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ASPECTS OF CONFLICTUAL COMMUNICATION IN THE CURRENT ROMANIAN TELEVISED SPEECH

– PhD Thesis Summary –

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Abstract

In the context of retrieving a dimension of verbal interaction ignored for a long time, the present paper aims at analysing the verbal conflict in one type of discourse, that one on TV, fact which stems from the belief that, in order to develop a viable theoretical framework, it is necessary to study conflictual verbal interaction in varied communication situations. The novelty of the paper is therefore the exclusive systematic approach of conflictual communication from programs such as talk shows and televised debates in order to highlight the features required by the producing context.

The analysed material standing at the core of this paper is represented primarily by   the Chapter *Discurs mediatic* from *Corpus de limbă română vorbită actuală nedialectală* (2013) [= CLRVAN], coordinator Luminiţa Hoarţă Cărăuşu. Of particular importance for this study was the fact that we had access to audio-video recordings of the broadcasts transcribed in the chapter mentioned in CCSNR. Besides this, we used three own transcripts of some TV broadcasts recorded with a TV tuner. Included in the Annex, the transcripts were made (respecting the principle of consistency) as shown in CCSNR conventions, p. 268-269. To highlight the peculiarities of disagreement, we also resorted to *Corpusul de română vorbită (CORV). Eşantioane* (2002), coordinated by Laurenţia Dascălu Jinga and in order to point out the features of televised speech, we also used *Corpus de Limbă română vorbită actuală* (2005), coordinated by Luminiţa Hoarţă Cărăuşu.

The main method used in our work is conversation analysis, an approach specific to "social sciences that aims to describe, analize and understand talk as a basic and constitutive feature of human social life" (Sidnell 2010: 1). Our approach is therefore an inductive one (Rovenţa-Frumuşani 2004: 41 stated that "the analysis of authentic conversations functions inductively") having a strong empirical feature fully in accordance with the approach method. Moreover, the attention for interpersonal and power relations is, in our opinion, fully justified, taking into account the principles and fundamental concepts of conversation analysis.

In the present research, we focused on four major objectives:

a) identifying the features of conflictual verbal interaction in the televised Romanian speech from the view of institutional roles as moderator and guest;

b) presenting the forms of impoliteness from talk shows and TV debates, as components of conflictual communication;

c) highlighting the argumentative-persuasive strategies specific to the conflictual communication from talk shows and TV debates, while focusing on the relational dimension of conflictual argumentation;

d) capturing some features of verbal conflictual interaction at the nonverbal level.

The paper is structured into five chapters, **the first one**, *General features of the televised speech*, having an introductory purpose (in order to capture the essential peculiarities of the analysed discourse type). **Chapter II**, *The conflictual communication from talk shows and TV debates*, firstly proposes a theoretical overview of the *verbal conflict* concept, in correlation with notions such as *disagreement* or *verbal violence*. The largest part of this chapter is dedicated to highlight the features of conflictual verbal interactions between the moderator

and the guests, respectively between the guests, therefore taking into account institutional roles and hence power relations. By adopting this perspective, it was possible to identify the strategies to avoid/mitigate the conflict, the strategies to "search for"/ maintain the conflict (to which the broadcast's hosts resort), the peculiarities of disagreement between the guests (as preferred discourse type) or how the verbal conflict takes place and ends in the televised discourse. Thus, to avoid or mitigate the conflict between the guests, the host of the broadcast may resort to: the recurring use of the performative verb "to pray"; reference to the target audience; implicitly or explicitly warning the participant who does not respect the rules of taking the floor; implicitly or explicitly warning the participant who deviates from the topic of the given discussion; explicitly sanctioning the participant who disrespects the principle of politeness, under attenuated forms. When the host plays the part of the incisive moderator, (s)he will use on the contrary, a number of strategies to "search for"/maintain the conflict, those identified by us being: formulating a dishonouring assertion about the guest's person or his/her speech; repeating the question in order to maintain control over the direction of the debate; reformulation in order to bring to public attention issues involved or supposed by the answer of a participant in the debate (Heritage 1985; Hutchby 2006); formulating accusatory questions implicitly or explicitly; interpretation of the guest's response as FTA (threatening act); moderator's resort to his/her institutional role to reaffirm the asymmetric nature of the interaction. A consequence of using such strategies is what we called, using Clayman's phrase (2001), "the management of interactional resistance". In other words, the guests will adopt various ways to resist the hostile questions of the moderators, those identified by us in the corpus being the refusal to give an answer by saying that they do not have the right to do it (see Rasiah 2010: 669) or by reference to a policy/principle (Clayman 2001: 424); formulation of partial or incomplete answers (Clayman 2001: 412-413); avoiding a question by attacking it (see Rasiah 2010: 673); avoiding a question by changing the subject (Clayman 2001: 414); avoiding a question by appealing to the principles of journalism (Piirainen-Marsh 2005: 211); avoiding the question by its deliberately distorted interpretation; avoiding the question/rejecting the assertion by requesting additional information; avoiding the question by formulating evasive answers (by which the interlocutor adopts the linguistic attitude of a submissive respondent, Clayman 2001: 424).

As for the specific aspects of the disagreement between the guests in talk shows and TV debates, we proposed an analysis in terms of the theoretical framework formulated by Muntigl and Turnbull (1998), with additions required by the specific discourse type. Thus, we showed the preference of the participants in interaction for the contradiction + counterclaim form, as in the context of public exposure, a simple rejection of the previous speaker's viewpoint wouldn't be sufficient. Then, in terms of irrelevancy claim as a kind of disagreement (Muntigl/Turnbull 1998: 243), we identified two forms of its realization: supporting irrelevance by highlighting the role of the interlocutor in the verbal exchange (characterising a strong aggressive attitude) and supporting irrelevance by pointing out the role of the speaker in the verbal exchange (which is a mitigated form of this type of disagreement). Finally, we highlighted other features of the verbal disagreement between the participants in the analysed broadcasts, namely the presence of appelations as marks of disagreement (in accordance with specific intonation, interruptions and overlaps); postponement of counter assertion after

negotiating/disputing the right to speak; using "temporal minimisers" (Clayman 2001), which attenuates the illocutionary force of the disagreement; the impossibility to correlate the type of disagreement (mitigated or unmitigated) with the social distance between the participants.

The case study on the development of verbal conflict in televised context allowed us, in turn, to identify some characteristics. Thus, in some phases of the conflict, opponents do not address each other directly, but to the moderator; for this reason, the speeches of the participants in the dispute are not always placed adjacently (Hutchby 2006: 27), but they follow the moderator's intervention. Escalating conflict is reported, in the context of television broadcasts, by the use of the second person (cf. and Guillot 2008: 192), the moderator trying, most times, to reimpose himself/herself as direct recipient. Following the moderator's interventions, the verbal conflict in debates and talk-shows is characterized by alternating climax - detension.

At the same time, special attention was paid to the way in which verbal conflict ends in the media, the model proposed by Vuchinich (2009: 123-132) being particularly appropriate to the context of television broadcasts. We identified thus the following forms of closing conflictual verbal exchanges: moderator's selection of another speaker; moderator's change of the subject; one of the participants leaves the TV space; negotiating a compromise; one participant gives in and accepts the other's position.

Chapter III, *Verbal impoliteness and its role in the conflictual communication in the current Romanian televised speech*, firstly proposes a brief overview of the theoretical concepts involved in the study of impoliteness (principle of cooperation, politeness principle, the face, the management of the face, face threatening acts), in order to draw, then, a distinction which we consider necessary to study the phenomenon of impoliteness through debates and talk shows. It is about the distinction between institutionally motivated impoliteness and institutionally unmotivated impoliteness. The first proposed type of impoliteness gives a solution to the talks on associating some specific acts with the suitable analysed discourse type, such as the moderator's communicative blocking of a guest, not with the aim to attack the interlocutor's face, but to ensure the smooth running of the show. However, institutionally unmotivated impoliteness has most forms of realization. The inventory proposed by Culpeper in 1996, 2011 and Bousfield, 2008 (explicit criticism, search for disagreement, interlocutor's association with negative aspects, insult, communicative blocking of the other, inducing a sense of fear and/or threat, provocation, metacommunicative directives, ridiculing/condescending/disregarding the other, insinuation/hint, ignoring the interlocutor) was completed with reinterpretations of some forms of impoliteness identified by the mentioned authors (reproach, correction unaccompanied by mitigation, sarcasm) and with a realization of impoliteness unidentified in the consulted literature, namely the negative comments on the interlocutor's body/paraverbal language. Although they could be assigned to the interlocutor's explicit criticism, we preferred to consider them a special form of impoliteness, given their implications (we consider them, in the context under discussion, an aggravated form of verbal impoliteness, since they suggest the interloctor's inability to adapt nonverbal/paraverbal component to the requirements of the communication situation).

Chapter IV, *Argumentative and persuasive strategies in the conflictual communication from the current televised Romanian speech*, focuses on an essential feature of the

argumentation in this type of discourse, that is subordination of the types of used arguments to what we called (starting from the argumentation through models about which speak Perelman and Tyteca 1958 [2012]) the overall strategy of (anti) model. In this chapter, we demonstrated that the participant in a television verbal dispute should, in most cases, present himself/herself as a role model and differentiate himself/herself from his/her opponent, to whom (s)he will try to assign the antimodel role in the eyes of the (TV)audience. All the argumentative-persuasive strategies and procedures which we approached (*ad hominem* arguments, *ad populum* arguments, argumentation through ridiculing, notions' dissociation, "intentional monological" repetitions, "affective-evaluative" language, metaphor with argumentative role, revealing the fraudulent argument of the opponent) were analysed, then, from this perspective of self-evaluation, respectively, of other's devaluation.

We have also reached a series of original observations after having analysed the nonverbal component of conflictual communication from **the fifth chapter**. Thus observing the role of the look in televised verbal disputes led us to distinguish the following types and functions:

- the eye to eye look with the role of intimidating opponents or build an *ethos* of sincerity;

- the look towards the camera, with the role of emphasis on the points considered by the speaker of the utmost importance for (against) his/her speech;

- the look directed towards a "semiprivate space," close to the own body (Ekström 2012: 254), with the role to place the enemy-sender on a less important position;

- the look directed towards the moderator, with the role to prepare the answer, to manifest the intention to speak.

The analysis of referential gestures of the participants in the dispute led to identify some categories specific to the conflictual speech (and not only) in the TV shows. We proposed, in this direction, the following gesture types:

A. pseudo-referential gestures:

a) towards the speaker/interlocutor which do not allude to this one but to the institution / entity (s)he represents;

b) towards the speaker, by which this one is excluded in fact from the category of the nominated ones, referring to the opponents;

B. referential gestures towards the viewers, as representatives of the target audience;

C. (self)referential gestures when the indicated person is also targeted by verbal statement.

In the light of these observations, we believe that the present paper is a necessary completion to the studies dedicated to conflictual communication in the Romanian linguistic space, proposing a series of distinctions that can be used in the study of verbal conflict in other contexts of communication or comparative studies (cooperative communication - conflictual communication, conflictual interaction in the family context - conflictual interaction in the TV context etc.).