

## SEMANTIC VARIATION IN THE ROMANIAN LANGUAGE OF MARKETING

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper explores instances of semantic variation in the Romanian language of marketing by analysing a number of terms that marketing shares with other specialised languages and/or with the general language. The data we base our analysis on are collected from a Romanian marketing corpus and from specialised and general language dictionaries. The study has shown that a great part of the terminological innovation in marketing consists in recycling already existing words/terms and adding new semantic features so that they cover the new marketing-related conceptual information. The new marketing readings fall into three main categories, following Cruse's classification (2011): full senses, spectral sub-senses and ways-of-seeing.*

**Keywords:** marketing, specialised language, semantic variation, full senses, spectral sub-senses, ways of seeing.

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### ***1. Preliminary remarks***

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Semantic variation has become a point of great interest of various terminological studies after the approaches to terminology have shifted from the classic, wüsterian view, which was prescriptive and denominative, to the modern, linguistic and descriptive one, which admits the existence of various linguistic phenomena in terminologies and also the multiple types of terminological variation.

This paper explores instances of semantic variation in the Romanian language of marketing by analysing a number of terms that marketing shares with other specialised languages and/or with the general language.

The dynamics and the interdisciplinary character of the extra-linguistic environment have significant consequences at the level of its linguistic representation. The continuous movement of words/terms from one specialised language into another or from the general language into specialised languages and vice versa is one of these consequences.

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There are two possible approaches to what might be called terms' dynamics: 1) from specialised fields to terms, which leads to sets of terms that are shared by at least two specialised languages and, possibly, by the general language as well; 2) from terms to specialised fields, which shows that a certain term is shared by more than one specialised language and/or the general language.

In the latter approach, there is a core meaning of that word/term that is shared by all its specific usages in various specialised fields and/or general language and a variable field-specific content. This is what we mean by semantic variation: various specialised languages innovate and fulfil their designation needs by using already existing words/terms which they somehow semantically recycle and assign a new, specialised meaning. There is a core meaning (called *purport* in Cruse, 2011: 119) which is preserved and recycled. What is added to it is subject to alteration according to various field-specific constraints.

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## ***2. Previous work***

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The marketing terminology is profoundly interdisciplinary since it places itself at the crossroads of various disciplines. Its dynamics and evolution in time follows the field evolution towards what marketing is today, i.e. an interdisciplinary science and discipline: "originally founded as a branch of *applied economics*", later becoming a "*management discipline*", "has taken on the character of an *applied behavioural science* that is concerned with understanding buyer and seller systems involved in marketing goods and services." (Kotler, 1972: 46)

We carried out an extensive research on the Romanian language of marketing as part of the PhD project, between 2004 and 2010. The research was based on a 947,031-word corpus which comprises four layers of speciality: specialised texts, specialised journals, specialised textbooks and marketing-oriented newspaper articles. It has been found out that rather a small percentage of the marketing term inventory (~13.4%) represents strictly specialised one-word marketing terms, i.e. terms that have only marketing meaning(s); 18.6% are one-word semantically-recycled terms, i.e. terms that marketing shares with other specialised languages or with the general language and 68% are complex terms, with various degrees of fixedness (Ciolăneanu, 2011: 185-186, 296-297). These figures show a great deal of inter-field semantic shifts that lay the foundations of the marketing terminology.

The previous research has revealed one of the biggest problems that someone studying the language of marketing is confronted with: the lack of clarity in the linguistic profile of this terminology. There is an impressive number of terms that seem to belong to other terminologies or to the general language and the definitions attached to them in glossaries or specialised dictionaries are not always successful in explaining what it is in that meaning that makes it be marketing, and not psychology or pure economics etc.

Therefore, the present study starts from the following premises:

- The marketing terminology finds itself at the crossroads of many other terminologies (economics, psychology, sociology etc.) and, consequently, comprises a great number of semantically-recycled words.
- Our everyday system of thinking is metaphorical in nature and “metaphors allow us to understand one domain of experience in terms of another” (Lakoff, Johnson, 2003: 3, 117).
- Semantic variation is “inherent to language structure” and “driven by common universal cognitive mechanisms which are accounted for by a dynamic conception of meaning construal” (Robert, 2008: 55).
- The most important role that the context plays is “to enrich a meaning or make it more specific” (Cruse, 2011: 113). The context is the place where the meaning of the term is defined and stabilised. The domain, as a larger context, contributes to the creation of the term’s referential value and contextual meaning (Robert, 2008: 80).

Consequently, we start from an extra-linguistic reality: the eclectic nature of marketing that result in a very dynamic cognitive universe which, in its turn, can be accounted for only by taking a dynamic view on meaning construal in specialised contexts.

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### ***3. Theoretical framework***

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The present article draws on Cruse’s book (2011), in which the author explores the contextual variability of word meaning, giving an interesting and very useful account for lexical ambiguity (understood as a one-to-many mapping of words to concepts) from a conceptual perspective (Cruse, 2011: 100). His theoretical framework has proven to be useful for analysing the specialised meaning(s) of certain lexical units, in close relation to their meanings conveyed in various specialised fields and/or in the general language. In other words, it allows us to show how a new specialised meaning comes into being and to discriminate between various types of meanings.

Cruse’s analysis of sense boundaries is based on three types of autonomy (Cruse, 2011: 101-103):

- *Attentional autonomy*: two autonomous construals are mutually antagonistic; they are not simultaneously at the centre of attention, i.e. “they are in competition for attention, they cannot both be held simultaneously at the centre of attention, and the best one can do is to switch rapidly from one construal to another”. Moreover, the simultaneous activation of two discrete and antagonistic readings creates a punning effect.
- *Relational autonomy*: two readings of the same lexical unit have their independent sets of sense relations.

- *Compositional autonomy*: one of the participating elements in a compositional process will engage only a part of the potential meaning of its partner.

Based on these criteria, Cruse discriminates among various types of senses that a lexical unit may convey: full senses and sub-senses (facets, micro-senses, local sub-senses and spectral sub-senses) (Cruse, 2011: 103-111). Since the thorough analysis of all types of senses and sub-senses established by Cruse would go beyond the space limitations of this study, we will focus only on three forms of meanings that semantically recycled terms/words convey in the language of marketing: *full senses*, *spectral sub-senses* and *ways-of-seeing*.

Generally, the **full senses** of a word can be described as

*fully discreet, i.e. they display all three types of autonomy described above, plus one more requirement that distinguishes them from sub-senses: they display radical attentional autonomy, which means that there is no possible construal in which the boundary between senses is suppressed and, thus, a unified meaning is created* (Cruse, 2011: 103-104).

**Spectral sub-senses** are “points on a semantic continuum”, which, since they normally belong to different domains, are quite separated from one another in use. The distance between them on the spectrum results in the degree of antagonism between readings. There is no possibility to unify all the points on the spectrum; however, two points which are quite close to each other can be coordinated (Cruse, 2011: 110-111).

**Ways-of-seeing** display a level of discreteness less than sub-senses and refer to different views that can be taken on a referent (four such views according to Cruse, 2011: 111-112):

- (1) Seeing something as a whole consisting of parts;
- (2) Seeing something as a kind, in contrast to other kinds;
- (3) Seeing something as having a certain function;
- (4) Seeing something from the point of its origins.

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#### ***4. Types of senses in the language of marketing***

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In what follows, we are going to illustrate the above-mentioned types of senses and sub-senses using examples from the Romanian language of marketing.

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##### ***4.1. Full senses in marketing***

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The term PROMOȚIE is a typical example of full, completely discreet senses. Its general meaning is “series of graduates”, whereas the marketing specialised meaning is that of “special offer”.

Here are the results of running the three-stage test proposed in Cruse 2011:

- (1) Este mândru de faptul că face parte din **promoția** 2001, cea mai bună din ultimii 10 ani.

(Eng.) He is proud of being part of 2001 graduation series, the best in the last 10 years.

- (2) Compania a declarat că **promoția** lunii octombrie a fost un real succes.

(Eng.) The company declared that the October special offer was really successful.

**Table 1: Promoție**

Types of autonomy	Results
A. <i>Attentional autonomy</i>	The two examples above show that the two readings of PROMOȚIE are totally antagonistic and any attempt of unifying them is nonsensical.
B. <i>Relational autonomy</i>	Each of the two readings have different superordinates: reading 1 sends up to <i>group of students</i> and reading 2, to <i>promotional activities</i> . Their components are: promotion 1: graduates; promotion 2: discounts, gifts, special prices etc.
C. <i>Compositional autonomy</i>	There are specific contexts of the two readings that cannot interchange: PROMOȚIE meaning “series of graduates” is very often accompanied by year, as in the example (1) above. Even a vague context, such as <i>Promoția 2001 a fost cea mai bună</i> (Eng. 2001 promoția was the best) leads to no other meaning than “series of graduates”. On the other hand, the preposition <i>la</i> (Eng. at) engages only with promotion 2: <i>promoție la haine</i> (en. special offer for clothes).

The conclusions we can draw from the analysis above are that all the three types of autonomy are displayed, with no possibility of creating a unified reading. A sentence like:

- (3) \**Promoția lunii ianuarie s-a încheiat chiar când cea a anului 2002 sărbătorea 10 ani de la absolvire.*

(Eng.) January “promoție” ended exactly when that of 2002 were celebrating 10 years since graduation.

is impossible to construct. Therefore, we conclude that the two meanings of the word PROMOȚIE are fully discreet and display radical attentional autonomy, i.e. no possibility of meaning unification (Cruse 2011: 104). The sense boundaries are firm and the specialised/non-specialised dichotomy in the two co-existent readings of the term/word PROMOȚIE is clear.

Similarly, PROMOVARE (Eng. PROMOTION), which is used for “a move to a more important status” in the general language, has also added the marketing meaning “activities intended to help sell a product”. It designates one important

sub-field of marketing, being one of the four variables of the marketing mix. It also responds positively to the three *autonomy* tests.

Let us analyse the following examples:

(4) Promovarea în funcția de director reprezintă un pas important în cariera sa.

(Eng.) His promotion as manager represents an important step in his career.

(5) Promovarea produselor pe piața europeană este noua țintă a companiei.

(Eng.) Products' promotion on the European market is the new target of the company.

**Table 2: Promovare**

Types of autonomy	Results
A. <i>Attentional autonomy</i>	The two examples above show that the two readings of PROMOVARE are totally antagonistic and any attempt of unifying them is nonsensical.
B. <i>Relational autonomy</i>	Reading 1 sends up to a <i>movement up on the hierarchical ladder</i> , whereas reading 2 sends up to <i>marketing mix</i> .
C. <i>Compositional autonomy</i>	The essential difference between the two readings of PROMOVARE lies in the fact that, being derived from verbs, they combine with the same type of thematic role (PATIENT), which is of different ontological sort: PROMOVARE in the first, general language sense has only [HUMAN] as PATIENT, whereas PROMOVARE in the marketing sense has only [NONHUMAN] as PATIENT, respectively companies, products, services. This holds true only for the economic marketing. If we take into account other variations of marketing, e.g. political marketing, the PATIENT role of PROMOVARE (2) can also be [HUMAN]. Hence, a new possible reading of the term PROMOVARE.

The table 2 above shows that all the three types of autonomy are displayed and a unified reading is impossible to be created:

(6) \*Promovarea în funcția de director a coincis cu cea de pe piața europeană.

(Eng.) His promotion as manager coincided with that on the European market.

Therefore, the two meanings of the word PROMOVARE are fully discreet and they cannot be unified by any means.

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#### *4.2. Spectral sub-senses in marketing*

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Most of the terms we have analysed fall into the category of spectral sub-senses, which are the result of metaphorical extensions. We believe that the facilitator of these metaphorical extensions is the general language and the meaning extension

(i.e. the phenomenon of the semantic recycling) follows a three-stage pattern: specialised language(s) – general language – specialised language(s). What the general language conveys is a core meaning of the respective word/term, which is then extended according to the needs of the new specialised language that “adopts” it.

A first example to be analysed here is the word/term ACOPERIRE (Eng. coverage). As it can be seen in table 3 below, the general language dictionaries present the entry ACOPERIRE as having a general language reading plus three specialised readings (*sports*, *media* and *technical*) to which we added the *marketing* one (extracted from marketing specialised dictionaries). One can see with their own eyes how the players cover the football pitch and one can “see” with their mind’s eyes the coverage of an issue by media. In the latter case, it is the figures which help one judge it, not the phenomenon itself. The same interpretation applies to the two marketing meanings as well. The metaphor (understood in Lakoff’s terms) which legitimises the marketing specialised meaning of ACOPERIRE is *MARKETING IS A SPORTSFIELD*.

**Table 3: Definitions of acoperire**

Term	Core Meaning	Specialised meanings
ACOPERIRE	“coverage”	<i>sports</i> “the manner in which players cover the pitch (...)”
		<i>media</i> “the way media covers an event”
		<i>tech.</i> “applying a superficial, protective layer on an object”
		<i>mk.</i> “the number of intermediaries in a distribution network”

Source: www.dexonline.ro

Starting from the following examples, we checked how ACOPERIRE responds to the three autonomy tests:

- (1) Directorul a apreciat strategia de acoperire ca fiind foarte eficientă. (*mk.*)  
(Eng.) The manager considered the coverage strategy very efficient.
- (2) Acoperirea terenului a fost aproape perfectă și au câștigat meciul. (*sport*)  
(Eng.) Field coverage was almost perfect and they won the match.

**Table 4: Acoperire**

Types of autonomy	Results
A. <i>Attentional autonomy</i>	The two readings are antagonistic.
B. <i>Relational autonomy</i>	Reading 1 relates to <i>distribution policy</i> and reading 2, to <i>sports strategy</i>
C. <i>Compositional autonomy</i>	The specific contexts are different: ACOPERIRE a pieței (Eng. market coverage) vs. ACOPERIREA terenului (Eng. field coverage)

In conclusion, they display all the three types of autonomy and they are domain-specific, i.e. they function as normal senses in their home domains (Cruse, 2011: 110). What is different from the previous category of full senses is that a unified reading can be created if the meanings are close on the sense spectrum. See the following examples:

- (3) În 2009 Dacia a fost marca auto cu cea mai mare acoperire media și de piață din România.  
(Eng.) In 2009 Dacia was the car make with the biggest media and market coverage in Romania.

The sentence is perfectly acceptable because the two meanings are close enough on the sense spectrum to enter into a coordination relation. However, the same statement does not hold for the next example:

- (4)\*Echipa națională a României a beneficiat de o acoperire media mai mare când cea de pe teren era deficitară.  
(Eng.) The national Romanian team benefited from a bigger media coverage when the one in the field was deficient.

Another example that belongs to the same conceptual metaphor, MARKET IS A SPORTSFIELD, is LIDER. Let us analyse the following examples:

- (5) Liderul actual nu a reușit să convingă electoratul că partidul său are cele mai bune soluții pentru ieșirea din criză. (*politics*)

(Eng.) The current leader didn't manage to convince the people that his party has the best solutions to the crisis.

- (6) Anul trecut liderul pe piața auto românească a fost Dacia. (*marketing*)  
(Eng.) Last year the leader on the Romanian car market was Dacia.

**Table 5: Lider**

Types of autonomy	Results
A. <i>Attentional autonomy</i>	The two readings are antagonistic.
B. <i>Relational autonomy</i>	Reading 1 relates to <i>political hierarchy</i> , whereas reading 2 relates to <i>market hierarchy</i> .
C. <i>Compositional autonomy</i>	The immediate contexts are different: LIDER de partid vs. LIDER de piață

The two readings (politics and marketing) display all the three types of autonomy, they are domain-specific and a unified reading can be created:

- (7) Liderul de piață, ca și cel al unei competiții sportive, obține cele mai bune rezultate.

(Eng.) The market leader, similarly to the one of a sports competition, gets the best results.

- (8) Liderul de piață, ca și cel al unui partid, impune direcția de dezvoltare a pieței.

(Eng.) The market leader, similarly to the one of a party, imposes the direction of market development.



Moving on to another conceptual metaphor, COMPANY IS A PERSON, we selected two terms for illustration: NOTORIETATE (Eng. notoriety) and ADAPTARE (Eng. adaptation).

**Table 6: Definition of notorietae**

Term	Core meaning	Specialised meaning (mk.)
NOTORIETATE (en. notoriety)	“known by many people”	“the percentage of the people who heard of a certain brand, organisation or product”

Personification, as a category of ontological metaphors (Lakoff, Johnson 2003: 33) can account for the [NONHUMAN] reading of words/terms that denotatively are associated to humans. In this example, NOTORIETATE, its [NONHUMAN] reading actually defines its marketing meaning.

As far as ADAPTARE is concerned (see Table 7), its marketing reading seems to be very close to ADAPTARE in psychology, the transfer being exactly based on the dichotomy [HUMAN] – [NONHUMAN].

**Table 7: Definition of adaptare**

Term	Core meaning	Specialised meanings	
		<i>psych.</i>	“of the individual to the environment”
ADAPTARE (en. adaptation)	“adjustment”	<i>techn.</i>	“of an electrical or telecommunication installation”
		<i>ling.</i>	“of foreign words to the system of the language which receives them”
		<i>geomorph</i>	“of some relief forms to the geological structures”
		<i>mk.</i>	“of the product to the requirements of the market”

Source: www.dexonline.ro

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### 4.3. Ways of seeing in marketing

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*Ways-of-seeing* refers to various perspectives that can be taken on objects. The most representative one for the language of marketing seems to be **something seen as having a certain function** (the addition of functional extrinsic traits to the core meaning, as we have shown elsewhere (Ciolăneanu, 2011: 167-168)). The

examples below highlight how a different functional perspective is taken in marketing and, thus, a new, specialised meaning is created.

AMBALAJ (Eng. packaging) designates in *economics* the materials used to wrap or protect goods, whereas in *marketing* is defined as the interface between the product and its user, a means of attracting buyers and make them buy it. Therefore, its main function is to promote the product. Thus, the term AMBALAJ designates the same referent in both disciplines; however, the function which legitimates its marketing meaning is not that of simply wrapping goods, but that of attracting buyers. In conclusion, AMBALAJ [ec.] and AMBALAJ [mk.] are two distinct readings of the same lexical unit, which belong to two different subfields: reading 1, to **merceology** (an economic subfield) and reading 2, to **promotion** (a marketing subfield).

A similar situation is that of ETICHETĂ (Eng. label). In *economics* it is defined as a piece of paper, plastic etc. attached to an object and giving information about it, whereas in *marketing*, as a simple and effective research method used in investigating the consumption demand.

The empirical observations as far as the language of marketing is concerned have led to the conclusion that this **way-of-seeing** approach results in new readings of mainly economic terms, thus confirming once again that marketing stemmed from economics and it has been developing through various contacts with other non-economic disciplines. On the one hand, the marketing reading of an economic term sends to the same referent seen from a different, marketing-specific perspective. On the other hand, the marketing reading of a non-economic term or a general language word involves a referent change based mainly on metaphorical transfer (as in the cases of ACOPERIRE, LIDER, NOTORIETATE and ADAPTARE).

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### ***5. Context dependency***

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This inter-field dynamics triggers a series of changes in the word's meaning. The examples above clearly show how the core meaning of a certain word/term is actually used in various specialised fields and how it is changed according to the field's own conceptual structure and applied framework. This is a dynamic view taken on words, in which their meanings share a rather abstract core meaning and emerge in actual use, being highly context-dependent; this is what Cruse names a "dynamic construal approach to variable word meaning" in which a meaning is constructed from a purport (a body of conceptual content which does not correspond to any specific meaning) and a set of constraints (Cruse, 2011: 119). The mere fact that a term belongs to a specialised language gives it certain characteristics that differentiates it from other usages of the same lexical unit in other specialised domains or in the general language: "Word meanings only make sense when viewed against specific conceptual domains or organized bodies of

background knowledge” (Cruse, 2011: 207). However, the semantic stability of the word/term in a certain specialised language is given by the contextual constraints it is subject to.

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## **6. Concluding remarks**

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As we have seen, marketing is an interdisciplinary discipline and science and this is clearly reflected in its language. This is also the reason why metaphor, understood in Lakoff’s terms, plays an essential role in mapping the semantic universe the marketing meanings belong to. It helps conceiving of the marketing field in terms of various other fields that marketing relates to.

We have also shown that the semantic change in marketing is mainly based on referent change (metaphorical transfer: e.g. ACOPERIRE, LIDER, NOTORIETATE, ADAPTARE), when a core meaning is preserved and, thus the transfer is possible. Another possibility is the identification of a new function of an old referent (e.g. AMBALAJ, ETICHETĂ). In this latter case, the trait that seems to be the most salient for marketing is the functional one.

How are all these reflected at the semantic level? Obviously, by creating new marketing meanings attached to already existing lexical units, which display various degrees of autonomy in relation to other meanings of the same words:

- **full senses** that imply the change of the referent and are completely autonomous (e.g. PROMOȚIE, PROMOVARE);
- **spectral sub-senses**, which also involve referent-change; they are relatively autonomous in the sense that a reading that unifies all the points on the spectrum cannot be created, but one that unifies the closest ones can (e.g. ACOPERIRE, LIDER, NOTORIETATE, ADAPTARE);
- **ways-of-seeing**, when the referent stays the same; what is different is the perspective taken on it.

All these semantic changes take place in a specialized context and the context is the one which selects the appropriate traits, in accordance with the field properties and necessities.

The overall conclusion of the present study is that marketing is a profoundly dynamic, interdisciplinary and highly context-dependent terminology.

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