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Lexical Treatment Of Environmental Discourse In Algeria: The Case Of Shale Gas Exploitation In The Newspaper " The New Republic " (2012-2014)

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ABSTRACT:

The aim of this contribution is to study the lexical treatment used by the French-language national press "The New Republic" on the issue of the exploitation of shale gas in Algeria. While the journalist attaches much more importance to the words energy, he tends to use a relatively moderate vocabulary when it comes to protecting the environment.

KEYWORDS: *discourse, lexical treatment, shale gas, energy, environment,*

Introduction

The risks threatening the future of populations continue to increase, particularly those responsible for the degradation of their quality of life and/or [1]the pollution of their environment. Numerous research works, press articles, or reviews warn us about these risks through their various analyses and explanations.

To effectively conduct our study, we have chosen to focus our research on environmental discourse in the national Francophone press. Indeed, journalistic texts provide an excellent space for observing discursive constructions, where the lexicon related to environmental themes becomes more prominent and is central to the key concerns of modern humanity.. and scientific community, one of the measures announced by the government in 2012, namely the exploitation of shale gas, remains a divisive issue among Algerians, particularly within the political class. This division is reflected in the few protests that took place in Ain Salah (in the heart of the Algerian Sahara) at the beginning of 2015 and/or during the popular marches (Hirak) in 2019.

This work aims to study the lexical treatment applied by press discourse regarding the exploration and exploitation of shale gas[1] in Algeria. Thus, we pose the following question: What manifestations of lexical treatment are employed by journalists in producing their discourse to address the issue related to shale gas exploitation?

While the analysis seeks to highlight the discursive particularities of press articles dealing with environmental issues, it will also explain the use of certain lexical items related to the environment, particularly by utilizing energy-related terms.

1. Journalistic Discourse

1.1 Discursive Construction and Identity

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Although journalistic discourse exists alongside other discourses that structure the public sphere, it stands out due to its construction, which follows its own rules and modalities. In addition to its polyphonic nature, journalistic discourse is characterized by a certain enunciative heterogeneity (Moirand, 2007). It is primarily an inter-discourse, where information is co-constructed by combining the journalist's own words with those of others.

While it is capable of blending into other enunciations by incorporating sources of information, the journalist remains subjectively present in their discourse (Charaudeau, 1992).

Operating within an editorial identity, journalistic discourse is also shaped by the editorial line of each newspaper. Thus, the press article seems to be influenced by this editorial identity, which can impact the representation of others' discourse (Marnette, 2004).

1.2 Reported Speech and Paraphrase

When addressing environmental issues, journalists may use certain discursive tools, among which reported speech and paraphrase can be distinguished.

Reported speech, which has evolved since antiquity (Plato, Cicero), has been the subject of numerous linguistic studies in contemporary times (Jakobson, 1963; Ducrot, 1984; Rosier, 2008). It is defined as "the linguistic forms used to report or represent, either directly or indirectly, someone else's discourse. [...] Reporting means both quoting, that is, reproducing a segment of spoken or written text in its entirety, but also summarizing, rephrasing, or even evoking or interpreting a discourse" (Rosier, 2008: 3).

Thus, reported speech is characterized by a certain degree of "manipulation" performed by the reporter (journalist) according to their intent. The journalist also has another discursive tool at their disposal: paraphrase, where they are required to rephrase the reality they describe.

1.3 Discursive Techniques Employed

The interactions between climate science, politics, the media, and the public are complex and dynamic. It is evident that science and politics influence media reporting and public understanding. However, it is equally true that journalism and public concerns influence ongoing decisions and activities in the field of climate science and environmental policies. While journalists have traditionally viewed their role as information disseminators rather than educators, the distinction between these two roles becomes blurred in practice (Boykoff, M. T. & Roberts, J. T., 2007:08).

In today's media landscape, editorial techniques play a crucial role in communicating and shaping perceptions of environmental issues. Journalists use various linguistic strategies, such as impactful metaphors like "the planet is suffocating" to evoke emotional responses and encourage action. Structuring the discourse through anecdotes or concrete examples makes environmental problems more tangible to the public. Similarly, incorporating numerical data aims to lend credibility to the discourse, although their presentation can sometimes mislead or exaggerate the facts. Word choice and tone also subtly influence readers' reactions by amplifying the perception of a crisis. These techniques reveal how the media can shape attitudes towards ecological issues.

1.4 Press Discourse and Public Opinion

The media significantly influence public opinions, awareness, and attitudes regarding environmental issues. Environmental ethics can help address the conflict between development and conservation, as demonstrated in discussions about shale gas in the Karoo (South Africa). Effective media coverage highlights environmental concerns and their potential impact on local communities and ecosystems.

The extraction of shale gas in the Karoo is controversial, reflecting broader African debates on development and the environment. Media coverage can shape public opinion by constructing narratives and amplifying discussions. Journalists must strike a balance between economic and environmental concerns.

Climate change and the transition to renewable energy are major issues in Africa. The media can promote sustainable energy, environmental justice, and resilience by showcasing successful projects. By providing accurate information and diverse opinions on environmental concerns, the media encourage people to take action and hold policymakers accountable.

The media's influence on environmental attitudes is significant. Media outlets help explain complex environmental issues through honest reporting, in-depth analysis, and ethical journalism. They motivate people to adopt sustainable practices and engage in environmental advocacy (Kelbessa & Dewo, 2022).

2. The Environment: Concepts and Definitions

Known for its variable and evolving nature, language continually develops by creating new words, especially in the context of environmental discourse.

Indeed, the environment is one of the key topics that constantly fuels public debate. With its numerous themes (pollution, natural resources, agriculture, health, etc.) and subdomains (technical, scientific, social, economic, etc.), its lexical network expands rapidly and continuously. The way these various aspects are addressed differs depending on whether the speaker is an industrialist, a politician, an environmentalist, a scientist, or an ordinary citizen.

For instance, the measure proposed by the Algerian government regarding shale gas exploitation cannot be discussed solely from a scientific or industrial (economic) perspective, as it is a sensitive debate sometimes linked to past disasters, such as groundwater contamination in certain countries (the United States, Australia, etc.).

Today, many new words are emerging, often associated with new technologies, but also as a result of explorations in environmental fields. This is why it seems necessary to define certain fundamental terms such as: Environment, Nature, Ecology, etc.

Etymologically composed of the root "vir," meaning "turn" or "circle," the term "environment" has undergone certain evolution over time, despite its polysemous nature. According to the Larousse dictionary, it is defined as: "the set of natural or artificial elements that condition human life."[2] This definition, while clear, closely resembles that of the word "nature," which is limited in its meaning to the simple "material reality," referring to the physical aspect alone, independent of any human activity. However, human activity is at the core of the relationship between humans and the environment.

Lastly, it is nearly impossible to discuss the notion of "environment" without confusing it with "ecology," yet the two concepts are quite different. Literally, "ecology" refers to "the science of habitat," derived from the Greek "Oikos" meaning "house," and "logos" meaning "science." As we have seen, "environment" refers solely to the interactions between humans and their surroundings, whereas ecology is "the science that studies the relationships between living beings (humans, animals, plants) and the organic or inorganic environment in which they live."[3]

3. Methodology

From a methodological standpoint, we selected a corpus of 11 press articles taken from the Algerian Francophone daily newspaper La Nouvelle République between 2012 and 2014.

Launched in 1998, La Nouvelle République is a general news daily in tabloid format with an average circulation of 30,000 copies per day. In addition to national news, it covers international affairs, politics, sports, culture, and economics. It is freely accessible online through its website.

The choice of this newspaper was based on the sufficient number of relevant articles compared to other dailies. However, we faced challenges in retrieving articles related to our topic of study (shale gas exploitation) due to the sensitivity of the issue.

3.1 The Corpus

The 11 selected press articles clearly address the issue of shale gas exploitation and were published in various sections: current events, environment, economy, etc.

3.2 Analysis Method

Our study follows a discourse analysis approach. To highlight the lexical treatment performed by the journalist in their discursive production, we focus on the words used in the field of the environment in general and those specific to the energy sector in particular.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Understanding environmental themes, especially a topic like shale gas exploitation, requires the use of specific terminology from this field and the construction of a "lexical network [that] is subject to multiple evolutions and variations, as it is certainly one of the most debated and perpetually questioned themes" (La Corte, 2017:207).

We begin by analyzing the lexicon from the energy sector. In the second part, we focus on the use of certain concepts related to the environment.

4.1 The Words of Energy

After an initial reading of the corpus, without conducting a statistical analysis, we noted the frequency of energy-related terms with the following results: 105 occurrences of "gas," including 96 for "shale gas" and 4 for "non-conventional gas"; 40 occurrences of "energy," including 13 for "renewable energies"; 25 occurrences of "hydrocarbons"; 9 for "electricity"; 7 for "solar"; 5 for "photovoltaic"; and 4 for "oil."

These findings indicate that the journalist's discourse is dominated by the issue of shale gas. Conversely, oil is rarely mentioned and often concealed under the term "conventional hydrocarbons." Renewable energies, particularly solar, are progressively gaining prominence in the discourse.

Throughout the articles, the journalist presents the positive perspective of official institutions regarding shale gas exploitation, highlighting their opinions.

"Reserves of 600 trillion cubic meters of shale gas (**four times the country's current reserves**) have been revealed over an area of 180,000 km. [...] **The future of Sonatrach** will depend on the results of shale gas exploitation," said Abdelhamid Zerguine. (La NR, July 14, 2012)

"According to Youcef Yousfi, Algeria's shale gas reserves are **inexhaustible** [...] with profitability of around 1.5 billion cubic meters of gas per kilometer," a rate he considers significant. (La NR, January 12, 2013)

"The minister predicts that shale gas exploitation, along with related energy and industrial activities, will **create approximately 100,000 new jobs**." (La NR, January 12, 2013)

This particularly positive perception suggests that shale gas is an "inexhaustible energy" whose exploitation is "essential" to meet the country's energy needs and finance investment projects. This new energy resource could create up to "100,000 new jobs" while preserving existing ones, as oil is a depleting resource. In other words, shale gas is seen as a crucial opportunity in the energy sector, and failing to exploit it would be considered "irresponsible."

Although renewable energies, primarily solar, are closely linked to concepts like "energy efficiency" and "employment," their "economic" and "ecological" value is still emphasized.

"The action plan emphasizes the development of renewable energies and **energy efficiency** [...] through photovoltaic production, which is a **government priority**." (La NR, February 19, 2014).

"By 2024, there could be 4000 MW of renewable energy, primarily solar. Expected impacts include saving nearly 240 billion cubic meters of natural gas, preventing the emission of 200 million tons of CO2, and developing a network of **PMEs** throughout the value chain of components dedicated to renewable energies." (La NR, May 5, 2014).

Finally, energy sources considered alternatives to oil, such as solar energy and shale gas, are treated similarly, without distinction, by being linked to the lexical fields of employment and economic recovery.

4.2 The Words of the Environment

In its ordinary sense, the term "shale gas" does not evoke something frightening or anxiety-inducing. However, the numerous disasters directly caused by this type of natural gas in different countries (notably in the United States, Canada, and Australia) have gradually created the perception of an impending danger for our country. Consequently, this concept has become associated with words carrying negative connotations, such as: "fear, pollution, illness, risk, etc."

"Some deputies did not hesitate to describe shale gas with the most alarming terms: **poisoned gift**, **time bomb**, and even called for abandoning this risky venture." (La NR, January 12, 2013)

In response to this situation, official institutions have opted for more abstract terms like "non-conventional gas" or "non-conventional hydrocarbons," suggesting that shale gas and natural gas are essentially the same.

"One of the reasons for revising the hydrocarbons law was the introduction of provisions facilitating investment in non-conventional hydrocarbons." (La NR, July 9, 2013)

"Youcef Yousfi went further in his opening address at the study days on non-conventional gas organized by the Algerian Petroleum Institute, stating, 'We are advanced enough to propose concrete projects for **non-conventional hydrocarbons**.'" (La NR, October 12, 2013)

"The Energy Minister deems it irresponsible not to exploit shale gas given Algeria's significant potential in non-conventional hydrocarbons." (LNR, December 22, 2013).

5. Conclusion and Perspectives

In his discourse, the journalist tends to use relatively moderate vocabulary regarding environmental protection, which is often overshadowed by the country's economic interests. In contrast, more emphasis is placed on energy-related terms. Given Algeria's dependence on conventional hydrocarbons (oil and natural gas), shale gas is framed as essential for exploitation, while renewable energies, particularly solar, are seen as alternative energy sources.

The study is limited by its small corpus and reliance on a single press source, preventing deeper statistical analysis. Future research could explore dialogism and argumentation in discourse analysis.

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Endnotes

1. "Shale gas is a hydrocarbon found in shale rock layers at depths between 2,000 and 3,000 meters [...] Its extraction is difficult, and it is through fracturing the rock with a mixture of water, sand, and chemicals that methane is released ; this process is referred to as hydraulic fracturing." (Chailleux, 2015:14).
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