

## NOTES AND REVIEWS

**Dragoş Vlad Topală, *The American military language during the Vietnam war. Elements of psycho-linguistic analysis*, Craiova, Universitaria Press, 2020, 314 p.**

Unique amongst the recent editorial publications, the present book proposes an especially exciting subject, that is, the manner in which an army conflict that lasted for 11 years, carried out between two unequal forces – an underdeveloped country of the tropical region (Vietnam) and one of the greatest powers of the world (USA) – influenced the language of the involved American militaries, at different levels, within the respective conflict. The words/phrases used by them proved to be a safety valve that allowed the opponents to escape, at least from terminological point of view, the extremely violent reality of the war. The war, whose effects and psychological traumas extended beyond its ending, and whose consequences were captured by folkloric creations that emerged simultaneously or after the conflict, meant to reveal these traumas.

The creation of such a work requires an extremely thorough endeavour (the terms were chosen after a rigorous selection, owing to psycho-linguistic, of stylistic and formal relevance criteria), which assumes the correct identification of the English word/phrase meaning, profound knowledge in psycho-linguistics, which imply an inter-disciplinary analysis of the terms (the contextual-dynamic methodology), knowledge in history and military technics: all these represent aspects that the author has and operates effortlessly with.

The work begins with an ample *Introduction* (pp. 9-33), in which Mr. Dragoş Topală makes a separate analysis of several aspects. The first of them refers to the factors that influenced the emerging of a terminology, that is: the average age of the American fighters (especially recruits), established at 19 years old, characterised through the lack of the neuro-affective maturity; the geographic and climate details specific for Vietnam; the impossibility to identify the enemy, under the circumstances of a conflict that was not fought face-to-face; the use of the modern fighting gears (especially helicopters), which created ambivalent psychic reactions (aggressivity / fear).

Another aspect concerns the manner in which the American militaries behaved with the Vietnamese people, the physical and language aggression representing one of the “patterns” of this conflict; the aggressivity of the Americans is propagated deep in the history of this country, to the age of the Wild West conquering, a period associated, in the American collective mentality, to adventure, courage, the mastering of the nature surviving techniques etc.; the Vietnam becomes now the new Wild West, and the geographic and vegetal similitude between the two determines the borrowing of some terms specific to the Amerindian toponymy, and the carrying out of some actions that had a correspondent in that period. The horse including, which was used by the wild-west explorer, finds a correspondent now, yet at another different level, that of the airborne “cavalry”: the helicopter becomes “the symbol of the overwhelming military superiority” (p. 16), and the pilots use a language in which the metaphor of the hunting is frequently met. The animalier metaphor appears, as well, quite frequently: “the bird” has, for instance, a double signification: of flying apparatus, the helicopter, but, in the same time, it represents the symbol for freedom.

From the terminological point of view, the racism and aggressivity is reflected abundantly in the list of the synonyms used with the purpose of characterising the Vietnamese (“gook”, “dink”, “slopehead” etc.). Synonymic series are registered on

addressing few verbs: “to kill” and “to die”, emerged from the fear/superstition of talking about the death directly.

The radio communication during the war has its own codes: they were aiming at the precision of the communication act, along with its safety. In order to obtain them, the messages were cyphered through the use of certain commercial names, inaccessible to the indigenous, “because they did not have access to the contextual-dynamic socio-economic landmarks from the USA” (p. 23).

Moreover, the inter-ethnic communication, the psychological method through which, the both opponents were evaluating each other, is equally important: nonetheless, in this process, due to the minimal common vocabulary, the paraverbal expressing was intensively involved (tonality, intonation, debit etc.)

Concerning the selected words, their presentation took place on two levels: “The first part includes the selected terms and syntagms, with translation into the Romanian language, analysed according to their specificity and complexity... The second part includes the quotations for presenting the words in context” (p. 31) – this latter aspect addressing the English speakers.

The analysis, the translation, the interpretation, the classification (thematic/semantic and/or formal) belong to the author who consulted dictionaries, journals, memoires, novels, war records, history scientific and literary analysis works, all having as a central point the Vietnam war. The result is an extremely interesting book on a used terminology, actually not by some militaries, but by civilians who tried to escape from a space that was totally unfamiliar and hostile, as Vietnam, with the help of the words.

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