

# THE COMMUNICATION CONTRACT AND THE RITUALS OF TELEVISED DEBATES

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## Abstract

All acts of communication are achieved in a given situation and the partners involved in this situation, do not exist as participants unless they are part of the characteristics determined by this situation. Patrick Charaudeau thinks that it would be an illusion to imagine that the individuals who speak, converse or discuss do this individually, according to their personality or their will. “To communicate it is not enough to open the mouth and to utter sounds – both articulated observing the rules of building discourse. We must have the quality of a speaking subject. And to achieve this, there must be another participant in the discussion, who has the intention, the purpose and the appropriate way to express himself in a certain situation. “Communication basically consists in evaluating the dialogue partner in a given situation, which makes all our acts of communication to interact and contract. It is defined by interaction because there is a meeting point of emission-production and reception processes – interpretation that builds the social significance.

**Keywords:** *televised debate, communication, dialogue, contract.*

We say that contract act because between dialogue partners there must be a set of rules and conventions that will allow them to achieve a real intercomprehension. To consider the given situation allows, therefore, the communication act to take place. But this involves a contract whose terms with dialogue role is taken in by each partner. That does not mean that the contractual framework can make use of the individual strategy. Patrick Charaudeau believes that in reality, things are not so simple, because the act of communication achieved in a society does not correspond to a single type of contract. Often, the contracts intertwine with each other, they overlap each other, in a chain within the same situation called global become one and the same.

The same goes for the media communication. By definition, it introduces several types of

contract and several methods of achievement, known as rituals.

## I. THE COMMUNICATION CONTRACT ELEMENTS

The contract is based on a communication principle of relevance involving the mutual recognition of participation competences in the dialogue and the right to an opinion. This means that the partners engage in an activity of building a sense in two places which we call situational and communicative. The situational is the place where the exchange space between partners is built, according the interactional purpose that answers to “what we want to change, what we say, what we do (in other words, which is the social role), depending on the conditions (interactional and identity constraints).”

The components that build this exchange space are:

- the interactional component of forms that constitute the physical exchange conditions:
  - a) the attendance forms of discussion partners, depending on their physical presence (or not) face to face, of their number, of the spatial or nearby position);
  - b) the forms of transmission of the dialogue, depending on the communication channel they can be oral or written and may be added or substituted by semiological codes (gesture, image, graphics);
  - c) the words exchange forms, depending on the interaction between partners, whether or not allowed, two types of situations can be constituted: the dialogue or the monologue.

- the psycho-social identity component of the partners that can be determined from several points of view:

a) from the point of view of personal identity defining the partners through identity characteristics, there are two types:

1. social: identity characteristics describe a social status by age, sex, ethnicity, social class, etc.
2. psychological: identity characteristics describe the emotional "qualities", intellectual and social which are evaluated and assigned by a partner to another depending on his behavior.

b) from the point of view of social status which represents the position in an institutional relationship, a position that can be:

1. socio-institutional (or socio-professional - in this case we can consider that the status is given by the subject, an appointment in administrative or policy or it is acquired by it on professional criterion);
2. socio-daily activity: an unusual category which is necessary to describe the identity of a subject that speaks non-institutional situations, such as for example an informative question on the street, a personal letter or a complaint.

c) from the point of view of the role that should be different the social status, although it depends on it. An individual with a determined status can be determined to do certain activities depending on the situation. For example, a teacher (state) will not pursue the same activity if he is in the classroom (social role of a teacher) in the class board (social role of evaluation and decision), meeting with parents (role of information and advice).

Thus the social role corresponds to the function the individual exercises having a certain status in relation to the purpose of the action determined by the situation where he is.

d) from the point of view of interpersonal relationship that describes the identity of individuals according to the degree of (re) cognition of partners in the act of communication:

- they are at the first contact (or not);

- they know each other(or not);
- they are in a familiarity relationship (or not).

These components of the communication act can be illustrated by televised debates involving two partners. For example, the campaign debate between two candidates: running for the president position

- interactional structure:

a) the presence forms:

1. physical presence of partners
2. two partners-candidates and a journalist
3. arrangement, placing the candidates face to face (in the studio)
4. arrangement, placing the journalist aside (in the studio)

b) the form of transmission:

1. oral communication channel
2. visibility of gestures

c) exchange forms

1. the dialogue
2. the psychosocial component

i) the personal identity:

- social: men, young and less young, white, bourgeois
- psychosociological: angry / calm

ii) social status:

- politicians

iii) social role:

- debate against an opponent, favourably influencing the voters

iv) interpersonal relationships:

- they are not at the first contact, they know each other, they are not familiar.

"The communication act is the place where, being a space of exchange built through the situational, we build through conditional methods the discourse contract indicating the partners the exchange of places and roles in question which must be kept in order to achieve a certain action purpose." In other words, the communication act determines how to deal with the communicating subject: does he answer the question "are we there to talk about the topic, to play a role in the discussion?"

The components that determine these types of discussion are:

- the intercommunication component that determines how " the take the floor "

- a) according to origin: the individual speaks whenever he feels like, is asked to speak, is authorized to speak before being asked
- b) according to time and space for discussion, more or less programmed (length, chants)
- the psycho-socio-verbal component that determines the roles of discussion in a given situation, a role that can not be appreciated beforehand because it depends on the precise exchange situational conditions, some of which involve the two partners (the questionnaire) and others involving only one of the partners (the response). For example, in an interview, the interviewer must meet (a requirement stipulated in "the media interview contract) the role of subject that asks, causes and the interviewee of subject that answers, has opinions, confessions, arguments, etc., accordingly.

Coming back to the case of televised debate between the two candidates running for the president position, we can describe a communication point of view by observing the following:

- for the intercommunication component:
  - a) the origin of discourse: the number of times the participant started speaking on his own initiative, was requested or authorized;
  - b) the times of discourse: the discourse capital and the interventions in the form of chanting.
- for the psycho-socio-verbal component, the distribution of roles on subjects, who ask, respond, evaluate, bring arguments, tell stories, etc.

Thus the communication contract is both external and internal to language. It is an external reality that depends on the physical and psychosocial which are related to the actional purpose contained in a given situation (The Situational); it is an internal reality that acts to achieve behavioral changes of words that are conditioned largely through a given situation (The Communicational).

This explains, on the one hand, why the partners in a communication act must be held to respect the terms of the contract if they want to reach a certain intercomprehension, why "the influence project" must be entered in the action finality of the communication contract, and why

there could not be possible to take over the communication challenges using the strategies within the contractual framework. But that could explain, on the other hand, why the same global situation may require more communication contracts which crisscross. Therefore, within each exchange condition, of identity, of speaking and of role variations may occur.

## **II. THE MEDIA CONTRACT - THIS ONE I'VE USED MYSELF IN A CHAPTER. YOU CAN SAY THAT IT AIMS TO INFORM THE PUBLIC.**

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## **III. THE MEDIA DEBATE CONTRACT**

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In case of a debate, the act of communication partners are in a dialogue situation: they are physically present, there are at least two of them are in a proximity position, using an oral channel and, therefore, using a verbal-gesture semiologic code according to an exchange situation that allows the exchange alternation of speaking. But these conditions, although necessary, are not sufficient to define the debate contract because the dialogue exchange situations are numerous: the conversation, the informative questions on the street, "supporting" in a survey, the work meetings, the interviews, the meeting face to face, etc.. They have a purpose which consists in "answering questions and / or being confronted to the partner," according to the topics of discussion in the presence or not of the public, but always addressing the public, a recipient absent, non visible (reader, listener or viewer).

Patrick Charaudeau believes that it is a global situation in which a first dialogue exchange situation between/among the present partners there is a media communication situation today finds itself in a situation of communication media which creates a triangular device consisting of, on the one hand, the participants in the studio and on the other hand, the target audience-receiver (outside the studio). Analyzing this situation we can say that beyond the circle formed by the participants in the dialogue immediately formed, a second circle of participants, the receivers-witnesses to the

exchange of words, which is an essential feature, but also a great unknown of media communication.

Thus, we see that over the first contract correspondent of “the immediate exchange” a second contract overlaps, “the media communication one” and that brings its own constraints of the “seriousness” principle by choosing the participants (identity status), the subjects treated, but also the principle of “pleasure” by putting on a show (verbal, auditory or visual) that requires a certain organization, exchange of some internal or external points of view, showing in images. This means that all the assembly in a dialog exchange in a certain media situation is related to a pre-programmed ritual.

In reality, the two projects merge and don't do more than only one, but before that merge there should be made some remarks on the situation of immediate exchange. Although, at the moment, “the interview”, “the debate” and the meetings “face to face” meet the same situational purpose, Charaudeau considers that there must be made a number of distinctions.

In fact, the three cases are each characterized by their own interactional and identity conditions:

- “the media interview” is characterized by first placing the two partners in a dual exchange situation, who have the status of journalist-interviewer and the other one of guest-interviewee (the social status may vary: poet, writer, politician, thinker -intellectual, expert, scientist, etc.).

The interviewer's role is to challenge the guest to speak using various questionnaires depending on the status of the interviewee and on the reason why he was invited, and the interviewee has the role to express, by answering the interviewer's questions and depending on each situation, he will be brought in the situation, to confess, to judge, to make statements, all these representing communication roles. It should also be noted that the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is one of complementarity, even of complicity because the two of them, together, must give birth to the word, to discussion.

- the ‘face to face’ media method is equally characterized by bringing two partners to your attention, but it is well established that these two partners are antagonists in ideas, if not adversaries. This time, the distribution of

roles is not the same as in the case of the interview, complementary, the two being able to ask questions, to answer, to judge, to explain, to criticize, to make statements, etc. Sometimes, a third character that is not involved in the “face to face” discussion may act as a timer. The “face to face” method is characterized by an argumentative force and a discursive behavior.

- the media “debate” is characterized by the presence of several partners involved, more than two, requiring an organizational space to assign the right to speak, the animator. The basic role of the animator is to present/introduce the guests, to ask questions, to offer them the right to speak alternatively, mimicking naivety, challenge, interest, surprise. The guest must respond by explaining, evaluating, narrating.

Depending on the type of debate, political, scientific or cultural, other new differences appear. And here we must take into account the status of the participants, if they are invited by way of politicians, writers and scientists, but also what each participant brings in his speech that may be more or less argumentative, more or less narrative and autobiographical.

To the extent in which these characteristics fall under the terms of the contract, we shall define the media debate, political, cultural or scientific contracts. The “cultural” and “scientific” contracts are close together and oppose the ‘political’ ones so that the ratio of non antagonism does not set the participants in a relationship dispute; but the “political” and the “scientific” ones are close together and oppose the “cultural” ones in a way that the guests have to bring arguments, explain, describe, define and evaluate.

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