a sociocognitive model of context proposed by van Dijk (2008).

2. Comparative analysis: Methodology

In order to assess the scope of language change in mass media, the newspaper articles published under the communist regime in 1980 were compared to those published after the transition to democracy in 2005. The communist and the democratic periods are represented by the texts from Rabotničesko Delo (the Workers’ Cause), and Duma (the Word), respectively. The Workers’ Cause was the official newspaper of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Its function was to communicate the party’s official course in domestic politics and international relations (Balabanova 2007). With a circulation of about one million copies (Nikolchev 1997: 126), this published daily newspaper was one of the major sources of information in the communist Bulgaria. After the breakdown of the communist regime in Bulgaria in 1989, the Workers’ Cause was renamed to the Word. The Word became the official newspaper of the Bulgarian Socialist Party. Even though the Word’s circulation shrank significantly from 680,000 copies in 1990 (Nikolchev 1997) to 15,000 copies in 2005, it still remains one of the newspapers with the largest circulation (Ognianova 1997: 17) and one of the most popular national dailies (Raycheva 2003: 15).

Despite the fact that the Word has undergone massive transformations since 1989, it has retained some structural and stylistic characteristics of the Workers’ Cause. For example, the names of some sections (e.g. Social Politics) are still the same. Moreover, the Word remains politically more conservative, and the changes in the presentational style are less robust than in other newspapers. Thus if we find systematic linguistic differences between
the *Word* and the *Workers’ Cause*, they would constitute stronger evidence for the effect of the political change on language than if we had chosen to compare texts in the *Workers’ Cause* and the *Democracy*, the official newspaper of the democratic party. This methodological decision aims to address concerns about the lack of objectivity in the process of text selection (cf. Stubbs 1997; Wodak & Meyer 2009).

The choice of the two periods, 1980 and 2005, is deliberate and targets important political changes. In a 25-year period Bulgarian society underwent a massive transformation from a Soviet Union satellite to a western-oriented democratic state. In 2005 Bulgaria signed the European Union Treaty of Accession. Before 2005, the Bulgarian media was classified as *transitional* and thus qualitatively different from the mass media of the Western democratic societies (Ognianova 1997; Raycheva & Petev 2000, 2003).

Two sets of texts representative of the *Workers’ Cause* and the *Word* were assembled. All articles included in the corpus dealt with domestic news, and the majority of them were published in the section *Social Politics*, inherited by the *Word* from the *Workers’ Cause*. The choice of the articles was guided by the desire to create two thematically similar sets, while avoiding ideologically loaded materials such as editorials or political analyses. The texts in both sets address similar social issues such as public health, industrial news, social initiatives, and news from the parliament. Methodologically, this study is broader in scope than the previous analyses of public discourse in East-European countries. For comparison, Galasiński & Jaworski (1997) and Preoteasa (2002) analyze language of one particular document (the Black Book of Polish Censor and the essay of the Romanian intellectual Patapievici, respectively); Illie (1998), (2005) looks at discourse practices of one particular individual – Romanian dictator *Nicolae Ceauşescu*. 

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A total of 30 texts was analyzed (15 from each period). The average length of the articles is 225 words for the *Workers’ Cause*, and 205 words for the *Word*. The average number of sentences per text is 10 for the *Workers’ Cause* and 13 for the *Word*.

Before presenting the results of the case studies, I address some potential weaknesses of the methodology adopted here. One issue is related to the choice of sources. The data from two newspapers is hardly a representative sample in statistical terms and is best classified as a purposive sample (Riffe, Lacy & Frederick 1998). Although this undoubtedly weakens the generalizations I am aiming at, I believe that this design is methodologically sound. As mentioned earlier, the *Workers’ Cause* was the main newspaper in the country in terms of volume, popularity, and prestige. In this respect, it is not only the best example of communist discourse, but it can also be considered as setting a standard for the Bulgarian journalism during that period, an equivalent to the Soviet *Pravda*. Further, its reincarnation into the *Word* provides us with an opportunity to control for potential confounds related to political orientation and ownership. If the *Workers’ Cause* differs from the *Word* on the factors I hypothesize, one can safely expect that it will not differ less from the *Word*’s contemporaries.

A second weakness of the current study is related to the small sample size. Each sentence in the corpus is subjected to a complex analysis on different syntactic and semantic parameters. As a result, the total volume of analyzed texts is rather small when compared to other studies based on e.g. the comparison of word frequencies. Nevertheless, I would argue that a relatively small number of articles can still provide important insights. Since I have controlled for the length and the topic of the articles, I do not have any a priori reasons to expect any systematic differences between the texts chosen to represent the two time periods. From this perspective, a lower sample size is not necessarily a weakness, since statistical significance at such low statistical power would automatically suggest that the effect sizes are large enough and worth attention.
3. Case study 1: Agentivity and the mapping of semantic roles

Grammatical expression of agentivity is a powerful stylistic device that reflects political ideologies of the dominant groups (Fairclough 1992: 26; van Dijk 1995), and the distribution of power within the society, or hegemony, in Gramsci’s terms (Gramsci 1971). Van Dijk (1995: 262) observes that “semantic agency […] is a structural feature that may be used to express ideological positions by attributing specific kinds of involvement in, and responsibility for, good and bad action.” Thus, certain ethnic groups are often represented as active agents in “crime, drugs, and ‘riot’ reporting” (van Dijk 1995: 261). In contrast, the police is often represented as non-agentive in contexts involving violent actions and human rights violations.

One linguistic means to express agentivity is grammatical voice, active vs. passive. Consider how the choice of voice affects the reader’s conceptualization of the reported event (cf. Trew 1979; Fowler 1991). According to Fowler (1991: 78), the active construction in (1a), with the semantic agent police being realized as a grammatical subject, emphasizes the role of the police as a salient cause of the tragic event. In contrast, the agentless passive construction in (1b) elides the semantic agent thus remaining mute about the police’s involvement in the event.

(1) a. PC shot boy from 9 inches.
   b. Robber’s son, five, killed in his bed. (Fowler 1991: 72)

In what follows, I analyze agentivity as a general feature of public discourse detached from the description of specific social situations, such as e.g. mass protests.

3.1 Methodology

I define agentive constructions as sentences with a syntactic argument that bears the semantic role AGENT. A prototypical agent is characterized by such features as (i) volitional
involvement in the event or state; (ii) sentience (and/or perception); (iii) causing an event or change of state in another participant (cf. Dowty 1991: 572).

Each sentence in the corpus was classified as agentive or non-agentive on syntactic (voice) and on lexical semantic grounds. Lexically, intransitive verbs belong to two groups, unergative and unaccusative (Perlmutter 1978). Subjects of unergative verbs such as walk are semantically agents, while subjects of unaccusative verbs such as break are semantically patients. The classification yielded two groups of constructions: agentive and non-agentive. The agentive group included active transitive constructions (The boy broke the window),\(^1\) agentive passive constructions (The window was broken by the boy), and unergative sentences (The boy walked). Agentless passives (The window was broken) and unaccusative sentences (The window broke) were analyzed as non-agentive.

Several other methodological principles governed data classification. Agentless constructions that had no potential agentive counterparts, such as existential constructions (There are 500 guests) and constructions with the possessive ima ‘have’, were excluded (cf. Weiner & Labov 1983).\(^2\) Embedded sentences were not considered. This methodology allowed us to select 129 sentences from the Word (out of 162), and 121 sentences from the Workers’ Cause (out of 159).

3.2 Results
Table 1 shows the distribution of agentive and non-agentive constructions in the Word and in the Workers’ Cause. The differences are significant, \(\chi^2 (1) = 17.9, p < .05\).

<Insert Table 1 here>

In order to check whether the observed distribution was due to the effect of the syntactic factor (voice) or the lexical semantic factor (unergativity/unaccusativity), additional
statistical analyses were performed. Table 2 compares active transitive sentences to agentless passive constructions. The differences are significant, $\chi^2 (1) = 10, p < .05$.3

The differences in the distribution of unergative and unaccusative constructions, as shown in Table 3, are not statistically significant, $\chi^2 (1) = 2.6, p > .05$. This might be due to the size of the sample. In a larger corpus these differences could become significant.

3.3 Discussion

The data in Tables 2 and 3 show a general preference for agentless constructions in the Workers’ Cause. This tendency is unusual from the perspective of both the theoretical literature on agentivity and previous discourse studies. Active voice as opposed to passive voice has an unmarked status cross-linguistically (Greenberg 1966: 45; Shibatani 1988: 3). It is acquired early by children (Givón 1995: 45), and is more frequent in discourse (cf. Givón 1995; Primus 1999). In Bulgarian, too, active voice is the default choice (Tilkov et al. 1983: 247-248). While the high frequency of agentless constructions is unexpected from the theoretical perspective, I show below that these constructions achieve specific semantic effects, characteristic of totalitarian discourse more generally: (i) they systematically mask the identity of the agent in a position of power, and (ii) they deagentivize prototypical human agents.

In the Workers’ Cause, unlike in the Word, agents are systematically omitted in the contexts describing the issuance of orders, inspections, the distribution of goods, and other activities performed by government officials. Thus, agentivity is expressed differently in thematically similar sentences (2) and (3), from the Word and the Workers’ Cause, respectively. Both are taken from articles that address malfunction of public services, and the
government’s attempt to resolve the problem. The article from the *Word* describes the problems in the public health care system, and specifically focuses on cases when patients were denied medical treatments by city hospitals. The *Workers’ Cause* article reports on poor road maintenance and problems with public transportation during the winter.

(2) **Ministārāt na zdraveopazvaneto Slavčo Bogoev razporedi včera spešni proverki na Pārva i Peta gradska bolnica v Sofija. (Word, text 14)**

‘The Minister of Health Care Slavčo Bogoev ordered yesterday investigations of the 1st and the 5th city hospitals in Sofia.’

(3) **Za preodoljavane na vāzniknalite zatrudnenija v eksplotacionnata dejnost na transporta bjaxon sajaotvetni ukazanija. (Workers’ Cause, text 9)**

‘The orders were given to resolve the problems related to the function of the transport system.’

In (2), the active transitive construction has a clearly identified agent, the Minister of Health Care. In contrast, (3) is an agentless passive construction. The semantic effect of this choice is that the identity of the person issuing the orders is not disclosed. The analysis reveals that systematic elision of agents in power positions is a hallmark of news reports in the *Workers’ Cause*. This linguistic tendency ultimately creates an illusion that the state is controlled by a powerful, omnipotent, non-human apparatus (cf. Ilie’s 1998 notion of Super-Agent). As Galasiński & Jaworski observe, “this is the language of anonymous but ever-present authority” (1997: 347).

Another semantic effect of agentless constructions is that they represent prototypical human agents as non-volitional. The analysis shows that events with the same semantic structures are represented differently in the *Workers’ Cause* and in the *Word*. For example, (4) and (5) make reference to the same event participants, people (*truženici* ‘workers’ and *žiteli* ‘residents’) and inanimate entities (*tovarni avtomobili* ‘trucks’). However, the two examples differ with respect to how semantic roles are assigned. In (4), from the *Word*, *žiteli* ‘residents’ is a subject of an active sentence and is semantically an agent. Actions of the residents affect inanimate entities, the trucks. In (5), from the *Workers’ Cause*, the assignment of semantic
roles is reversed: the group of *truženici* ‘workers’ is semantically a patient by virtue of being a subject of a passive sentence. The semantic effect of this construction is that workers are denied any involvement in the process of transportation; they are passive non-volitional participants in this event.

(4) *V sâbota 30 žiteli na Suhdol preperečiha pâjja na tovarnite avtomobili, izvzašti otpadâci kâm depoto za otpadâci.* (Word, text 2)
‘On Saturday, 30 residents from Suhdol blocked the trucks, which were transporting waste to the garbage facility.’

(5) *Dosega selskostopanske truženici v povečeto slučai se prevozva do obektite na APK s otkriti platformi na tovarni avtomobili […].* (Workers’ Cause, text 2)
‘Until recently, farmers were transported to the workplace (APK) on truck’s open platforms.’

The suppression of agentivity in communist discourse is not class-specific: it does not target a particular ethnic or professional group but people more generally. Similarly to blue-collar workers (5), white-collar workers, scientists and lawyers, are systematically represented in passive roles. In (6), for example, *naučni rabotnici* ‘scientific workers’ and *proferosi* ‘professors’ are semantically patients by virtue of being subjects of a passive sentence.

(6) *Za lektori se kanjat juristi ot Burgas i Sofija, naučni rabotnici, profesori ot Juridičestkija fakultet na Sofijskija universitet Kliment Oxridski.* (Workers’ Cause, text 15)
‘Lawyers from Burgas and Sofia, scientific workers, professors from the School of Law at the Sofia University Kliment Oxridski are being invited as lecturers.’

In the *Word* these professional groups are portrayed differently:

(7) *Samijat professor zajavi, če ne e obiden na nikogo.* (Word, text 3)
‘Professor stated that he is not offended with anyone.’

Not only do professors, lawyers and other white-collar workers have prototypical agentive attributes in the democratic discourse, they most often appear as subjects of verbs that presuppose independent opinion and the ability to act at free will, such as ‘think’, ‘suppose’, and ‘propose’.
The distribution of agentive and non-agentive constructions in communist and
democratic discourse finds a natural explanation within the theory of semantic roles.
According to a recent analysis in Davis & Koenig (2000: 73), “the entailments characteristic
of the [AGENT] attribute might […] reduce to a general entailment roughly paraphrasable as
‘has control over the unfolding of the situation’.” The idea that individuals can have control
over the course of events was incompatible with the communist ideology, hence the
preference for non-agentive constructions in the communist discourse (cf. Galasiński &
Jaworski 1997; Ilie 1998). The newspaper articles in the Word show a high number of
agentive constructions and thus present a radical departure from the communist discourse in
the Workers’ Cause. Givón (1995: 45) states that “the prototypical pragmatically-transitive
active voice in connected discourse, with the agent occupying the subject/topic grammatical
role reflects the anthropocentric orientation of human culture and human discourse”. Based
on this observation, I argue that the preference for agentive constructions in the Word reflects
the shift in the system of social meanings, conditioned by the transition from communism to
democracy.

4. Case study 2: Lexical properties of subject nouns and nouns’ individuation

Previous studies of reference in discourse have shown that linguistic choices, i.e. Gorbachev
vs. Gorby (Fowler 1991), apart from reflecting the author’s attitude toward the referent
(Simpson 1993; Widdowson 1995), can also reveal socially-conditioned biases towards
certain groups, including sexism, e.g. reference to women as blonds (cf. Wodak 1997),
exenophobia, e.g. Turk, 16, gets six years for murder (cf. van Dijk 1988: 191), and racism, e.g.
black thugs (cf. van Dijk 1991; Cottle 1999; Matheson 2005). More generally, by studying
linguistic means by which social agents are represented, we can get a better understanding of
the effect of underlying socio-political factors on language (van Leeuwen 1996). In what
follows, I compare referential strategies of communist and post-communist discourses focusing on the notion of *individuation* of the referent, i.e. “the degree to which the participant is characterized as a distinct entity or individual in the narrated event” (Timberlake 1975: 124).

Linguistically, individuation depends on semantic features of the noun, i.e. whether it is animate or inanimate, concrete or abstract, proper name or common name, etc. (Timberlake 1975: 134). Following the methodology in Hopper & Thompson (1980), I compared nouns based on their *index of individuation*. The index of individuation was calculated as follows: for each lexical feature with a high degree of individuation (animate, concrete, proper), the noun was assigned 1 point, and for each lexical feature with a low degree of individuation (inanimate, abstract, common), it was assigned 0 points. Thus an animate, concrete, and proper noun such as *Takov* (a surname) scores 3 points, while *Kneža* (a town in Bulgaria), receives 2 points (for concreteness and properness). If our discourse consisted of these two tokens only, then the index of individuation of such a discourse would be 2.5, that is, the sum divided by the number of tokens.4

4.1 Methodology

Only subjects of the matrix clauses were considered. Subjects are pragmatically more salient, or topical, than arguments in direct and indirect object positions (Givón 1995); they reflect thematic orientation of discourse. As in the previous corpus studies, pronominal subjects were classified as common nouns (Dahl & Fraurud 1996; Fraurud 1996), and, depending on their referent, as concrete/abstract or animate/inanimate. The previous context was taken into consideration, since, as shown in Dahl (2008), the same noun can be concrete or abstract depending on the nature of the discourse. Complex subjects consisting of a proper name preceded by a modifier referring to the social function of the referent, such as *CEO Christo*...
Lačev (Word, text 8), were classified as proper names. Subjects of adjectival and nominal constructions, such as The results are impressive, were included. This methodology yielded a higher number of tokens compared to case study 1. The total number of subjects was 146 for the Workers’ Cause and 146 for the Word.

4.2 Results

The distribution of animate and inanimate nouns is shown in Table 4. The differences are statistically significant, \( \chi^2 (1) = 19.7, \ p < .05 \).

<Insert Table 4 here>

One might argue that the higher frequency of animate subjects in post-communist discourse is due to the high frequency of active transitive constructions in the Word. In such constructions subjects are semantically agents, and agents are usually animate. In order to control for this factor, I compared animacy of transitive subjects only, thus excluding unaccusative, passive, and unergative constructions.\(^5\) The differences are statistically significant, \( \chi^2 (1) = 5.2, \ p < .05 \). Thus, animacy is not contingent on agentivity.

<Insert Table 5 here>

The differences in the distribution of proper and common nouns, presented in Table 6, are statistically significant, \( \chi^2 (1) = 15.3, \ p < .05 \).

<Insert Table 6 here>

The data in Table 7 show the distribution of concrete and abstract nouns. The differences are significant, \( \chi^2 (1) = 5.9, \ p < .05 \).

<Insert Table 7 here>

Table 8 shows the distribution of animate, concrete, and proper nouns, and the index of individuation for each period. The index of individuation (the last column), was calculated
as the sum of points from animate, concrete, and proper tokens was divided by the total number of tokens for that period. The analysis of the distribution of animate, concrete, and proper names in the two types of discourse reveals that the differences are statistically significant, as shown by a t-test, $t(146) = 5.32, p < 0.5$.

4.3 Discussion

In what follows, I first consider each semantic feature, animacy, concreteness, and properness, individually and explain why they are distributed differently in the Workers’ Cause and in the Word. I conclude the section with a general discussion of individuation.

4.3.1 Animacy

Subjects are usually expressed by animate nouns (Comrie 1977, cited in Hopper & Thomason 1980: 290; Van Vallin & La Polla 1997; Dahl 2008: 135). Previous corpus studies confirm this generalization by showing that cross-linguistically animate subjects have higher frequency than inanimate subjects (e.g. Dahl & Fraurud 1996 on Dutch; Dahl 2000; Øvrelid 2004 on Norwegian). This generalization holds for the texts published in the Word: subjects usually have animate referents and they are engaged in prototypically human activities, as in (8).

(8) Kmetăt samokritično si prizna, če obštinata ne se e spravila säs zatvarjaneto na depoto za otpadáci. (Word, text 2)
‘The Mayor self-critically acknowledged that the municipality didn’t properly manage the closure of the garbage facility.’

The sentence in (8) also exemplifies the shift in the manner in which the government and its officials are represented: they can make errors and are capable of self-criticism.

News reports in the Workers’ Cause, unlike in the Word, favor inanimate subjects (cf. Tables 4 and 5). This unusual referential strategy can be explained by the fact that communist discourse is inherently non human-oriented. The most frequent event participants are not
people but various institutional units, such as komitet ‘committee’, organi ‘organs’, bureo ‘bureau’, etc. Moreover, these institutional units take upon functions usually performed by people – they ‘take care’, ‘express satisfaction’ and ‘oblige’, as in (9).

(9) Komitetăt za dăržaven i naroden kontrol zadălţi okrăţnite komiteti za dăržaven i naroden kontrol da izvăršat proverki. (Workers’ cause, text 9)
‘The Committee for the state and peoples’ control obliged the local committees for the state and peoples’ control to conduct inspections.’

Discourse with non-human agents in the subject position constructs an image of a society in which committees, organizations, and bureaus control all aspects of life. The people’s involvement as a group, let alone as individuals, is minimal. The tendency to use inanimate nouns is a referential strategy conditioned by the institutional orientation of the communist society.

4.3.2 Proper Names

In light of the discussion in the previous section, it is not surprising that in the communist discourse event participants are usually referred to by nouns denoting their social functions, such as e.g., delegate, rather than by their proper names (cf. van Leeuwen’s 1996 notion of functionalization). Proper names in the Workers’ Cause are obligatory preceded by a noun phrase indicating the person’s functional role, as in (10):

(10) predsedateljat na Nacionalnija klub na mlada hudoţestveno-tvorčeska inteligencija Ivan Slavkov [...] (Workers’ Cause, text 10)
‘the chairman of the National club of young artistic and creative intelligentsia Ivan Slavkov’

The opposite tendency is observed in the Word. First, proper names can be used without modifiers referring to social functions, as (11) shows.

‘On Thursday afternoon, C.V. Varkov, V. Nikolov and A. Jordanov try to enter the zoo.’

Second, unlike articles in the Workers’ Cause, the Word’s articles commonly use nicknames.

In (12), the Chairman of the Parliament, Ognjan Gerdžikov, is referred to by the nickname
Mečo ‘Little Bear’, which makes a humorous reference to the children poetry book written by Gerdžikov several decades ago, ‘The story with the Little Bear, the Ducks, and the Fox – the story that will astonish you’.

(12) Mečo se vrăšta u doma. (Word, text 3)
‘The Little Bear returns home.’

The fact that nicknames are routinely used in the democratic press to refer to high profile politicians signals a major change in referential strategies. An anonymous reviewer pointed out that this shift can be attributed to the growing mediatization, tabloidization and personalization of politics. However, while these processes can undoubtedly explain the tendency to use proper names in political news, including nicknames, these processes alone cannot account for the higher frequency of proper names more generally, especially in reports about other social domains, as in (11). Form this perspective, a more comprehensive explanation is that the change in referential strategies, observed across different news genre in post-communist discourse, is motivated by the shift from an institutionalized political system to a system where individual members are given more prominence.

4.3.3 Concreteness

Even though high percentage of abstract nouns is expected in news reports (van Dijk 1988: 10), the ratio of abstract to concrete nouns is significantly higher in the communist discourse. One factor responsible for the observed differences is that the communist discourse in the Workers’ Cause has a greater number of derived nominals or nominalizations, such as *izpălnenie* ‘fulfillment’ (from ‘fulfill’), as in (13). Derived nominals are often abstract. Articles from the Word, on the other hand, use less nominalizations, often showing a preference for verbal constructions such as ‘X fulfills Y’, as in (14).

(13) *Izpălnenieto na zadačite ot Mežduvedomstvenija sāvet e doprineslo za aktiviziraneto na centralnite dāržavni organi.* (Workers’ Cause, text 8)
‘The fulfillment of the tasks by the inter-departmental union contributed to the activation of the central organs of the state.’
The higher frequency of derived nominals in the *Workers’ Cause* can be explained by their pragmatic effect: similar to passives, derived nominals allow for the demotion or omission of event participants (cf. ‘the team accomplished good results’ with the agent in the subject position vs. the corresponding nominalization ‘the accomplishment of good results’ where the agent is not expressed). Fairclough (1995: 112) observes that “a lot of nominalizations in a text [...] make it very abstract and distant from concrete events and situations” (see also Hodge & Kress 1979). Such a distancing strategy is a common feature of totalitarian discourses (cf. Ilie 1998).

### 4.4 Individuation: the collective effect of animacy, concreteness, and properness

The analysis presented in this section reveals systematic semantic differences between subject nouns in communist and post-communist discourse with respect to animacy, concreteness, and properness. Considered together, these lexical features constitute index of individuation, an objective measure that allows us to compare referential strategies of communist and democratic discourse at a more abstract level. The analysis shows that the articles from the *Word* have a higher index of individuation, compared to that in the *Workers’ Clause* (Table 8). This means that referents in the *Word*’s articles are more often represented as independent entities, while those in the *Workers’ Clause* are more often referred to as members of a group.

How do these results relate to a broader socio-political context? One possible explanation is that index of individuation reflects the society’s position on the individualism-collectivism scale (cf. Hofstede 1980). While Bulgaria was not included in Hofstede’s (1980) cross-cultural study, the Bulgarian society under the communist regime was inherently...
collectivist (Kulkarni et al. 2010). This trend appears to be persistent even after the breakdown of the communist regime, as experimental studies have shown (cf. Gerganov et al. 1996 on in-group comparison; Veenhoven 1999, Routamaa 2009 on multi-cultural comparisons). However, while overall Bulgarians still shows collective tendencies, this trend might be changing, as more recent studies suggest. Thus, a fine-grained comparative study by Kulkarni et al. (2010) shows that on some parameters Bulgarians do show strong individualistic traits. For example, the study found that on the competitiveness and supremacy of individual interest parameters Bulgarians show more individualistic tendencies compared to e.g. Ireland and the U.S., traditionally classified as individualistic cultures (Hofstede 1980). Moreover, Kulkarni et al. (2010) didn’t find any statistically significant differences between e.g. Bulgaria, Ireland, Israel, and the United State on individual welfare and self-reliance: “across all the samples, the participants indicated that they were self-reliant and tended to emphasize individual welfare over group welfare” (Kulkarni et al. 2010: 100). These findings suggest that individualistic values gradually become more important in Bulgarian society, which increasingly moves away from its collectivist past. The Survey of the countries of the former Eastern bloc conducted by the Pew Research Center (Horowitz 2010) reached the same conclusion. The survey found that the post-communist generation, including in Bulgaria, shows more individualistic trends compared to older generations.

The rise of individualism in traditionally collectivist East European cultures can be attributed to the change in a broader socio-political context. The totalitarian communist regime inhibited individualistic values (Marková 1997: 12). Specifically, “the state took responsibility for everything: full employment, free education, free health care, cheap housing, even the moral posture and ideological rectitude of all citizens” (Reykowski & Smolenska 1993: 91). The transition to democracy, on the other hand, allowed for political and economic freedom, but it also placed more responsibility on the individual, thus
promoting individualistic tendencies in inherently collectivist cultures, including in Bulgaria. Under the assumption that discourse represents and constructs society (e.g. Wodak 1996), it is then not surprising that referents in post-communist discourse show a higher level of individuation compared to that in the communist discourse.

5. Case study 3: Grammatical properties of verbs: tense and evidentiality

5.1 Tense

Tense is one of the central grammatical elements of discourse, and its distribution can often reveal the effect of language-external factors on public discourse (Wodak & Meyer 2009).

5.1.1 Methodology

Main clause verbs, including auxiliary verbs in copular constructions, as in *The results are good*, were classified as present, past or future based on their morphological properties. Tenses in relative clauses and in subordinated clauses were not considered.

5.1.2 Results

Table 9 shows the distribution of tense in the two types of discourse. The differences are statistically significant, as shown by a chi-square test, \( \chi^2 (2) = 33.61, p < .05 \).

<Insert Table 9 here>

5.1.3 Discussion: Tense

The news report genre is generally characterized by a higher frequency of past tense verbs (Patterson 1988: 60). This observation holds for the articles in the *Word* but not in the *Workers’ Cause*, where the present tense is the most frequent form (Table 9).

The analysis shows that present tense in the *Workers’ Cause* is primarily used to describe ongoing or habitual activities performed by working class people in factories and collective farms:
Sega mexanizatorite sa nositeli na texničeskiia progres. Te prilagat naj-novite, visokoproizvoditelnite texnologii. (Workers’ Cause, text 10)

‘Now mechanics are the bearers of the technological progress. They implement the newest highly productive technologies.’

The temporal orientation in this example is conveyed not only by means of the present tense, but also by the temporal adverb sega ‘now’. The focus on the present can be explained by a combination of factors. First, such a now-centered discourse satisfies the main principles of socialist realism, the dominant framework for artistic representation in the communist society. As with art works, the subject matter of newspaper articles had to be typical, hence the depiction of factory workers and farmers, and realistic, i.e. reflecting objects as they are (Hollander 1972). These two principles might be responsible for why the now-oriented discourse becomes a norm in communist newspapers – nothing is more realistic than the present. The second explanation has to do with the evolutionary stage of communism in the 1980s. Despite the fact that communism as a movement is inherently future-oriented (cf. Deneen 2009), for communists in the 1980s it was important to focus on what is currently being done to facilitate the transition to ‘the bright future’ (Raychev 2000b; cf. also Raychev 2000a).

The now-orientation of the communist discourse in the 1980s promoted the usage of the present tense in cases where it is not supported by the lexical content of the verb, as in (16). The sentence uses present tense verb udvojava se ‘doubles’ to refer to the increase of the production rate. Yet, because the process is still ongoing, as the present tense suggests, and it is not clear what the final outcome will be.

Sled obnovlenieto na moštnostite, za koeto sa vloženi 10 500 000 leva, himičeskoto proizvodstvo se udvojava. (Workers’ Cause, text 3)

‘After the renovation of capacities, in which 10,500,000 levs were invested, chemical production is being doubled.’
This discussion shows that the preference for the present tense, motivated by the thematic orientation of the communist discourse, promoted its usage elsewhere, even in the contexts that do not support present tense on lexical semantic grounds.

5.2 Evidentiality

Evidentiality is traditionally defined as a grammatical category that marks the source of information, where the latter subsumes direct perception, inference or report (cf. Aikhenvald 2004). The source of information directly affects information reliability. Thus, hearsay information is generally less reliable than direct perception of the event. Therefore, evidentials can often be used to express a variety of social meanings beyond the information source. In Bulgarian, evidential forms express the speaker’s attitude towards the information she reports (Aronson 1967; Friedman 2004; Smirnova 2013; cf. also Babel 2009 on Bolivian Spanish). In what follows, I analyze the distribution of evidentials in the Workers’ Cause and the Word and explain what social factors condition the usage of evidentiality in public discourse.

5.2.1 Methodology

Bulgarian has a designated morphological paradigm that expresses evidential meaning (Tilkov et al. 1983; Scatton 1993; Smirnova 2013). Thus, for each form in the indicative paradigm, there is a corresponding form in the evidential paradigm. Based on their morphology, verbs were classified as evidential or indicative/non-evidential (cf. non-evidential napisa ‘he wrote’ vs. evidential napisa-l ‘I heard/inferred that he wrote’). While evidential forms in Bulgarian are potentially ambiguous between a reportative and an inferential evidential interpretation, i.e. ‘I heard’ vs. ‘I inferred’ (Izvorski 1997; Comrie 1976: 109; Dahl 1985: 150-152), the ambiguity is resolved by context. In the texts analyzed all
evidential forms expressed reportative evidential meaning, indicating that the speaker’s source of information was hearsay.

5.2.2 Results

Table 10 shows the differences in the distribution of evidential forms in the *Word* and in the *Workers’ Cause*. The differences are significant, $\chi^2 (1) = 23.77, p < .05$.

<Insert Table 10 here>

5.2.3 Discussion: Evidentiality

Despite the fact that evidentiality is a vital component of the Bulgarian language, no evidential forms are found in the *Workers’ Cause*. They are, however, quite common in the texts from the *Word*. Out of 15 texts analyzed, 6 had matrix verbs in the evidential form (EV). The analysis shows that evidential forms are commonly used to present dynamic events that the author did not witnessed directly. (17), for example, is a passage from the article with an engaging headline *Mečkite v zooparka speli nad kanabis* ‘Reportedly, bears in the zoo sleep on marijuana’. The article is about three zoo workers, who used their office in the Bear section as a storage area for marijuana. The passage below describes how the security guards arrested the offenders.

(17) *Kovačev izvikal šefa na oxranitelnata grupa Simeon Xandžiev, s kajto se otpravili da izvršavat proverka v sektor “Mečki”. Opitali da proverjat i staja, kojto se izpolzva za počivka ot gledačite na mečki, no tja bila zaključena. Sled oko polovin čas i zaplaxi če e izvikana policijam trimata opitali da napusnat stajata na mečkarite. Služitelite na “Egida” obače zabiljazali če jaketata im sa silno izduti i gi nakarali da gi sablekat. Na zemjata padnali najlonovi paketi s trevista zelena masa, napodobjavašta narkotično veštestvo. (Word, text 11)*

‘Kovačev called-EV the chef of the security group Simeon Xandžiev, with whom they set off-EV to check section “Bears”. They tried-EV to check the room, which is used for rest by the maintenance personal, but it was-EV locked. In half an hour, after the guards issued the warning that the police has been called, the three men tried-EV to leave the room. However, the security guards from “Egida” noticed-EV that their jackets were inflated, and forced-EV them to take the jackets off. Packages with a green substance, which looked like the drug, fell-EV on the ground.’

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The evidential forms are also used to report indirect speech, as in (18). (18) is from the article about negotiations between the Sofia Mayor Stefan Sofijanski and representatives of the Suhdol community, who protested the disposal of Sofia’s waste in the garbage facility located near the village.

(18) Sofijanski komentira, če v [smetišteto] bili vloženi dosta pari, a Suxdol bil edinstveno selište do Sofia, koeto ima izgradena kanalizacija?! (Word, text 2)

‘Sofijanski commented that a lot of money was invested-\(\text{EV}\) in the garbage facility, and Suxdol, apparently, is\(\text{EV}\) the only village near Sofia with a sewage system?!’

The function of the evidential in (18) is not simply to express information source. Semantically, the usage of the evidential is redundant, since the verb komentira ‘commented’ already indicates that the source of information is a report. The choice of the evidential form in this context – the indicative can also be used to report indirect speech – achieves an important pragmatic effect: the evidential conveys the author’s disagreement with what the Mayor has said (note also the exclamation at the end of the sentence). Thus, in (18), the evidential expresses irony and sarcasm (cf. Friedman 1982; Friedman 2004). Needless to say, the expression of the journalist’s own attitude was not a possibility in the communist discourse.

I would like to argue that the lack of evidential forms in the communist discourse is due to their pragmatic functions. Specifically, reportative evidential forms in Bulgarian, unlike indicative forms, do not commit the speaker to the belief that the information she reports is true (Smirnova 2013). Thus, pragmatically, evidential forms convey psychological distance, i.e. they allow the author to distance herself from the information she presents (Fielder 1995; Gvozdanović 1996; Smirnova & Iliev 2014). Clearly, this pragmatic function was not compatible with the communist ideology and the stylistics of the communist discourse, which presented news as absolute facts and truth that cannot be questioned. Not surprisingly, the avoidance of evidential forms is not unique to the Bulgarian communist
discourse. Friedman (2003: 207) observes for Macedonian that “the government-owned paper […] Nova Makedonija – like papers in other East European countries during the communist period – is more likely to use synthetic pasts [=non-evidential] or else nominalizations.” Thus, the avoidance of evidential forms emerges as a more general feature of a conservative totalitarian discourse.

6. Conclusions

The three case studies presented in this paper reveal systematic linguistic differences between the newspaper articles published under the communist regime and under the democratic government in Bulgaria. The findings raise two questions: (i) What are the factors responsible for the observed differences? and (ii) Do the observed linguistic features are spontaneous reflections of social reality or a result of a carefully designed process such as e.g. censorship? With respect to the first question, I argued that the language differences are best explained as a result of the political change, i.e. the transition from communism to democracy, and the shift in the system of social values. While it is true that the political transformation in question was also accompanied by economic, social, and generational changes, I believe that the scope of this study and, specifically, attention to abstract linguistic features rather than to vocabulary allows me to control for the effect of other factors. Linguistic characteristics of texts in the communist newspaper are not simply that of a narrative not concerned with the market conditions, e.g. lacking colloquial elements or comparators. Moreover, it is hard to see how economic considerations can affect such abstract features as agentivity, noun’s individuation or tense. The changes at such an abstract level of linguistic representation are best explained as the effect of the political change on language.
With respect to the second question, one might argue that the observed differences are the result of a carefully designed process rather than a mere reflection of social reality. At first, the unusual distribution of grammatical features in the communist discourse can be attributed to a long-time effort on the part of the communist leaders to control public language in an uncanny Orwellian sense (Orwell 1949). As observed by Grenoble, “soviet leaders knew that language counts, that it is a crucial part of both a nation’s and an individual’s identity, and it could be manipulated to serve as a powerful tool for the State” (Grenoble 2003: 1). Note, however, that the censorship process was aimed primarily at the regulation of news content and newspapers’ working vocabulary (Hollander 1972; Vakurov et al. 1978: 31). In contrast, the distribution of abstract grammatical features considered in the current study can hardly be subjected to external control. This observation applies to post-communist discourse as well. While the observed linguistic changes in mass media language are often characterized as a controlled process, a strategy consciously employed by Bulgarian journalists with the goal to refresh the language (Zambova 2001), such an analysis can only explain surface changes in vocabulary and content. More abstract grammatical features such as voice, nouns’ individuation, tense and evidentiality are not accessible to introspection, and thus can hardly be controlled for. Thus, linguistic characteristics of texts are better explained not as a direct product of censorship or as a revitalization strategy, but as a spontaneous reflection of social reality mediated by ideologies of language users. This explanation assumes a sociocognitive model of context (van Dijk 2008). In van Dijk’s framework, “the relation between society and discourse is indirect” (van Dijk 2009: vii) and is mediated by ideologies of speakers and writers. Ideologies are understood as sociocognitive constructs shared by members of a particular group; they reflect speakers’ internalized beliefs about the society’s organization and function (van Dijk 1995: 243). As such, ideologies are actively involved in the process of discourse interpretation and construction. From this perspective,
linguistic characteristics of the two types of public discourse examined here, democratic and communist, might be taken to reflect speakers’ shared beliefs about the system of social meanings and fundamental principles of their respective societies, such as humanism vs. institutionalism, individualism vs. collectivism, and the differences in the perception of time.

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NOTES

1 Constructions with agentive verbs in the main clause and sentential objects, such as The Mayor promised that the order will be obeyed, were classified as active transitive sentences.

2 Possessive and existential constructions are stative, and statives are inherently non-agentive (Smith 1991: 42).

3 Table 2 does not include constructions with sentential objects (The Mayor promised that the orders will be obeyed) and their structural variants, e.g. agentless passive sentences with sentential subjects (That the orders will be obeyed was promised). If such constructions are included, the difference is still significant, $\chi^2 (1) = 16, p < .05$.

4 Hopper & Thompson’s (1980) research goal was to establish the correlation between individuation and the type of discourse context, foregrounding and backgrounding. Therefore, they used different linguistic parameters – referentiality and definiteness.

5 Active transitive constructions with sentential objects are included in Table 5. Therefore, there is the difference in the number of tokens compared to Table 2, column 1.
The observation that cultural trends can be inhibited or enhanced by socio-political processes echoes research findings in cultural psychology (cf. Inkeles 1983; Yang 1988 on how modernization promotes individualism).

Perfect tenses were excluded.

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