

## INTERVIEW IN MASS MEDIA. SPEECH STRATEGIES

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The interview might be the most frequently used type of material in radio broadcast programs. And that is because of its factual and argumentative role and because of the dynamism that it provides to the broadcast. The diverse radio broadcasting patterns have proposed many types of radio dialogues, the so called talk shows. All of them rely on the relation between the host and the guest(s) of the show, or, from a linguistic point of view, the tool is question-answer. However, they differ by the objectives they follow and by the applied strategy. A closer analysis reveals that the sequence of questions is not random, but it aims to emphasize to the listeners certain aspects considered important, or to describe a person, or to find out specific information, to prove something, or to describe a situation. The possibilities are numerous, and the result depends on the skills of the host of the show. There is a process of interaction between the two poles of communication, the person who interviews and the person who is interviewed, they are co-actors and are just as interested to create a positive image in the mind of the listener.<sup>1</sup> That is why it is necessary to establish a relationship of trust. The trust that the purpose of the interview is only informative, a trust in the strategy applied by the person who leads the interview, a strategy that reflects knowledge about the subject or the subjects that are analyzed. The lack of coherence of the strategy applied by the interviewer shows the lack of information and will endanger the coherence of the final interpretation. Between the interviewer and the interviewed there is a relation of forces that influences the entire course of the interview. The one that establishes the rules of the game is the interviewer; he decides the speech universe, the direction of the sequence of questions. The type of interaction that is chosen varies from the symmetric interaction to the complementary interaction, depending on the type of interview. It is very important for the journalist to know how to listen; the interviewed person will be stimulated by the attention shown to his answers by the non-verbal element of communication. The questions must fit the answers. The interview is not made of two parallel speeches, but by a succession of questions and answers that will eventually render a coherent interpretation.

A great part of the success of an interview is due to the non verbal communication – the social distance, the body language, the eye expression, the mimic of the face and the capacity to concentrate, that the journalist might have, in a direct interview. In the case of interview by telephone, the subtle signs and clues are those that supply this information, the non verbal element being replaced by the Para verbal one. The difference between an affirmative and an interrogative sentence is rendered by the subtle signs that emphasize certainty or uncertainty.

The segmental marks are combined with the subtle signs within the questions, resulting in the melodic curve specific to intonation. From the subtle signs, the most important are the accent and the intonation ascending to the end. The subtle nature of the sentence spoken by the interviewer helps both the interviewed person and the listener to decode the purpose of the interrogation, to establish his involvement in the message, the focus on himself, on the message or on the interviewed person, and implicitly, on the listener. The type of interaction between the interviewed and the interviewer is established also by the subtle signs, but also by the energetic feature of the language. Even from the beginning of the interview there is a link of forces that becomes more visible as the interviewed turns more evasive or tries to avoid or conceal the truth and the interviewer knows this, and aims to make it obvious to the listeners. The lack of a strategy, the incomplete documentation, is reflected not only in the content of the questions, but also in the tonality, the intensity of sounds sent by the receiver during the speech, or the pauses.

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<sup>1</sup> Norman Goodman, *Introducere în sociologie*, București, Editura Lider, 1992, p. 127

The same thing happens when the personality of the interviewed person overwhelms the interviewer and submission is revealed from his tone of voice, interaction becomes complementary to the disadvantage of the person who should lead the dialogue, and the listeners are frustrated, they don't feel represented by the author of the interview.

The rhythm is free and is determined mainly by the semiotic chore<sup>2</sup>, the specific rhythm of blending for each participant to the dialogue. The listeners participate indirectly, by the questions asked by the interviewer. The impression that the receivers have about the participants to the interview depends on both the content of the questions and the paraverbal and energetic signs, according to which we can approximately guess the guest's age, education, if he smokes or drinks, and the nonverbal clues ensure the direct relation between the people directly involved in the dialogue, establishing the type of interaction.

### **I.1 Types of radio interviews**

According to the **content**, the interviews are separated in three main categories – informative, interpretative and affective:

**1. The informative interview** – presents the information in the form of direct answers, it can be a confession of the author himself, involved in a situation that interests the public or a person that witnessed the event (description interview). In this case, the order of the questions is important, it draws the argumentative direction, along with the obtained answers, if they are clear and relevant to the topic of discussion. Then we can talk about an effective informative interview.

The interview done with Mr. Virgil Măgureanu, the former chief of the Romanian Intelligence Service, about some news, that surprised the public opinion by the gravity of its content, and also by the original way of broadcasting, can represent an example of informative interview. Although the interviewed person is evasive and the answers are unclear, sometimes almost confusing, leaving room for interpretation, the strategy of the interviewer is worth remembering. We have selected from the interview only the questions to emphasize the way in which the journalist tries to get the information he wants, alternating the direct questions with indirect strategy. The answers, having a denotative feature, are unclear, yet they have a rich load of connotative meaning, and by processes of inference and intertextuality they can provide a lot of information to the receiver.<sup>3</sup> The introductory sentences establish the topic of the entire speech and determine the isotopy.

1. *So, Radu Timofte, the person who is chief of Romanian Intelligence Service, has made public, apparently taking the course of a discussion, seemingly unintentionally, that there might be the possibility or the intention to organize some attacks, directed from outside the country, against the head of the state. The base or the origin of these criminal intentions being the anti-corruption campaign in the form that it is conducted now. We are talking to the person who occupied, from its foundation until 1997, the position of chief of SRI (Romanian Intelligence Service), Mr. Virgil Măgureanu. Mr. Măgureanu, how long have these things been spoken about on television?*

2. *What does it mean that information has been circulating? What do you know about it?*

3. *Would it be too much to ask you for names?*

4. *Mr. Măgureanu, politically speaking, at a certain moment you became a member of the party. However, the citizen is used to circulating such information, seemingly unintentionally and as a natural fact. You said you already knew it from before. Where did you get the previous information?*

5. *When you found out, what did you do?*

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<sup>2</sup> Julia Kristeva, *La révolution du langage poétique*, Paris, Édition du Seuil, pg 236

<sup>3</sup> The interview was broadcasted on BBC and it has the following structure :

6. *To Mr. Timofte from SRI?*
7. *I rephrase. To whom did you tell? Who did you warn?*
8. *Can't you be more specific?*
9. *There had already been an interpretation, which Mr. Timofte made public; it might be a case of his competence to save his position, or to ensure, so to say, his continuity.*
10. *But this, on television? If you were in Mr. Timofte's shoes, would you comment on a television channel these things?*
11. *Mr. Măgureanu, during the mandate of president Iliescu, the one that you served, institutionally speaking. What were your services to him at SRI? Were there, have there ever been such situations? With Traian Băsescu?*
12. *You handled a lot of files. You know very well what the former security files meant. I won't even start talking about your experience. (...) You know that there was such a document, published in the National Journal, a sort of Armageddon Traian Băsescu with his ties with the former security service. Do you know that one? (...)*
13. *No, I intend to be even more direct. It is in the public interest. You worked for secret intelligence. You still know a few things about the security files. What do you know, how valid might be this information? What do you know about Traian Băsescu and his ties to the Secret Intelligence?*
14. *Mr. Măgureanu, what kind of interpretation do you find for the fact that, certainly, Traian Băsescu worked at Anvers, representing the Romanian state. In one way or another. So it's an important matter. A commercial job. That is how it looks at a first glance. However, he is not the only political competitor, and anyway, if we speak about the competition that has occurred this autumn, also Adrian Năstase represented the Romanian state in an important committee. It was the Committee of Human Rights from Geneva. Never, during these years, were there rumors or information, like in the case of Mr. Băsescu, regarding a connection of Mr. Năstase with the Secret Intelligence. If I ask you what you know about Mr. Năstase's connection to the Intelligence Service, if it existed or not, you will probably tell me what you said about Mr. Băsescu's case. But I have another question. Why do you think it didn't show up? What does it make you think?*
15. *So, Mr. Năstase was a more comfortable choice, even a favorite one, for those who had issued the document?*
16. *But, you suspect that this document is not a simple fabrication manufactured by the media, or by some, should I say, unprofessional areas. Do you suspect it comes from the zone of the Intelligence Service?*
17. *Certainly, certainly. Generally, the so-called connection of Traian Băsescu with the Intelligence Service. You give the impression that it might nevertheless be the work, less professional but nonetheless the work of professional people from the service of information?*
18. *What do you mean?*

From the sequence of questions and their formulation we understand that the interviewer did not get the requested information, at least not in the form he wanted. And however, he doesn't give up, until the last question, trying to convince the interviewed person to express clearly his opinion. And he succeeds in the end. The last answer is maybe the clearest. The former chief of the Secret Service insists that the archives of the institution must be open to be analyzed and made public.

For so many years, these archives were considered intangible, for various reasons, and now there is a demand to show them in mass media, by a person from within the system. Although the questions seem to be gradually distancing from the initial topic, the interviewer only provides as many details as possible about the situation that is discussed. The argumentative vectoriality proves that the journalist knew his guest and was prepared for the interview, establishing a strategy and armed with patience.

**2. The interpretative interview** – it is that type of interview where the journalist exposes the facts and asks the interviewed person to comment them. In this case, the act of speech is focused on the interviewed person. The most important are the reactions of the interviewed person, his way of approaching the subject matter. According to the purpose, even an incoherent or vague answer can bring sufficient information about the interviewed person, on condition that the question should be properly asked, to be a part of the logical sequence of the arguments. This type of interview can be sliced in three subcategories:

- **the analysis interview** - it is the interview where the interviewer must classify the event or the situation in a precise context and answers mainly to the question “why”, which is an open quantifier. The answers that he expects are causal or express the purpose. In this case, the interviewed person is a specialist in a certain field.

The situation in Ukraine, for a neighbor country, is interesting. The presidential elections, after the first round, have troubled the Ukrainian society. And there were a few similarities in Romania too, that was preparing for elections. That is why the radio station BBC, in their news programs, introduces a short interview with a local observer, the journalist Ilie Zegrea from Cernăuți. The interview wins from a factual point of view too, it alternates two voices, and credibility is also more increased than in the case of general news, it can also reflect the opinion of the person who edited the information, the journalist. The opinion of a local journalist is much more valid.

*About the way in which the election campaign is conducted in Ukraine, coming to an end, before the second round, we talked to the journalist Ilie Zegrea. From Cernăuți.*

- *Just as in the first round of the elections, all official channels of Ukrainian television are favoring the candidate of the government in power, the Prime Minister Ianukovici. The first round of elections has proved that there were very numerous illegal acts. And that is why everybody is prepared to face a new wave, should I say, of illegalities, in the second round of elections.*

- *Ilie Zegrea, how tight is this competition. In the first round we know that both candidates obtained approximately 39%?*

- *The difference after the second round will also be, I think, very little. Somewhere between one, one and three or four percent. Not more. Certainly, the voters chose sides, as we saw, after the first round. And those who voted in the first round with Ianukovici are looking for fans to provide votes in the second round. Also, the same thing are doing Iușcenko's voters, who have declared that they will keep under strict control all the voting centers, so as to prevent any illegalities. So as not to have certain breaches of rules, with the votes or by manipulations etc.*

- *Finally, I would ask you, because you are in Cernăuți, which are the political options of Romanians from Ukraine?*

- *The Romanians from Ukraine have supported Iușcenko, in the first round. The people, today, having the possibility to go abroad to work and save money, have seen a different kind of life too. Especially a lot of people from Bucovina, including Romanians, are working in Western countries. In Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany, even in England.*

- *However, the population that you are talking about is hoping that those candidates supported by Russia would be, let's say, very useful to them?*

- *They thought that because they didn't have the opportunity to go out and see other parts of the world. To see the West. Now, after what they've seen there, even despite the fact that, certainly, people are working hard there, paid less than the citizens of those countries, however, they saw that life can be a little different. And they are in favor of change.*

By the questions that are asked, the interviewed person is getting help to structure the information according to the purpose proposed by the journalist. Initially, it describes the situation, the state television that supports openly one of the candidates, the election agents that try to attract voters and the suspicion that the law won't be respected not even in the second round of elections. Then the journalist focuses attention upon a minority, the Romanians from Ukraine,

who, from the answer, we understand that they represent a factor of progress for the Ukrainian society. And this is emphasized by the last question by which, it seems, the interviewed person is contradicted. But the answer actually reaffirms the previous reasons emphasizing them at the end of the dialogue, like a final conclusion.

- **the interview of commentary** relies on the question - *what is your opinion about*. The act of speech is focusing on the content of the expected answer, on the message. It expects an answer of qualitative type, with a wide specter of the involved actants. The main interest is that the interviewed person interprets the situation, draws conclusions focusing on the consequences of the event.

Such an interview is the one included within a material about the report of the European Committee, broadcasted by BBC<sup>4</sup> :

*We are now on the phone with Ioan Talpeș, the State Minister for European Integration and Justice:*

- *Mr. Minister, the report speaks about a lack of political life in the fight against corruption. Do you agree with this?*

- *It is difficult to accept such a term, such a formulation. At the same time, I understand those who did it. Because there are many expectations at Bruxelles concerning Romania. That is why; those who did it have good intentions. Because they really wish for Romania to reach solutions that, even in this field, that of corruption, so tough for Romania's image, could solve faster and in a more efficient way a series of situations.*

*(...)Ioan Talpeș, the Minister of State for European integration and justice, in BBC News from this hour.*

Although the questions are relevant, the strategy applied by the interviewed person makes the result of the interview, from the point of view of the information provided, unsatisfactory. The interviewed Minister speaks a rigid language, straying from the subject, repeating himself, so that the logic of the sentences from the answers is practically inexistent. What the journalist succeeded was to emphasize this tactics of his partner of dialogue. Because the listener who follows the sequence of questions and answers understands that Mr. Talpeș is evading the subject. His opinion could be summarized like this – there is corruption, but there are no corrupted people, or at least not around here.

- **the interview of opinion** can be also named controversy interview. The interviewed person gives explanations to support his opinion – the politician answers to the opponent; the scientist sustains or rejects a theory or the man in the street who expresses his opinion about a problem that affects him. The opinion of an independent impartial observer, as independent and impartial as a journalist can be, is able to clarify better the gesture of a politician and can emphasize the momentary situation from the Democrat Party, one of the parties that govern the country. In order to understand the gesture of Cosmin Gușă, the listener is invited to participate to the formation of the journalist's opinion, with the help of the questions asked by the journalist. BBC uses this device to analyze a situation created in the Democrat Party by the resignation of Cosmin Gușă from the leadership of the parliamentary group.

*In the BBC studio there is, with me, the journalist Mircea Marian, from the journal The Truth. Mr. Marian, the lack of experience of Cosmin Gușă from PD (Democrat Party), that determined him to resign from the position of parliamentary group leader, doesn't it represent a handicap for the leadership of this party?*

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<sup>4</sup> The BBC radio station, on the 04 10 2004, in the News at 14, broadcasted a vast material of analysis of the report of the European Committee. Within this material, one topic was about the fight against corruption led by the National Anticorruption Department.

- *I think that Gușă doesn't even dream to become president of the party, but he is creating a platform to get into the next leadership structure of PD. There will be a congress. He is pressured enough now, not necessarily left out, and he is trying to get a position of vice-president. In my opinion, the fact that he comes from PSD does not give him any chance to become president or executive president.*

- *But is the argument he invoked when he gave up the leadership of the parliamentary group Pd plausible? Or are there more reasons?*

- *Yes, he didn't give up. He was forced to resign. Monday, Tuesday, in the meeting of PD group, there was a clear trespassing of the laws. It is said very clearly there. You must have at least two years experience as a parliamentary member to be allowed to become a group leader. And despite this regulation, due to the fact that some of the deputies support Gușă, the rule was overlooked. Now, in the Permanent Office, they worked with the laws in front of them, and he had to give up that position. (...)*

The dialogue can be classified as interview of analysis of the situation created within a party that takes part in governing. But this analysis represents the opinion of one person, who follows the political life and has information from different sources, official and unofficial, but it is not an unquestionable truth. There is an amount of subjectivity, although the interviewer is trying not to speculate. For the listener it can represent an example of reason, a basis for discussion and further correlations. It represents the journalist's interpretation, about the given situation, and that can influence the listener's interpretation, but the possibility to substitute it is completely minimal.<sup>5</sup>

**3. The affective interview** – can emphasize an event or a personality. The entire speech process is centered on the interviewed person while beyond the content of his important answers there are also the paraverbal signs that implicitly draw the portrait of the interviewed person.

In the case of an event, the questions must emphasize the feelings of those involved. For example in the case of floods the listener must relive with the interviewed person the fear and the pain when the water flood left the victim without his lifetime savings. In television the images are also suggestive, and in the radio broadcast the words are those that render the images from the event. The signifiers are doubled by the signifying layer of communication, which participates to the process of establishing the meaning.

The Pope's sickness meant for the entire Christian world, and not only, a moment with a significant affective load. On BBC, in a news program, there were broadcasted two short interviews that described the general mood from Italy and the Vatican, and respectively Poland, the Pope's native country.

*I asked the priest Anton Lucaci, from Radio Vatican, in what way the Pope's condition has generated worries in the Vatican and in Italy?*

- *All the newspapers, national or, international, have chosen this news for opening headlines.*

- *And in Italy what is the reaction of the public opinion and the press?*

- *They are praying. In St. Joseph's Chapel, in the Basilique of the Vatican, people are praying constantly, so that God would keep the Holy Father alive. (...) There have already been visitors to see him, from the Italian political world. The news is optimistic. **From Rome, we are immediately connected to Warsaw.***

*What reaction did the news of Pope's illness generate in Poland, his country of origin, I asked the journalist Bogumil Luf, from Warsaw.*

- *Starting from this morning, all mass media had many comments, with many relations, especially with Rome. There were articles about the fact that people went to churches in the*

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<sup>5</sup> Melvin L. deFleur, Sandra Ball – Rokeach, *Teorii ale comunicării de masă*, Iași, Polirom, 1999, pg 167

morning. And even those who went to work, before that, went to the church service in the morning. So it is obvious that everybody was deeply concerned.

- The Pope has been committed to the hospital before. It is a known fact that his health is fragile. Has this episode stirred more worries than usual within the public opinion in Poland?

- The Europeans and especially the Christians are convinced that the Pope is old and ill. Generally, there have been moments of worry so far, and they passed by with a positive outcome. And everybody thinks he will surpass this health crisis too.

In both materials the journalist tries to emphasize the two countries' population's concern for the Pope's condition, but the guests are optimistic in their speech, and they would even contradict the journalist. And however, the subtle signs, the sad, even worried voice, especially in the case of the Polish journalist, show the emotional tension of the moment that affected the population in both countries. In the case of both people interviewed, the verbal and paraverbal combination suggests to us, as listeners, that they wish for the Pope to get better, but they are doubtful, and trying to dismiss their doubts. If in the case of the representative from Radio Vatican we could assume that there are political reasons involved, in the case of the Polish journalist we can notice his belief. As long as you believe with all your heart that something is going to happen, in this case the Pope's recovery, there are great chances for it to happen. This message has a cognitive and affective implication.

In the case of interviewing a personality, the questions must emphasize the personality of the interviewed person, to show his evolution up to the moment of the interview. The guest can be an example for the listeners; in this case the hierarchy of values must be taken into account, his attitude towards the others, towards the difficult times he's been through. The interpretation of the receiver is the result of the process of negotiation that takes place between the interviewed person and the interviewer.

The questions have their role in adjusting the universe of the interviewer to the universe of the interviewed, but this process is supervised and oriented by the interviewer so as to coincide with the universe of the receivers, which are the listeners, in this case. The dialogue takes place between three parts, interviewer-interviewed-listener. The relation interviewer-listener is kept in the case of any type of interview. Just as important for the interviewed is the relationship that he establishes with the listener, even more if he has a role on the political stage. The strategy of the author of the interview relies on the representations that he has about the ideal listener. These theoretical criteria apply in the case of all interviews taken as an example to show the specific speech strategies.

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