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"Beyond Morality." Discourse on Homosexuality in Croatian Newspapers from the Sociosemiotic Perspective: Comparison of Two Periods

1. Introductory notes[1]

This paper aims to analyse and compare two newspaper articles dealing with issues of gay people in Croatia that were published in two different periods. The first article dates from the early 1990s, which was the starting point of contemporary Croatian gay activism. The second was published 16 years later, in 2008, within a different social and political context. It was the period when gay activism in Croatia had already reached some of its aims, and when the discourse on homosexuality had become more visible and acceptable in the media. In comparing these two periods, we focus on surface differences between two newspaper articles, while at the deep level we look for similarities and unchanged features. Our perspective is sociosemiotic – it will be explained in more detail in the next section. For now, it needs to be stressed that we integrate both verbal and visual elements of the two articles, explore differences and similarities in the discursive strategies of constructing and representing homosexuality, and analyse differences and similarities in aspects of utterances and utterance actors involved.

Our aim is to show that, in the context of social and historical processes, discourse on homosexuality has changed its discursive strategies, utterance aspects and visual representations, but has, however, retained its hegemonic position and normative character until the present day.

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2. Theoretical issues – sociosemiotics and heteronormativity

2.1. Sociosemiotic perspective

Sociosemiotics is focused on the modes in which different social discourses construct, legitimate, recognize or attack systems of values and beliefs, as well as relations of power and domination in society.[2] It aims to examine their ideological effects and hegemonic processes, and to point out their discursive and semiotic nature.

Its basic premise is that all social phenomena, institutions, movements and relations exist within a universe of signs and meaning. The problem sociosemiotics is faced with is not, on the one hand, how society affects sign systems or, on the other, how sign systems and processes affect society. Rather, what is in the sociosemiotic focus is the way society relates to itself, the way it represents and reflects itself in the sign systems, texts, discourses and narratives it produces, by itself and within itself. Here the "social" is not an empirically given existing a priori, but a constructed effect of meaning. This means that sociosemiotics does not study the "social" directly, like sociology or cultural anthropology, for instance, but is taken as a set of discourses, texts and practices. It is interested in how "society" constructs itself as an empiric, objective and obvious given, how it makes what is basically the result of constructed processes of meaning seem "natural", "normal", experiential, self-evident, ordinary or common-sense. From the semiotic perspective, "society" is seen as a set of discourses. In this perspective, all phenomena and objects are constructs, and the social reality itself is not given directly, but indirectly: it is strictly mediated through various effects of meaning. As the Italian semiotician Marrone emphasizes, "in fact, semiotically speaking, the social is not a hard empirical condition whose regulations must be identified, but a constructed effect of meaning whose procedures must be singled out." (Marrone 2001, XVI-XVII)

There are authors that shun according sociosemiotics an existence all of its own: M. P. Pozzato points out that there are no objects studied by general semiotics and, separately, objects studied by sociosemiotics, but rather objects that can be studied under a sociosemiotic profile (Pozzato 2001, 213). Thus, sociosemiotics would not be a special branch of semiotics simply dealing with social facts, the social dimension of signs or meaning. Consequently, it would not be a discipline

detached from general semiotics, with a specific object of study. Sociosemiotics would rather qualify as an approach, a view, a different way to look at things; it is (just) a perspective whose nature is analytic and qualitative. Its main contribution which then makes it possible to justify its existence side by side with semiotics lies in replacing the study of sign systems with the study of the dynamics inherent in social interactions and interactions of meaning, as well as with the study of the construction of meaning understood as an object of social conflicts, power, ideology, manipulation, interest and persuasion. As put by Landowski, one of its founders, sociosemiotics adds an important premise: the possibility of taking into account cultural and value systems, and their transformations (Landowski 1999, 189). In this way, language and social practices acquire clear strategic valency, and the social scene turns into a field of manipulation, manoeuvring, negotiation, accord, difference, cooperative or contrasting ways of behaviour (Landowski 1999, 189).

The sociosemiotic point of view looks for meaning as socially inscribed, as constructed to become an object of social confrontation, power, constitution, decomposition of groups and positions. It takes notice of the constant struggle to reach and legitimatize a particular discursive position as well as of the relationships existing between discursive formations and systems of beliefs, values and ideologies. In this respect, according to Semprini, sociosemiotics tries to critically analyse society, in which process the main object is no longer the traditional categories of historicist, political-science and sociologic analysis, but categories pertaining to the communication universe (Semprini 2003, 23).

Today, sociosemiotics is no longer satisfied with studying participants that have been textualized (narrators and actants), that is, inscribed into the textual substance of an utterance or of a given text. It equally studies relations connecting these textual figures to the supposed “real” social participants, inscribed into the overall “real” sociocultural area (Semprini 1997, 19). This is because messages circulating in the semiosphere are not absolute objects deprived of procedures implying interpretative cooperation (Eco 1979, 58)[3] and knowledge. The opposite is true, and this dynamic is one of the fundamental principles governing the way social discourses function (Semprini 1997, 17).

As it was stated earlier, the sociosemiotic perspective emphasizes the importance of meanings and values as necessary for the effectiveness of ideological processes and actions: this implies the impact of the social discourses in spreading, circulating, cultivating and subverting these ideas and values. This brings us to the next two key concepts relevant for this theoretical framework and analysis that need to be elaborated: possible worlds (Semprini 1997, 20; Semprini 2003, 19) and stereotypes.

The concept of possible worlds is elaborated on the basis of rethinking the role of the media in the semiosphere. According to Semprini, three instances are important in this context: in their basis, the media enter into complex relations with practical conditions of their own production, with their audience, and with the world they rely on. Defining these three instances and relations established between them allows for the description of a possible world, a concept referring to a universe different media are based on (Semprini 1997, 139). Different media – in our case newspapers – set up a certain possible world that represents a specific and coherent system of values, ideologies, actors and situations that all together offer a version of the "real world", a version of "reality", which is constructed using the processes of selection, elimination and development (Semprini 1997, 139; see also Wodak 2006, 126). For instance, some topics are filtrated and rarely mentioned, some are systematically ignored, and the third are, conversely, very present and extensively elaborated. These processes lead to specific systems of representing the world.

Semprini therefore propounds to make a clear cut between reality and representation, that is, between the real world on the one hand and the representation of the real world on the other. And a medium, in our case a newspaper, never offers a "real" description of an aspect of reality, in the relation of direct correspondence with a fact, a value or a situation from the "real" world. Simultaneously, a medium is never limited to simply presenting the contents, but tries to achieve complex relations with its receivers (readers in the case of newspapers), with a specific text, and with the instances of its own production (Semprini 1997, 140). These relations together play an underlying role in articulating and forming the possible world constructed by the medium. In this perspective, the old semiotic dialectics between the textual and the "real" world becomes reformulated as dialectics between, on the one hand, the represented world – presented by a text – and, on the other hand, the world constituted with the accumulation of knowledge, beliefs and

representations, which is stabilized and objectivized enough so that it can function as a point of reference for a relevant number of individuals. These two worlds are, therefore, in the relation of the complementary: one cannot have sense without relying on the other. In addition, Semprini emphasizes that the textual world, because of its mediation, is in its essence selective: it cannot represent more than one fragment, one aspect of the "real" world (Semprini 1997, 143).

Possible worlds rely on stereotypes, another concept widely attested in our corpus for analysis. Once stereotypes are produced, every new representation is based on these established stereotypes, and readers find it credible just because its elements fit into the characteristics of an a priori existing stereotype. If the representation moves away from stereotypes, the represented object loses its "symbolic clearness" (Semprini 1997, 272), and readers can reject or question it. In other words, every "new" representation is accepted if it fits into previously existing topoi, resulting in their confirmation and reinforcement. Stereotypes and possible worlds draw on imaginaries, that is, imaginaries are evoked by the constant use of concrete concepts or practices. It is by this evoking, also constantly repeated, that stereotypes are reinforced, made more stable and strongly positioned. On the other hand, the imaginary evoked by a concrete concept or practice can be defined as a set of attributions and characterizations, usually non-rational and supra-individual in their nature. It is comprised of different types of characteristics and elements: symbolic, mythological, historical, social, cultural, technical elements combined with contextual, collective and individual dimensions acting together in the process of its formation. Semprini stresses double actions that work in the formation of an imaginary. What is emphasized on the one hand is the importance of personal knowledge, experiences and beliefs that are linked to the universe of an imaginary. On the other hand, a relevant role is played by different social discourses that circulate the semiosphere in a particular moment and that refer to the universe of this imaginary (Semprini 1997, 117): advertising discourse, political discourse, discourse of law, activism, different information (medical, scientific, popular), gossip, personal practices and experiences directly transmitted form one person to another. It will be demonstrated in the analysis that discourse on homosexuality deeply relies on evoking stereotypes that in their turn evoke heteronormative systems of values and ideas, both in the "older" and "newer" newspaper articles.

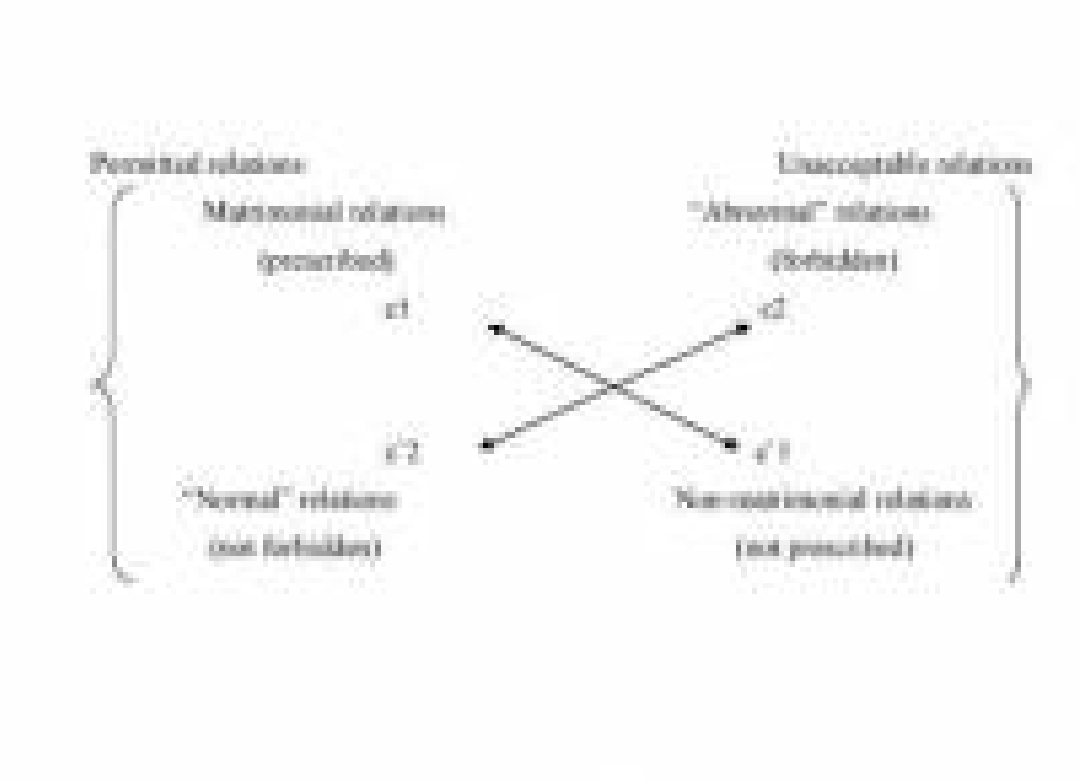
2.2. Heteronormativity

According to the GLBTQ encyclopedia on the Web, heteronormativity "is the assumption that heterosexuality and heterosexual norms are universal or at least the only acceptable conditions. Closely related to heterosexism,[4] heteronormativity negatively affects GLBTQ people in a host of ways, from actively oppressing those who do not fulfill heterosexual expectations to rendering sexual dissidents invisible." (http://www.glbtq.com/glossary.php?id=21; last visited in January 2011) In somewhat simplified terms, it could be stated that heterosexuality is historically constructed as a socially privileged and desirable category, while homosexuality is, at the same time, marked as deviant, undesirable, and non-privileged. This means that one term cannot exist and function without the other – only their mutual interdependency enables both terms to achieve their full sense and purpose. As S. Seidman describes, "'Heterosexuality' has meaning only in relation to 'homosexuality'; the coherence of the former is built on the exclusion, repression, and repudiation of the latter. These two terms form an interdependent, hierarchical relation of signification." (Seidman 1994, 130) Described in this way, this opposition could be defined as a semic category from the semiotic and sociosemiotic standpoints. A semic category is defined within the Paris School of Semiotics as an opposition of two different meanings belonging to the same field that are not connected to each other by a purely logical relation of an a priori negation, but, on the contrary, by the opposition in meaning linked to the way they function in a particular text, culture, society or historical period (Greimas, Courtés 1993, 34). Designating the pair heterosexuality/homosexuality as a semic category does not imply simply distributing assigned connotations and values to each member of the pair along the lines of positive/negative, desirable/undesirable, required/sanctioned. Within each member of the pair, ranking is present: some forms of expressions of heterosexuality or homosexuality are more privileged than others, while some are to a certain point even socially sanctioned. In the "heteronormative hierarchy" (Cameron, Kulick 2006, 165), some expressions of heterosexuality are more equal than others and are favoured: monogamous sexuality in matrimonial relations, reproductive sexual behaviour, and conventional and traditional gender roles. Cameron and Kulick remark, "All these aspects of

heteronormativity have reflexes in everyday linguistic practice," (Cameron, Kulick, 2006, 165) and, we can add, in other semiotic practices as well.[5]

The combination of privileged and unprivileged connotations that achieve their purpose in the "heteronormative hierarchy" can be exposed and elaborated using a very frequent model of (socio)semiotic analysis – the semiotic square.[6] It was originally introduced by A. J. Greimas and his collaborator F. Rastier in 1968, in the paper entitled "The Interactions of Semiotic Constraints" and published in the English language in the journal Yale French Studies. Discussing the nature of the social model of sexual relations, and drawing on Lévi-Strauss' structural anthropology, Greimas and Rastier have proposed the following model (taken from Greimas, Rastier, 1968, 93):

One of the properties of the semiotic square is that it is a formal, not a substantial, model: it possesses standard forms that always remain the same, while the contents change according to the text, culture, society, historical period, political situation etc.



Writing the paper in 1968, Greimas and Rastier have found the following equivalences in traditional French society (Greimas, Rastier, 1968, 94):

c1 – conjugal love;

c2 – incest, homosexuality;

c'2 – adultery by the man (over and above conjugal love);

c'1 – adultery by the woman (over and above homosexuality, incest).

It is important to have in mind that "[t]he terms of the social model have no 'objective' content: thus, homosexuality is sometimes forbidden (New Zealand), sometimes not forbidden (among the Bororo); they are always situated, however, on an axis other than that of matrimonial relations, in which heterosexuality alone is permitted." (Greimas, Rastier, 1968, 94) In this model, then, homosexuality was situated in the field of "abnormal" relations (along with incest), in contrariety with the only permitted and highly valorized heterosexual matrimonial relations. For today's Croatian society, taking into consideration the political and social conditions (although not the legal ones) and public opinion, and drawing on the analysis of the two newspaper articles and possible worlds they construct, we propose a slightly different distribution of the content of the four forms of the semiotic square. In our opinion, the distribution would be the following:

c1 – conjugal love;

c2 – incest, paedophilia, rape etc;

c'2 – heterosexual adultery (both male and female);

c'1 – homosexuality.

Positioned in this way, homosexuality stands in negation of (contradiction to) the permitted and required heterosexual marriage. It is not situated in the same field with incest anymore, but now homosexuality implies incest, as well as it implies paedophilia and rape, which are very often represented in the media – but also in the "real" world – as linked to homosexuality. It still remains in the field of socially unacceptable relations, as the definition of heteronormativity presupposes.

In the field of linguistics and sociosemiotics, heteronormativity is understood as a discursive principle that organizes sexuality in general, including gay populations, which are part of its paradigm. As S. Seidman stresses, when questioning the relation between constructions of gay identities and heteronormativity, "Gay identity constructions reinforce the dominant hetero/homo

sexual code with its heteronormativity. If homosexuality and heterosexuality are a coupling in which each presupposes the other, each being present in the invocation of the other, and in which this coupling assumes hierarchical forms, then the epistemic and political project of identifying a gay subject reinforces and reproduces this hierarchical figure." (Seidman, 1994, 130)

Heteronormativity also shapes the forms of gender identity and behaviour (Cameron & Kulick, 2003, 141). The primary sign of gender "normality" is in fact heterosexuality itself: a real, true man loves women, and a real, true woman loves men. As Cameron and Kulick stress, heteronormativity can be defined as "those structures, institutions, relations and actions that promote and produce heterosexuality as natural, self-evident, desirable, privileged and necessary." (Cameron & Kulick, 2003, 55)

A potential field of research within (socio)semiotics and human sexuality could be elaborated if we adopt the thesis that sexuality and sexual behaviour are in fact semiotically coded and that they can be analysed using semiotic methods and instruments. We might call this process queering (socio)semiotics.

3. Corpus

The corpus for the analysis consists of two newspaper articles:

1. Kad žene vole žene ("When women love women"), NOVA, magazine for women and family, Novi list, Rijeka, published on 27th October 1992, and

2. Mama (59): Moja kći je lezbijka. Ali najvažnije mi je ipak da bude sretna ("Mum (59): My daughter is a lesbian. Still, the most important thing for me is her happiness"), Jutarnji list, Zagreb, dated 21st and 22nd May 2008.

The first article tries to simultaneously describe both the contemporary (the one in 1992) and the past (historical) position of gay men and lesbians in general and in Croatia. It attempts to provide an overall view of "homosexualism" (homoseksualizam), as the writer names it. The second article brings the confession of an anonymous mother who narrates the process of accepting her daughter's homosexuality, starting from the initial shock to the eventual acceptance. Her narrative incorporates professional comments by an expert, who, from a psychological standpoint, explains

to the readers about everyday problems of parents whose children are gay or lesbian, as well as about problems of gay men and lesbians themselves.

Both newspaper articles were published on the occasions of establishing organizations having to do with the LGBT population: in the first case it was the starting of Ligma – the first organization for homosexual persons in Croatia, while in the second it was the founding of the Counselling centre for the parents of homosexual and bisexual persons, started up within the lesbian organization Kontra.

4. Analysis

4.1. US Senate, our colleagues and linguistics

The world in the article from 1992 is sharply divided into two groups: them (gay persons) and us (the writer, the paper, the readers and other members of the heterosexual majority). The delineation is most obviously made by using personal (but also other) pronouns, and personal verb endings[7] .

Svi zaboga znamo da američki Senat naprosto vrvi od homoseksualaca i naravno da protiv toga nemamo ništa. No prihvatiti da je to kolega s kojim dijelimo radni stol sasvim je druga stvar (...).

“We all obviously know that the US Senate is practically swarming with homosexuals and, naturally, we have nothing against it. But to accept that the colleague with whom we share the desk is homosexual is a completely different thing (...).”

Although the paragraph starts with “We all ...” the second sentence makes it clear that this we is exclusive (but not in the usual linguistic sense), as is all: both expressions exclude the gay population.

Same is with nobody in the following example, which should have “everybody” as its referent, but which is clearly in opposition with them (meaning “gay people”).

(...) iako postoje, nitko ih ne primjećuje (...).

"Although they exist nobody notices them."

According to the article, however, the world is not as simple as that, in the sense that the category we (or us) is not as homogeneous as (it is implied) the category them is: it is obviously made up of different social actors with different levels of knowledge on (or lack of it) and different attitudes and opinions towards gay people. Firstly, there is the journalist as the teacher, represented by the personal pronoun I (and related verb endings), which is used as testimony and validation of personal opinions and experiences. Then there are the readers, as the learners, represented by the personal pronoun you[8] (and related verb endings), which is used in the context of stressing the need to "understand" and to be sympathetic and tolerant.[9] And finally, there is the "dominant culture" or "heterosexual environment", a complex subcategory (including notions like "science", "Middle Ages" and "the Bible") that at the same time both includes the journalist and the readers (in that they are all straight) and excludes them, because they are not unsympathetic or hostile towards gay people (or at least they will not be once they have read the article), as the heterosexual majority is.

The tone of the article is pedagogical (or educational) (Semprini 1997, 257-258): assuming the position of a teacher, the writer instructs the readers about something new, valuable and interesting, almost exotic, using the impersonal and objective tone and referring to (pseudo)scientific facts (linguistic, psychological) in order to ensure credibility and legitimacy of what has been said.

Engleski jezikoslovac imenom Philip Howard otkrio je proučavanjem nekih starih sudskih spisa (...)

"The English linguist Philip Howard has, studying some old judicial files, discovered (...)"

The writer, as a teacher, is an authority on the subject, a veteran with a lot of experience: she knows many homosexuals, and they are all promiscuous[10] (there is, however, a good psychological explanation for it involving internal and external problems: "a deep emotional conflict which homosexuals have in abundance". The position of the authority on the subject gives the writer the right to include the moralizing component into the text: promiscuity is bad because it

brings AIDS. The text, however, concedes that AIDS is as dangerous for heterosexuals as it is for homosexuals, mainly because both groups engage in prostitution. However, “male homosexuals were the ones to develop it especially well.”

The positioning of oneself as the authority on something, the moralizing component, referring to scientific facts are all part of the pedagogical discourse designed to transmit some kind of knowledge to those who lack it (whether they are aware of it or not), the knowledge being deemed in advance as valuable to transmit, and the process of transmitting being valued in itself.

However, instructing is not all that this (part of the) text does. It also adds an additional component of meaning to the word homosexuality (in fact, homosexualism, as the article calls it; see section 5.1.), confirming and justifying the prevailing stereotypical (heteronormative) view of gay people, particularly gay men, as promiscuous. Promiscuity thus becomes an integral part of the definition of homosexuality; combined with the moralizing component of the pedagogical style – and despite the writer's apparently tolerant attitude towards lesbians and gay men and her call for understanding and sympathy on the part of the readers – this results in the overall, justified and justifiable, view of homosexuality as something bad, corrupt, something to be condemned and avoided.

4.2. Daughter from Zagreb and her fiancée

Kad nam kći iz Zagreba za vikend stigne sa zaručnicom, pokušavam je tretirati kao što bih tretirala zeta, otvoreno i dobronamjerno.

“When our daughter, who lives in Zagreb, comes over the weekend with her fiancée[11] *I'm trying to behave towards her as I would behave towards a son-in-law, openly and kindly.”*

These words spoken by the mother in the second article, although very positive in the terms of accepting her daughter's sexual orientation, nevertheless reveal a deeper level of internalized heteronormativity. The mother treats her daughter's girlfriend (fiancée, as she says)[12] as she would treat a son-in-law. These words show the degree of the mother's acceptance of her daughter's lifestyle: she has come to terms with her daughter's homosexuality (as she says, she

and her “husband have got used to being parents of a lesbian”) and she does not expect her daughter to pretend that the girl she has brought home is just a friend. Her attitude is commendable and brings hope to many young lesbians and gay men who have not come out to their parents yet.

On another plane, however, her words not only reflect the social reality that homosexual couples are faced with, but also perpetuate the normative status of heterosexuality. In order to better understand the exact way in which this normative framework of heterosexuality works, we need to start with the word meaning. A son-in-law is a person who your adult child has chosen to spend life (or part of it) with as an intimate partner, and as such becomes a part of your family, deserving your acceptance and respect. However, a son-in-law is necessarily a man,[13] and your child, as contemporary social mores (still) require, is a woman. (This might be changing elsewhere, but not yet in Croatia). A couple to be legally married (which is connoted in the “in-law” part in English), then, is made up of a man and a woman, and there is no other way, no other word to describe “a person who your adult child has chosen to spend (part of) life with and who has, accordingly, become (or is to become) a part of your family”, but by resorting to the term son-in-law (or daughter-in-law, as the case may be). But by using these terms, which are not only gendered, but presuppose the heterosexual relationship between your child and her/his chosen one, the heterosexual nature of sexuality is taken from among all other sexualities as a canonical form, as the only (right) form against which other (deviant) forms can be defined.

The article uses the objective-referential style (Semprini 1997, 258-259): the journalist is not present in the first person except on two occasions (“I asked”),[14] but only as a presenter, giving the story but not teaching – merely presenting the facts. She is a neutral medium, connecting the object (world) with the audience, pointing to the “objective” reality, which is not manipulated, handled in any way, but presented as it is. Needless to say, this apparent non-manipulation – being the result of a semiotic strategy – is manipulation.

The writer does not – and indeed, being almost invisible, cannot – hold the position of the expert (as was the case in the first article); for this, three other actors are involved: the mother, as the veteran – having a lot of experience on coping with her daughter's sexuality; the psychologist, as the scholar – having theoretical knowledge on the subject; and the activist, as (in this context) the

enthusiast – having the passion for, as well as an intensive relationship with, the object of her expertise.

4.3. Attractive, successful and deeply religious

In the course of her story, the mother – the veteran in Semprini's terms – from the more recent article mentions certain characteristics of her daughter that she (obviously) considers important. She says:

Pazite, naša kći je zgodna i vrlo uspješna mlada žena koja u Zagrebu ima menadžersku poziciju i svoje mjesto u društvu. Ona je duboka vjernica koja volontira i pomaže drugima, jako je vole u zagrebačkoj župi gdje volontira (...)

"Mind you, our daughter is an attractive and a very successful young woman who holds a managerial position in Zagreb and has her own place in society. She is deeply religious and does volunteer work helping the needy; she is very much loved in the Parish of Zagreb, where she does her volunteer work (...)"

The words of the mother can be analysed at three different levels, which will be outlined here. At level 1 (the surface level or the level closest to the surface), the mother's words serve to show that her daughter is no different from other, heterosexual, people (as they are perceived). She is a young person living in Zagreb, has a job and, being a devout Catholic, does volunteer work. Since this text serves as a close-up of a life of a gay person, she is taken as a representative of the gay population in general, who, then, are not a group of people meeting in secret and fearing AIDS any more (as presented in the first article), they are just like anybody else: they (too) have jobs, they (too) engage in activities other people engage in (e.g. being active at a local church), they (too) can be liked and considered attractive. In other words, they lead "normal" lives. It is an affirmative view of the gay population – the article is trying to bridge the gap between us and them, heterosexual and gay, incorporating all (sexual) varieties under the same heading of "normal". The problem with this apparently positive picture is clearly visible at a deeper level (level 2): it is in the "too" overtones, given in brackets above. If lesbians and gay men were really considered to be the same as the heterosexual majority, there would be no need to mention or emphasize this; it would go without saying. If there is a need to stress the sameness (as opposed to otherness) of the gay

population with the heterosexual population, then this sameness cannot be self-evident; it is obviously not perceived as such. Hence the mother's need to emphasize her daughter's fitting into the society at large – she does not want her to be perceived as different, a stereotypical lesbian, freakish, the "other". By describing her daughter as "deeply religious" the mother presents her as a traditional person, of high moral values;[15] as somebody who does not stand out from the rest (in a country where almost 90% of people declare themselves Catholics), somebody who belongs. By calling her "attractive" she implies that her daughter's lesbianism does not show and that she is not a lesbian because she is plain or unattractive to men (it is, therefore, her choice). By mentioning her "managerial position" and status she claims her daughter is not unemployed (or simply lazy), a lowlife, or engaging in activist work, for example; she has a well-paid job and status in society. Therefore, she is a valuable member of this (heterosexual) society and is exactly what gay people are not, she is exactly their opposite. She is almost heterosexual; she could be, but for that tiny little difference.

Therefore, by giving her view of who her daughter is and where she stands in relation to the society in general and in relation to other gay people, the mother closes the gap between her daughter and the (heterosexual) society at large, at the same time widening the one between the daughter (that is, the society) and the stereotypical lesbians and gay people in general, whose characteristics are implied. They are atheists (or perhaps belong to another, non-traditional church or religious group), amoral or even perverse, uneducated, unemployed or have low-paid jobs, troublesome; lesbians, in addition, are ugly and undesirable. All these (negative) characteristics implied and reinforced by their opposites mentioned in the text are stereotypes about gay men and lesbians that confirm and validate, as well as perpetuate, heterosexuality as the only normative and normal variety of not only sexuality but also the way of life and the view of the world.

However, only at a still deeper level (level 3) does it become clear that being just like the heterosexual majority except in one's choice of partners is not enough: a lesbian or a gay man has to be somehow better. The daughter described in the article is not an average person. Her religious behaviour is not average: she is a volunteer at her local church, and helps the needy. Her job is also above average: she is a manager, high up the social ladder. And she is attractive, which is in this context taken as merit. The mother's words, therefore, are given as a kind of justification

of her daughter's lifestyle, of her daughter as a human being (almost as an apology offered in order to justify her daughter to the journalist, to the readers, to herself): despite being a lesbian, she is very valuable to the society because she excels in the things she does and because her good qualities are superior to those of others. This overstressing of the daughter's good sides suggest that gay people could never be the same as heterosexuals, they would always need to be better to compensate or even to atone for their being somehow deficient in the matters of sexuality, and only by this excelling at everything they do and are could they be accepted by the society in general.

5. Comparison of the two periods

In this section we sum up some of the features of both articles analysed at the levels of vocabulary, utterance and the interplay between verbal and visual representation of gay men and lesbians. Special attention is paid to gender/sex and sexuality stereotypes and their links to the nineteenth-century medical discourses on homosexuality as sexual and gender inversion. The discourse on homosexuality in our corpus, especially in the 1992 article, possesses certain features that can be interpreted as relying on the nineteenth-century medical discourses and evoking negatively connoted stereotypes such as: pathology, gender inversion, deviance, promiscuity. This representation of homosexuality even had, in the first half of the 20th century, a wide impact on linguistic discussions on gay language, or, as it was called in that period, the language of homosexuality![16] And, from this perspective, language was seen as an expression of an individual's pathology and deviance.

5.1. NOVA, magazine for women and family, 1992

At the level of vocabulary, this article shows some specific yet, looking ex post, predictable features. The absence of "political activist language" is noticeable; it did not exist in Croatia in 1992. Some lexical usages that do not appear in the 2008 article are well attested here, for instance the word homoseksualizam (=homosexualism) instead of the later word homoseksualnost (=homosexuality)![17] The word gay appears as "new" and emerging, while the word peder is limited to being an exclusively pejorative expression (meaning "faggot"). In the tradition of mixing gender

and sexuality the obsolete word hermafroditi (=hermaphrodites), used instead of interseksualci (=intersexuals), is attested as well. The article heading, “When women love women”, reveals an apparent contradiction: obviously, the article is both on lesbians and gay men.

Apart from vocabulary, mixing gender performance and sexuality finds its manifestation in repetitive stereotypes on masculine lesbians and feminine gay men in the verbal part of the text (see section 5.3.). Images, however, are somehow different in their contents. The pictures are as if from a health magazine, or from a youth magazine. They evoke sex, but are medicalized, sanitized in a way. This choice of pictures is exemplified by two long-haired feminine women, holding each other around the waist, dressed only in vests (figure 1) and two naked men in a shower room (figure 2).

While the women are holding each other, the men have no physical contact.



Figure 1



Figure 2

Another picture shows a heavily made-up woman with an old-fashioned hairstyle, surrounded by roses (figure 3).

Her eyes are closed and perhaps she is thinking of the woman depicted in the crescent moon.



Figure 3

Or the woman in the moon could be the same woman with a different hairstyle, the same woman being somehow different. The presence of the crescent moon, unfortunately, calls menstrual period to mind and evokes the psychoanalytical frame of interpretation. There are no captions around the photos, however, and there are no attempts to link the photos with the text.

This contradiction, present in the relation of the verbal and visual contents of the newspaper article, produces a semiotically unsystematic and, still in semiotic terms, only vaguely articulated text in its whole. The contradiction arising from the interrelationship of the visual and the verbal indicates non-homogeneous discursive strategies in the production of the text: it is superficially thought-out and inadequately semiotically organized. The result is a sort of semiotic desultoriness – a pretty vaguely articulated semiotic organization that evokes different values, contents and systems of ideas. However, in spite of this vagueness and desultoriness, all the text's features, both verbal and visual, reveal their heteronormative basis.

At the level of utterance it is possible to single out the mise en scene, the “putting in the scene”, of relations between the enunciator and the enunciatee. Different communication strategies determine different types of possible discursive roles for each of the two protagonists the enunciator and the enunciatee of the discourse being uttered. The sender/enunciator can choose between the “personal” and the “objective” (neutral) discourse (Landowski 1999, 137). If he/she chooses the “objective” discourse, its nature will be neutral, and it will be distanced and will tend to establish the objective state of affairs with no need for confirmation, with no need for the sender's participation and its communion with the recipient/enunciatee. If he/she chooses the “personal” discourse, this will establish a relation that connects the enunciator to the enunciatee, requires their mutual cooperation and confirms their agreement and communion. It will be a discourse of a personal, not a neutral nature. The basic means used in order to detect whether a discourse is “personal” or “objective” is the analysis of personal pronouns. In the section 4.1., we have already demonstrated that the world of the article is sharply divided into two groups: them (gay persons) and us (the writer, the paper, the readers and other members of the heterosexual majority). The pronoun we/us is in its nature exclusive of gay population, and inclusive of the relation between the writer of the article and her readers.

On the one hand, the use of I – the journalist, writer of the article – is frequent, used as a testimony, with the aim to validate her personal opinions and experiences. On the other hand, the use of you when addressing the readers establishes a direct relation with them and calls for their mutual cooperation. It is especially visible in the context of stressing the need to “understand”, to be sympathetic and tolerant towards gay people, not to judge or reject them, but to accept them as they are. Lesbians and gay men are represented as victims of society, science and medicine, religion and their families. The writer calls for understanding and tolerance towards gay people, but they remain situated “on the other side”, there is a gap between us, normal and them, stigmatized. The object of the utterances, gay men and lesbians, never take over the language, they do not speak for themselves, but remain objectivized. Others – the journalist, a heterosexual – speaks for them. Although the article informs on the existence of a gay activist group in Zagreb – LIGMA – the discourse on gay men and lesbians evokes the private sphere of their lives surrounded by silence,

rejection, and intolerance. In this way they do not enter the “heterosexual spheres”, but remain without the right to appear and to speak.

5.2. Jutarnji list, 2008

At the level of vocabulary, new language appears in this article: for instance, the words coming out (used in its English form) and outati se (“to come out”) are very frequent. At the surface level, it indicates a sort of a new era for the circumstances in which gay people, and even their parents, find themselves: gay men and lesbians are now coming out of the closet, expressing deliberately their desires and preferences and occupying new positions in the contemporary Croatian society. On the other side, their parents also come out as parents of homosexual children. But at the deep level, this text is – as it was already demonstrated – relying on the same stereotypes as the previous one, and it is perpetuating almost the same heteronormative patterns. The next characteristic of the vocabulary supports this statement: the word gay, widespread in the activist vocabulary and in their publications, does not appear in the text at all. Instead, the word homoseksualac (“a homosexual”) is frequent. In this way, the article remains in the field of science and medicine, instead of entering the field of activism and human rights, for instance.

The division between us and them is not so sharp anymore in that the article deals with people (who definitely belong to the us part of the dichotomy) who are parents of gay children. The fact that the story is centered on parents is something a lot of people can relate to. It is not about a secret group of people, who “cannot be distinguished from other people waiting at the bus stop in any way”, and who gather in special, unknown, secret places from the first article. It is about somebody much closer to home, about the children of our neighbours, friends, colleagues, and there is a possibility it might be about our children as well.

At the level of utterance, an interesting split of the enunciator is attested here. This split is, on the one hand, implying the writer of the article, the journalist who is appearing here as a sort of a transmitter of the narrative (the mother’s story, the expert’s commentaries) and, at the same time, an intermediary between three instances: the mother whose child is lesbian, the professionals who are providing the readers with their expertise and, finally, the readers themselves, who function as the enunciatee of the utterance. The enunciator has almost erased herself from the utterance – she

limits herself to interrupting the mother's narrative with two questions only – and has given the right to speak to the witness, the mother who is narrating her story with confused and mixed feelings. Thus, the majority of the text is written as a testimony, in the first person, which gives the text the authenticity of "real" experiences and life stories, as well as originality. After the discourse has been taken by a professional who comments on parents' reactions regarding their children's homosexuality in general, the enunciator keeps her distance and takes over the role of a neutral mediator who is only representing the "objective" reality, state of affairs as it is. In fact, this illusion of objectivity and neutrality, as a result of utterance strategies, is manipulation (see section 4.2).

Thematically, the article is situated in the field of popular psychology: it deals with issues of parents' more or less successful acceptance of their child's homosexuality. Once again the private sphere is emphasized, and problems regarding parents who are looking for psychological help in dealing with those problems are brought into the focus. To a certain extent, activists in this article do take over the discourse and enter the "heterosexual sphere". Their words become important and referential; for instance, their words are quoted in the text, even in the separate part of the article, which is visually set off from the rest of the text. But again, the majority of gay men and lesbians remain without the right to speak, silenced and underestimated – in this article, again, somebody else, to whom competence is ascribed, speaks for them.

Visually, the professionals also appear as "authorized subjects" – they figure as experts regarding both sides – gay people and their parents (figure 4 and 5).

Two photos of professionals are reproduced, one of a psychologist dealing with issues of homosexual and bisexual persons, the other of an activist, the coordinator of the Counselling centre being founded.



Figure 4



Figure 5

In spite of the attributed competence, their actions are narrowed to the psychological dimension and private life (how to deal with the "problem") with no references to human rights and political activism. To sum up, in this article homosexuality and the lives of gay people are not represented as a political, but a psychological question.

The other pictures in this article are pictures of ordinary people, not posing for the photograph: two girls holding hands and a middle-aged woman depicted from the waist down, dressed in a skirt and flat-heeled shoes, holding a handbag – a parent. The picture is situated near the headline that reads "Mum (59): My daughter is a lesbian. Still, the most important thing for me is her happiness" and the subhead "Parents' coming out: how to deal with the sexual orientation of your child" (figure 6).

She could be anybody's mum, i.



Figure 6

e. the homosexuality of children is something that can happen to anyone with children. Still, her dark skirt, shot from behind, and the leg captured in movement evoke her closure in her own world and separation from other persons. She is distancing herself from the rest of the world and stays alone. The picture in this way somehow denies the content of the headline and subhead: the mother represented in this picture is not ready to speak of her child's homosexuality; she is not ready to come out yet, as the mother from the verbal part of the article has done.

5.3. Stereotypes – butches and queens

In addition to the stereotypes mentioned before (promiscuity, pathology, plain looks, atheism etc.; see sections 4.1. and 4.3.) that are more prominent either in one or in the other text, the stereotype

of lesbians as masculine (so-called butches) and gay men as effeminate (queens) is present in both articles, perpetuating the binary systems of gender/sex and sexuality. The 1992 text claims that people "carry the opposite in themselves," suggesting a feminine side to men and a masculine one to women. It confuses gender (variance) with sexuality, continuing the late nineteenth-century theory of homosexuality as gender reversal, according to which gay men and lesbians were "inverted": in order to be attracted to a person of one's own sex one had to feel and behave as belonging to the other, "opposite", sex. In other words, the "soul" of an invert[18] was not in accord with his/her "body."

Dugo je kažu potrebno da se čovjek oslobodi straha koji (...) uporno njeguje prema onome što kao suprotnost sebi samom sam u sebi nosi. Heteroseksualce koji se takvu osjećaju prepuste, muški homoseksualci izluđuju kao živi podsjednik na to da se jedan macho muškarac može transformirati u svoju feminizanu suprotnost i naravno obrnuto kada su u pitanju žene.

"They say it takes a long time for a person to get rid of the fear that (...) he[19] *stubbornly cultivates, the fear of that which he carries in himself as an opposite. Male heterosexuals who surrender to such a feeling are driven crazy by male homosexuals as a vivid reminder that a macho man can transform into his feminine opposite and, of course, vice versa, as regards women."*

Only by transforming into "the opposite" can a person be homosexual. The quality of "oppositeness" heavily relies on gender stereotypes, conventional gender roles and expected gender performance. This view is strongly based on the heterosexual model and serves to support it, justify it and perpetuate it as the only (right) kind of sexuality.

The more recent text uses gender behaviour and (expected) gender roles in order to explain homosexuality (lesbianism). The mother says:

Sad kad mislim retroaktivno, vidim da je oduvijek u parku mijenjala tri špangice za autić. – Kako je to bilo kad je njezin Tomboy odlučio (...).

"Looking back now, I realize that she would always exchange three hair slides for a toy car in the park. – What was it like when her tomboy decided (...)"

At no other point in the text is there any mention of the girl being masculine, except this once; in fact, she is described by her mother as an attractive young woman, a phrase that calls to mind a feminine look and behaviour. However, a stereotypical lesbian (i.e. a female invert) would be expected to display certain masculine traits. According to the theory of inversion, lesbianism would be expressed not only in a woman's choice of partners but also in her masculine behaviour and style of dress, as well as in a muscular body. A mannish lesbian (as she would be called in the 19th century),[20] therefore, can be spotted early on – already in childhood – in a girl's (tom)boyish behaviour. Thus, by exchanging her hair slides for toy cars (i.e. refusing to play her designated gender role), the daughter in this text is understood as showing early signs of lesbianism by behaving in a way expected of boys (wanting to play with cars), while not behaving in a way expected of girls (wanting to be beautiful and "accessorize"). This instance alone is considered by the mother to show tell-tale signs of her daughter's sexual orientation, which she (presumably) failed to notice, and is enough for the journalist to label the child tomboy.

Stereotypes, as sets of easily recognizable characteristics belonging to an individual seen as a representative of a whole (usually minority) group and used (and needed) to identify members of the group, are not of themselves and in themselves good or bad, positive or negative (Halberstam 1998, 180). Using stereotypes can (and does) result in reducing the heterogeneity of a given group to a single, and simple, type; however it must be noted that, on the other hand, a stereotype does represent a type that exists in the group it represents. In Halberstam's words, "the butch is a type of lesbian as well as a lesbian stereotype." (Halberstam 1998, 271); the label simply does not apply to all lesbians. The same goes for queens.

What is important, according to Halberstam, in deciding whether a stereotype is positive or negative, is intention. Speaking of films, she says, "if the queen or the butch is used only as a sign of that character's failure to assimilate, then obviously the stereotype props up a dominant system of gender and sexuality." (Halberstam 1998, 180) However, even stereotypes that are not used in such an obviously negative way still uphold the dominant heteronormative system, albeit not directly. The representation of gay men and lesbians that relies on established stereotypes confirms the stereotypes and sustains the very system they are anchored in, presenting heteronormativity as the only possible and viable system of organizing the everyday lives of people

(sexuality included). It is through this lens that every other (deviating and deviant) instance of behaviour, performance and look is presented, valorized and judged. Seen from this perspective, stereotypes cannot be but "bad."

6. What to conclude?

In the concluding remarks it should be noted that both newspaper articles show some differences and similarities at the levels of analysis examined.[21] Differences are apparent at the surface level, while at the deep level the discursive and semantic traits remain the same.

The article dating from 1992 constructs a very clear-cut world, divided into us (heterosexuals) and them (homosexuals), while in the 2008 article this line is no longer sustainable, because homosexuals can be the children of us (heterosexuals). The older article maintains an educational and pedagogical tone, and the more recent one aims to represent the objective reality, things as they are without the apparent personal involvement of the writer. Negative stereotypes relying on the nineteenth-century medical insights into homosexuality are numerous and more frequent in the first article, implying prostitution, promiscuity, gender reversal and deviance. Only the stereotype on gender reversal is retained explicitly in the second article. The 1992 article stresses the differences between a small and obscure group of homosexuals and the heterosexual majority, constructing the former as "Others", while in the 2008 article the sameness is emphasized: the protagonist of the mother's story is a valuable member of Croatian society, she is not the "Other". But a positive representation of one person here is not used for the strategy of generalization (all or at least the majority of gay people are alike, they are valuable society members), but of exclusion – the majority of gay men and lesbians still remain situated in the field of negatively connoted stereotypes, while the protagonist of the analysed story figures as an exception. This, in fact, shows the normative status of heterosexuality in the confrontation with gay men and lesbians: they need to be above average if they want to be accepted, and still have to keep silent about their sexual orientation. In the older article the gay population does not enter public spaces at all nor does it get the right to speak: they remain silenced, and somebody else (the enunciator, journalist, heterosexual) speaks for them. Conversely, the recent article assigns the right to speak to only a few actors to whom professional competence is ascribed. They appear as competent subjects in

the field, and their opinions and comments are evaluated as those of unquestioned authorities. But the field in question is psychology – homosexuality here figures as a psychological problem, in the same way as it was in the article from 1992. And apart from a few experts, the gay population in general has no right to speak and remains silenced again. Furthermore, both texts perpetuate the dominant binary system and reproduce stereotypes on homosexuality as gender inversion in the sense of inverted conventional gender roles and habitual gender performance.

Regarding the visual component of the texts, the article from Nova brings medicalized and sanitized pictures, evoking psychoanalytical concepts and frames, while the article from Jutarnji list shows everyday situations, ordinary people and competent experts. At the deep level, nevertheless, both visuals possess an articulated contradiction between verbal and visual parts of the texts: what they claim in the verbal part is not confirmed in the visuals, and vice versa.

The analysis shows that in the context of social and historical processes, discourse on homosexuality has indeed changed its discursive strategies, utterance aspects and visual representations, but has, on the other hand, retained its hegemonic position and normative character until the present day.

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Sociosemiotics is, among other issues, focused on the modes in which different social discourses construct, legitimate, recognize or attack systems of values and beliefs, as well as relations of power and domination in the society. It aims to examine their ideological effects, hegemonic processes, and to point out their discursive and semiotic nature. Sociosemiotic perspective emphasizes the importance of meanings and values as necessary for the effectiveness of ideological processes and actions: this implies the impacts of the social discourses in spreading, circulating, cultivating and subverting these ideas and values. In this paper we focus on two examples that show how such social discourses in their historic specificity affect the establishing and acceptance of heteronormative meanings and values. We aim to analyse heteronormativity as a discursive principle which organises sexuality in general, including the gay population who is part of its paradigm. In the context of social and historical processes, it changes its discursive strategies, utterance aspects and visual representations, retaining, however, its hegemonic position and normative character. Focusing on ideas and perspectives developed in the field of Greimasian French and Italian sociosemiotics, this paper aims to analyse and to compare two Croatian newspaper articles on the gay population in Croatia dating from two different periods: one from 1992 and the other from 2008. Sociosemiotic analysis integrates both verbal and visual elements of the two articles, and it explores the differences in the discursive strategies of the construction and representation of homosexuality, analyses the differences in aspects of utterances and utterance actors involved, as well as tries to examine how particular meanings are used for the critique or support of the dominant system of beliefs and values. This analysis shows that these concrete representations of homosexuality transform their discursive strategies moving towards empowering and more decisive types of discourses, but that in their deep (semiotic) level still remain in the setting of the dominant heteronormative paradigm.

[1] The research for this paper was supported by funding from the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports and Banco Popolare Croatia, under the project 130-0000000-0743 – Construction and Structure of Language Identity.

[2] Sociosemiotics (or socio-semiotics, as sometimes found in its early period) has its roots in the approach known as structural or generative semiotics, founded by A. J. Greimas and the Paris School of Semiotics. Its origins are francophone (it is widespread in France, Italy and Latin America), and one of its first theoreticians is considered to be E. Landowski (Dusi 2004, 383). It is possible to split it into three main constituents: sociosemiotics as a theory of reflection and modification, sociosemiotics as a theory of action and manipulation, and sociosemiotics as a study of social discourses (Traini 2006, 167; Landowski 1999, 71, 277; Semprini 1997, 81; Marrone 2001, XVI-XVII).

[3] According to Eco, on the one hand, a text or a picture (discourse in today's terminology) is pregnant with an infinite number of meanings. On the other hand, these meanings are actively shaped by persons who are undertaking interpretation. It is the cooperation of a person with a given text that finally enables the person to articulate a meaning that "makes sense" to him or her. The object in question and the context of reception, that is, the whole context encompassing the process of interpretative cooperation is always taken into consideration.

[4] "Heterosexism, an extension of 'sexism,' is a pejorative term designating the chauvinism that privileges heterosexuality to the detriment or exclusion of other sexualities." (http://www.glbtq.com/glossary.php?id=9; last visited in January 2011)

[5] This, similarly, stands for homosexuality as well: some of its expressions are more favoured within gay and lesbian communities than others (see, for instance, Livia 2002 for the French lesbian community, and Payne 2007 for the Australian gay men virtual community). There is, however, a very important difference: ranking in the lesbian and gay men communities, by lesbians and gay men themselves (insider's perspective), lacks social power, social regulations with longstanding history and legal dimension, which all exist in the heteronormative regulations of heterosexuality.

[6] The semiotic square consists of several logical relations: c1 and c2, and c'1 and c'2 are in the relation of contrariety/contrary; the relation of contradiction is established between c1 and c'1, and c2 and c'2; implication (or presupposition) exists between c1 and c'2 and between c2 and c'1 (c'2 implies c1, and c'1 implies c2, not the inverse in both cases).

[7] It is a characteristic of Croatian that the linguistic category of person is identified by using personal verb endings, thus making personal pronouns redundant.

[8] Which is the same for 2nd person plural and the polite form for 2nd person singular.

[9] For more on the use of personal pronouns as the means of establishing whether the discourse is personal or neutral, see section 5.1.

[10] "Homosexuals (...) behave in an extremely promiscuous way and this fact cannot be disputed. I do not know nor have I ever heard of a homosexual who has not changed a great number of sexual partners."

[11] In Croatian the gender of the person is visible, as is in writing in the English language.

[12] If it were a (male) fiancé, there would be no need to emphasize the fact that she is treating him as a son-in-law, because future husbands (and wives) are treated and accepted as if they were already married to our daughters (and sons).

[13] Transgender issues are too complex to go into in this paper.

[14] For more on this "non-presence" of the journalist, see section 5.2.

[15] Her partner is never referred to as girlfriend, but as fiancée, which testifies to the daughter's moral qualities and the depth of her commitment.

[16] In this early period, no lesbian language was thought to exist, because lesbianism was interpreted as "merely a phase, a pose, a strategy to become a thespian, or an expression of petulant, confused dissatisfaction with men." (Cameron, Kulick, 2003, 86)

[17] Since the word homoseksualizam is intentionally avoided, and advocated against, in the LGBT activist circles – being considered "wrong" and "offensive because it implies a [mental] disorder " (Mediji i LGBT zajednica, 2004, 27) – while homoseksualnost is favoured, this replacing of one term by another could be interpreted as an example of a successful influence of LGBT activism on

the media, as far as the use of inoffensive language is concerned. The same cannot, however, be said of the use of the terms homosexual and gay (see section 5.2.).

[18] Nineteenth-century sexologists considered inverts as the third sex. Although this is, in essence, disruptive of the sex binary, it did not transform it. The sex/gender binary and the sexuality binary combined to reinforce and stabilize one another, in turn forming and preserving heteronormativity as the only (acceptable) way of living. “Inversion as a theory of homosexuality folded gender variance and sexual preference into one economical package and attempted to explain all deviant behavior in terms of a firm and almost intuitive belief in a binary system of sexual stratification in which the stability of the terms ‘male’ and ‘female’ depended on the stability of the homosexual-heterosexual binary.” (Halberstam, 1998, 82)

[19] In Croatian he is used as the generic pronoun; the masculine gender (shown in nouns, pronouns, adjectives and certain verbal forms) is the default gender.

[20] For discussions on whether the figure of “the mannish lesbian” was a self-representation or an invention of 19th century sexologists, see Newton 1989 and Duggan 2003.

[21] The way in which the two chosen newspaper articles integrate with a broader corpus of media articles and visual representations of gay people would make an interesting point of study. These issues are, of course, too complex to be elaborated in a single paper, and unfortunately there are no academic attempts at an in-depth qualitative analysis of media discourses on homosexuality in Croatia. Civil society organizations (for instance, B.a.B.e., LORI, Kontra) are the only ones that undertake and publish annual or periodical reviews on the ways in which the LGBT community is treated in the media (cf. Mediji i LGBT zajednica, 2004).

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