

Abandoned Mines – Categories in Romanian Local Newspapers - People and Places

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The paper uses the Matrix Categorization Devices theory in order to analyze the way in which the abandoned mines in Romania have been presented in newspapers over the period beginning with their closure up to the present time. In order to conduct the analysis, the paper provides a theoretical framework of the Membership Categorization Device (the category being mines and the members – the people and places); the last part discusses the results of the analysis.

Keywords: *Matrix Categorization Devices, newspapers, abandoned mines, people, places.*

1. Membership categorization analysis

The Membership Categorization Analysis theory was first advanced by Harvey Sacks; it focuses on the way in which interlocutors orient themselves in their speech on how they mutually share the way they understand, define and comprehend people, things, events, actions, phenomena, etc. According to Hester and Eglin (1997, 1-2) the study of Membership Categorization Analysis is actually the study of social order since it investigates the way social life is perceived and processed by the speakers. “Categorization phenomena in talk comprise instantiations of our commonsense knowledge of social structure” (Hester and Eglin 1997, 73). They also state (1997, 3) that membership categorization is an integral aspect of conversation analysis.

2. Definition

Membership Categorization Devices is a theory that includes three concepts – members, categorization and devices. The term member refers to the nouns which are used in a text as either actors or subjects and that are characterized by specific

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activities or states, overtly or covertly expressed (Lepper 2000, 15). The activities commonly associated with the members are considered category-bound activities, being defined as “action words which link subjects and objects” (Lepper 2000, 193). Texts often take these activities for granted and in conversation, speakers may or may not negotiate them.

Membership categories form collections, which means that some membership categorization are taken by granted by the speakers as going together; for instance the members for the category of family may include uncle, aunt, but not Marxist feminist or trumpet player. (Hester and Eglin 1997, 4). Initially, membership categories were defined by Sacks as used only to describe persons but later they have come to include institutions, social classes, and non-personal objects, such as house, garden, etc. Hester and Eglin (1997, 3) emphasize the fact that the features that characterize the members are not apriori defined, but should be investigated in texts (written or spoken).

Categories are the roles that both people and objects (abstract and concrete) play while devices are defined as “the institutional collections of roles (comprising, for example, religion, family, education, work) with predicates expressing role expectations (Ester and Eglin 1997, 161). These devices have a cultural and temporal relevance and they may be agreed on or contested. As Sacks defines it,

Membership Categorization Device is that collection of membership categories, containing at least a category, which may be applied to some population, containing at least a Member, so as to provide, by the use of some rules of application, for the pairing of at least a population Member and categorization device member. A device is then a collection plus rules of application (Sacks 1972, 32)

Therefore, categorization has a dual function – it both describes a member and includes it in a group of similar members. Hester and Eglin (1997, 6) advance the concept of standardized relational pair, defined as created by the rights and obligations that the members included in a category have towards each other (e.g. doctor-student, mother baby, citizen-government).

Sacks’ theory has been extended by Cuff, according to whom the initial rules had to be “ be refined and extended to accommodate the reality of everyday discourse in which competing and conflicting versions are negotiated in the context of talk” (Lepper 2000, 6). The current meaning of categories is a changing one, as indicated by Jayyusi (1984) who refers to the concept of disjunctive categories, defined as opposite categories used to conflictingly describe the same member.

Sacks (1972) analyses the two rules observed when applying membership categorization devices, namely the economy rule and the consistency rule. The

economy rules refers to the tendency of applying one category rather than two, on condition that one category is enough to describe a member (Lepper 2000, 19); the consistency rule refers to the repeated use of the same category for the other members belonging to the same population, even if other categories could be used (Lepper 2000, 18-19).

3. Feature of membership categorization

Researchers have shown that membership categorization devices are characterized by the following six features:

1. they depend on context - this feature indicates that the categories are collected in text, having a temporal nature (Lepper 2000, 52) while context is understood as “a concept which acknowledges temporality as an active constituent aspect of meaningful social interaction” (Lepper 2000, 51). Hester and Eglin (1997, 25) also analyse this feature, stating that the membership categorization devices are “ locally accomplished, contextually embedded and reflexively constituted phenomenon”;
2. they generate features depending on the categories and the speakers or readers co-select the relevant category bound activities in text, thus constituting meaning (Hester and Eglin 1997, 8) ;
3. they are assembled objects – this feature refers to the fact that the membership categories devices are constituted in interaction rather than pre-existing (Hester and Eglin 1997, 20);
4. they convey moral judgment – this features refers to the correlation of members and activities, by means of which interactants also do moral work as the actions can be criticized, justified, excused, etc. (Hester and Eglin 1997, 8);
5. they are ambiguous – this features refers to the fact that categories may have different meanings, according to the context in which they are used. The example provided by Hester and Eglin (1997, 20) is the category boy and girl – which can refer to a life stage or to a relation (boyfriend-girlfriend).

4. Data analysis

The paper aims to analyze the way in which the abandoned mines were presented in Romanian newspapers over a period of six years – November 2016- July 2022.

To this end, the paper uses the Membership Categorization Theory in order to study the way the closed mines are presented, investigating the people in these

areas and the places themselves. For describing people activities are used, while for the places their features are presented.

5. Data collection

The analysis is conducted on nine articles, published in a local newspaper Hunedoreanul (The Hunedoara Journal) and in the local news section of a national newspaper Adevărul (The Truth); the articles represent a convenience sample and they were selected by taking into account the topic – that of abandoned mines, which are of different types: coal (5 articles), iron (2 mines), gold (1 mine) and dolomite (1 mine)

The articles are listed below and in the analysis they are referred to by the numbers indicated below:

O haldă de steril părăsită în anii 2000 are o poveste sumbră. De ce locul spectaculos este plin de pericole [A tailing dam abandoned in the 2000s has a gloomy story. Why the spectacular place is filled with dangers] by Daniel Guță, published in Adevărul, July 29 2022

Moștenirea comunistă în Ghelari, vechea „capitală a fierului”. Cum arată blocurile părăsite de mineri [The communist legacy in Ghelari the old “capitol of iron”. What do the blocks abandoned by the miners look like?] by Daniel Guță, published in Adevărul September 20, 2021

Cum arată fosta mină Barza, închisă în urmă cu 15 ani. De aici au fost scoase zeci de tone de aur [What does the former Barza mine, closed 15 years ago look like. Tens of tons of gold were extracted from here.] by Daniel Guță, published in Adevărul, May 15 2021

Priveștiștea sumbră a fostelor mine de fier de la Teliuc. Coloșii de beton în ruină de lângă Hunedoara [The gloomy site of the former iron mines in Teliuc. The concrete colossi in ruins near Hunedoara] by Daniel Guță, published in Adevărul, January 5 2021

Povestea celei mai bogate mine de fier, exploatarea de la Ghelari [The Story of the Richest Iron Mine, the Mine in Ghelary] Redacția Ziarul Hunedoreanul, editorial in The Hunedoara Journal July 31 iulie 2020

Soarta tristă a orașului Uricani după șapte decenii de minerit [The sad fate of the Uricani town, after seven decades of mining] by Daniel Guță, published in The Hunedoara Journal, November 8 2017

Un an de la închiderea Minei Petrila: soarta tristă a celei mai vechi exploatări miniere din Valea Jiului [A year since the Petrila mine closure; the sad fate of the oldest mine in the Jiul Valley] by Daniel Guță, published in The Hunedoara Journal, November 1 2016.

Soarta tristă a orașelor miniere. Uricani. Orașul de la capăt de linie și monumentele sale controversate [The sad fate of the mining towns. Uricani, the town at the end of the line and its controversial monuments] by Daniel Guță, published in The Hunedoara Journal, March 13 2016

Inchiderea mineritului văzută din orașul de unde 2000 de oameni au luat calea pribegiei [The mine closure seen from the town from where 2000 people took the path of exile] by Carmen Presa, published in The Hunedoara Journal, August 13 2015.

6. Data analysis

The first category analyzed is places because in the articles they are more frequently and amply discussed than people. In the later articles, there is a shift from places, which decrease in terms of importance, to the people living in the area.

The mines are described in terms of disjunctive relational pairs - the past versus the present and nature versus civilization (which is referred to in the articles by means of buildings and monuments). Although the articles refer to different types of mine (coal, iron, dolomite or gold), the pairs are always the same.

7. Places – past and present

The past is mainly described by positive feature – lively, full of promises, good for people, exacting admiration and respect both of the people in the area and in far away regions of the country.

The past is distant and more recent. For example, both articles 3 and 4 provide a very detailed history of the mines – from Dacian times, the Roman conquest, Middle Ages, capitalism and socialism:

o istorie minieră de peste două milenii [...] în vremea dacilor împrejurimile actualei comune Teliucu Inferior se numărau printre cele mai importante districte miniere din Dacia, iar după cucerirea romană, exploatarea fierului a luat o amploare nemaîntalnită până atunci. (A3) [A mining history longer than 2 milleniums [...] during the Dacian time the surroundings of the current

Telicu Inferior village were among the most important mining districts in Dacia and after the Roman conquest, the iron extraction boomed].

The distant past is often associated with objects of art, thus increasing the importance of the past:

Au fost descoperite rămășițe ale unor cariere miniere antice, unelte folosite de mineri în antichitate, necropole dacice, ruine ale unei villa rustica și inscripții care atestă exploatarea fierului din vremea romanilor și importanța pe care administrația romană o acorda acestei zone. (A3) There were discovered remnants of ancient mining quarries, tools used by miners in ancient times, Dacian necropolis, ruins of a villa and inscriptions which certify the iron exploitation since Roman Times and the importance in which this area was held by the Roman administration.

The area is famous and known for the achievements, with famous inscription in the settlement near Ghelari „Natus Ibi Ubi Ferum Nascitum”, “Born where the iron is born (A4).

The technical, economic and social development continues through Middle Ages, when fairs are held, shops are set up and trade prospers. In the 19th century, during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the area is characterized as “cosmopolitan” having brought together people belonging to different ethnicities and cultures:

[În secolul al XIX-lea, Ghelariul (Gyalar) era o așezare cosmopolită, în care s-au stabilit oameni din întreg Imperiul Austro-Ungar și care au zidit biserici pentru diferite confesiuni. (A3) [in the 19th century Ghelariul (Gyalar) was a cosmopolitan settlement, where people from all over the Austro-Hungarian Empire settled and built churches for different denominations].

In the 1920s, the progress continues, as indicated by the bilingual monography written about the mines: “O monografie bilingvă (franceză și engleză) din anul 1928 oferea informații prețioase despre felul cum funcționau minele de la Ghelari în anii interbelici. (A4) [A bilingual monography (French and English) published in the year 1923 offered valuable information on the way in which the Ghelari mines operated in the period between the two world wars.].

The communist period is a very active one, as the mining regions develop, towns are set up, and more people come from all over the country to find a better life. The future is promising: “In anii 60 satele miniere Teliuc și Ghelari se pregăteau să fie transformate în localități urbane” [In the 60s the mining villages Teliuc and Ghelari were getting ready to become towns.] (A4). However, the communist

period is not always presented in a positive way - it offered hope to the miners but it was also dangerous as mining accidents took place:

mina de cărbune a fost de-a lungul timpului și locul unor mari tragedii. În 1943, o explozie în subteran a ucis 18 mineri, însă soarta tristă a exploatării minere a fost grăbită de cele două explozii din 2008, soldate cu moartea a 13 mineri și salvatori minieri și rănirea altor 15. (A7) The coal mine was a long time, the place of big disasters. In 1943 a mine explosion killed 18 miners but the sad fate of the mine was accelerated by the two explosions in 2008, when 13 miners and mine rescuers died and another 15 were injured.

The decline of the mines started at the end of the 20th century, when the mines began to be closed. The mine closure is marked by the people as a burial, tens of thousands attending the moment when the last coal wagon is brought out of the mine:

Mina Petrila s-a închis în urmă cu un an, de la 1 noiembrie. Cu două zile mai devreme, în 30 octombrie 2015, zeci de oameni au luat parte la ceremonia simbolică a scoaterii ultimului vagonet de cărbune din Mina Petrila, eveniment care a marcat închiderea definitivă a exploatării miniere, după 156 de ani de activitate aproape neîntreruptă. Fostii mineri au scris atunci pe vagonetul ieșit din pământ „Ultima tonă de cărbune, Mina Petrila, 30.10.2015”, și au luat din cuva sa, ca amintire, bucăți de cărbune. Scena petrecută în acompaniamentul funebru al unei fanfare a stârnit emoții profunde, lacrimi și resemnare (A7). [The Petrila mine closed a year ago. on November 1. Two days earlier, on October 30 2015, tens of people attended the symbolic ceremony of extracting the last coal carriage from the Petrila mine, an event marking the final closure of the mine, after 156 year of almost continuous exploitation. The former miners wrote then on the carriages taken out of the mine “The last ton of coal, Petrila Mine, October 10 2015 and took pieces of coal from it as a memory. The scene taking place on the funeral accompaniment of a brass band stirred deep emotions, tears and resignation. (A 7)

The symbols of the past are held in high esteem by people:

Pe marginea străzilor, zeci de vagoneti de la fostele mine vopsiți în roșu au fost așezați pe socluri sau în zonele verzi pentru a aminti specificul orașului. Statuia a doi mineri stahanoviști, ridicată în anii 1960, este cel mai iubit monument al orașului și nimeni nu a îndrăznit să vandalizeze.(A6) On the street edges, tens of carriages painted in red from the former mines were placed on pedestals or in the green areas to remind people of the town's feature. The statue of two Stakhanovite miners, erected in the 60s is the most beloved monument of the town and nobody dared vandalize it.)

The past is also associated with the protection of nature - for example tunnels were built to keep the water clean (A1)

The present, mentioned far less frequently, is characterized by despair, hopelessness and neglect. The buildings and railways are in ruins, the towns are abandoned and the area is deserted: "the mine is closed", (A1) "the railway was dismantled" (A1), "15 years have passed since one of the most important gold mines in Romania was closed" (A3), "abandoned by almost two decades" (A4) "the mine will become history" (A9), "there is no more activity and light here" (A11)

In the past-present relational pair the past is presented as lively, happy, hopeful, artistic while the present is gloomy and dark, associated with desolation and death.

7.1. Places – nature versus civilization

The second relational pair used to characterize the closed mines is nature versus civilization.

Nature takes back the land and covers the mines, concealing the past but also causing death. Nature is ambiguously presented as it both beautifies the place and endangers it: Ținutul minier de la Ghelari este acoperit treptat de pădure, iar vegetația abundentă acoperă cu un covor verde ruinele și dărâmăturile clădirilor istorice (A5). [The mining area in Ghelari is gradually covered by wood and the luxurious vegetation covers with a green carpet the ruins and debris of historical buildings.]

However, nature is full of dangers and kills people: "o haldă uriașă de steril, abandonată din anii 2000, s-a transformat într-un loc spectaculos, modelat de natură, însă plin de pericole" (A1). [A huge tailings dump, abandoned in the 2000s has become a spectacular place, sha[ed by nature but filled with dangers'.

Nature causes people's deaths:

O mlaștină formată la poalele versantului, de-a lungul tunelului de piatră care protejează pârâul, a fost locul unei tragedii. Aici și-a pierdut viața chiar soția omului care a contribuit la înființarea haldei, muncind an de an la descărcarea sterilului de pe versant. (a1) [A swamp at the bottom of the hil, along the stone tunnel that protects ths spring witnessed a tragedy. The wife of the man who took part in setting up the dump, working every year to disachрге the tailings in the dump died here]

Unlike nature, which suggests that life continues, civilization, represented by the towns and their buildings, disappears. Gradually people forget the purposes of the mines:

Minele și preparația Teliucului s-au închis la mijlocul anilor 2000 și au lăsat în urmă zeci de hectare ocupate cu ruine și dărâmături, clădiri miniere scoase din uz cărora puțini oameni le mai cunosc menirea (A4). [The mines and shops in Teliuc closed in the mid 2000 and left behind tens of hectares filled with ruins and debris, mining buildings no longer used, whose purpose is known by few people.]

The workshops and the buildings are ransacked by thieves and people digging for construction materials (A 3) and the abandoned mines are a frightening sight: “[a]bandonate de aproape două decenii, ruinele minei Teliuc, aflată în vecinătatea Hunedoarei, oferă călătorilor un peisaj sumbru (A4). [Abandoned for about two decades, the ruins of the Teliuc mine, near Hunedoara, are a gloomy sight for the travelers.

The people’s homes are described as “ghost block of flats” (A2) as their inhabitants had moved elsewhere and abandoned them. The towns are deserted, having reaches the end of the line and nature takes over:

Orașul a devenit unul pustiu, cu multe locuințe goale, cu spații comerciale pustii, cu clădiri părăsite. Problema lui este că se află la capătul de drum, căci dincolo de Uricani drumul se afundă în Retezat”, povestește Ludovic Bara, un fost miner. (A8) [The town has become deserted, with many empty houses, with empty shopping areas, with abandoned buildings. ‘The problem is that it is at the end of the road, as beyond Uricani, the road sinks into the Retezat mountains’ says Ludovic Bara, a former miner

Like the past, civilization is also presented contradictorily. For example, the new building that were built to house the miners were in contrast with the area: “Zona s-a dezvoltat forțat, iar blocurile de locuințe muncitorești au apărut pe dealuri, lângă casele pitorești ale localnicilor. (A5) [The area developed in a forced manner and the workers’ blocks of flats appeared on the hills, near the natives’ picturesque homes.]

Civilization is so closely related to the mines, that the monuments that are symbols of the past cannot be understood any longer by the few tourists who visit the area; having lost the mines, the areas seems to have lost its identity: “[o]rașul a rămas în anonimat, iar în prezent se înfățișează turiștilor care ajung cu greu aici într-o atmosferă tristă. Câteva dintre monumentele sale ciudate stârnesc curiozitatea vizitatorilor” (A8) [The town has become anonymous and now it offers

a sad sight to the tourists who can reach it with much difficulty. Some of its monuments arise the visitors' curiosity]

The two relational pairs, past and present and nature and civilization enter into a relation themselves – the past is connected to civilization and nature to the present.

7.2. People – states

The second category used for the closed mines is people who in these articles are associated with activities and state.

The people are generally presented as part of the mine and having a very similar fate to the mines. The states frequently described are sadness, despair, discouragement, while the verbs used for the people are associated with lack of action and abandonment.

The states can also be divided in relational pairs such as hope versus despair, happiness versus unhappiness, life versus death, employment versus unemployment, the positive ones associated with the past and the negative ones with the present.

Hope is related to the moment when people decided to come and work in the mines, had plans for the future, and believed that they had control over their lives. When they arrived in the Jiu Valley to work as miners people felt they were starting a good protected life, as they were welcomed to the valley, offered jobs and accommodation: “[c]arterul „Cuț” din Ghelari a fost ridicat în anii ‘60, pentru a-i găzdui pe angajații minelor de fier, veniți aici din toate colțurile țării” (A2) [The Cut district in Ghelari was built in the 60s to house the employees of the iron mines, who have come here from all over the country]

The miners' life was meaningful and their worth publicly acknowledged; they felt their work was useful, and their life purposeful:

Performanțele muncitorilor de la Teliuc ocupau frecvent spații largi în ziarele locale aflate sub tutela regimului comunist, la fel și relatările despre construcțiile industriale și clădirile muncitorești înființate în ritm alert în zonă, din dorința autorităților de a produce cât mai mult fier pentru necesitățile combinatului siderurgic al Hunedoarei. (A5) [The achievements of the workers in Teliuc made the headlines of the local newspapers under the communist regime, and so did the stories about the industrial buildings and the worker's blocks built very fast in the area, because of the authorities' wish to produce as much iron as necessary for the steel factory in Hunedoara. (A4)

Employment meant many and various jobs, miners, drivers, foremen: “În primele decenii de comunism, zona minieră a fost extinsă, iar în anii '80, când minele și uzinele aurifere au intrat în declin, la Barza munceau peste 6.000 de oameni.” (A5) [In the first decades of communism, the mining area was extended and in the 80s when the gold mines began to close, more than 6,000 people were working at Barza.]

At present, the number of employed people has plummeted from 5,500 people to 300, (A7) with similarly declining figures in all other mines. Tellingly, the locals celebrate the year when the mines were closed: “[a]stăzi <<sărbătorim>> 20 de ani de la marea disponibilizare din 1997, când au plecat 28.000 de oameni” (A7) [Today we “celebrate” the huge redundancy of 1997 when 28,000 left].

People’s states are unhappiness, despair, resignation; they feel betrayed and forgotten; their repeated appeals to the government to develop the infrastructure in order to support the tourism industry are not answered.

For these feelings, the identified pair is miners versus government:

Președintele Consiliului de Administrație al Complexului Energetic Hunedoara, Aurelian Ghimpău, a fost practic fără echivoc când a anunțat, la Petroșani, că „în decembrie 2018 este ultima tonă de cărbune pe care o vom scoate din Valea Jiului”. (A8) [The President of the Hunedoara Energy Company Board, Aurelian Ghimpu announced unequivocally at Petroșani: ‘December 2018 is the last ton of coal that we extract from the Jiu valley’].

The people feel they have no future and they cannot survive, the economic situation being described as “disastrous”:

Pentru comunitățile locale, care încă se resimt după marele val de disponibilizări din 1996 – 1997 și concedierile colective ulterioare, moartea mienritului ar însemna, cel puțin pentru început, un dezastru social. La Petroșani, de exemplu, închiderea mineritului ar însemna o catastrofă, dincolo de impactul pe bugetul local. Edilii au precizat că sunt aproximativ 3000 de angajați, fiecare cu încă 3 – 4 persoane în întreținere, așa că, direct sau indirect 7.000 – 8.000 de oameni ar fi afectați (A9) [For the local communities, still under the effect of the high number of redundancies in 1996-1997, and the later collective dismissals, the death of mining would represent, at least at the beginning, a social disaster. In Petrosani, for example, the mine closure would be a catastrophe, beyond its impact on local budget. The town officials stated that there are around 3,000 employees, each supporting 3-4 more people so that, directly or indirectly 7,000-8,000 people would be affected.]

7.3. People – activities

The activities performed by the former miners are complaining, protesting, leaving the place.

The miners complain about the present and about their current life, protest against the closure of the mines by burning their mining equipment (A6)

Many of them, particularly the young ones leave the place to return to their native villages (A8) or to work abroad (A9). “Și, din cauza lipsei locurilor de muncă, peste 2000 de oameni au plecat să muncească peste graniță, după cum a precizat edilul.” (A9) [And, because there are no jobs, over 2,000 people left to work abroad, as the official stated.]

To conclude, people are mainly characterized by means of states rather than activities. They are angry, upset, hopeless, feel betrayed and their activities are to protest or to leave.

8. Conclusions

The category described in the articles is mines, of a variety of types – coal, dolomite iron and gold. The mines are described in terms of people and places, with far more mentions of the place in older articles, the shift slowly moving to people in more recent ones.

The destiny of towns and people is closely tied to the mines, everything being apparently subordinated to them.

The pairs used to describe the closed mines have a dichotomous character – the most frequently used category being the past which is opposed to the present. The past is associated with activity, busy life, and control over nature, pride and acknowledgment. It is described very minutely, from ancient times till the beginning of the 21st century and the communist past is characterized by people's pride in their work and feelings of security. However, the communist past is not fully glorified, as mining accidents are also mentioned.

The other pair used to describe the places is nature versus civilization, with nature taking over and turning the place into ruins and gloom.

The people are presented mainly in terms of states and, very seldom, activities. They are hopeless, sad, feel cheated and abandoned, the pair used to describe this state being people versus government. The activities associated with people are protest and leaving.

All articles rely on relational pairs – past –present, nature- civilization, locals-authorities, each conveying moral judgment, the pairs being clearly expressed. The

overall attitude is of extolling the past – both of the places and people and deploring the present.

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