

ARE ANY "PRESS-CONFERENCES," "INTERVIEWS" OR "DIALOGUES" TRUE DIALOGUES?

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses three influential means of vehiculating information from political or economical factors to large social strata, which became much in fashion in some European countries in the last 2-3 years: "Press-Conferences" (PC:D₁) — addressed by political or economical leaders to populations via mass-media — "Interviews"- Is — sometimes called "Dialogues" — between a reporter and a leader (D₂), and "Dialogues" — organized by a reporter to occur between several leaders (D₃). The author submitted the corpus to analyses of the basis of the "Dynamic-Contextual" (DC) model of the act of communication and of 4 criteria of true dialogue (D). The criteria were not satisfied by these forms of communication (FsC) when delivered in a political key, as compared with the one in literature, art, everyday life key.

0. In the framework of the request for a D, much desired by the populations of Europe who lived, for several decades, under the communist dictatorship, three means of communication mostly became in fashion in the last three years — at least in Romania: PC, Is, and "D" — see above D3. These FsC, meant to vehiculate information to large social strata and even to the population of the state, are here submitted to analysis on the basis of our model (DC) and D definition, with 4 criteria.

1.0 There is an amazing phenomenon in the Europe of the last few years: an extremely rapid *dynamics of events*, and a *propension to much verbal communication*, a desire of masses to "know" what is happening.

1.1 The totalitarian stasis was the means of governing populations just by not permitting changes. The amazing present dynamics include both the request for "reforms" and their proclaiming by the governing powers, and the struggle of the masses for "liberty," accompanied by the allegations of some representatives of the power stating that this request is satisfied by them. This context is concretized in the shape of public behaviours and also of acts of communication. They probably are similar in

the countries of Central and East Europe that lived for 45 years a communist regime, but my preliminary remarks and the analytical study itself mostly refer to the concrete context of Romania. The bursting of the individualistic tendencies turned out to be more subject than ever to supraindividual factors, mostly pertaining to governmental power, but also to many political parties or other forces. In this context, the masses ask for a D with the leaders, while the latter — opposition included — display a disponibility and even an exaggerated propension to communication with (to) masses, attempting to an "explanation" of their activities, to a justification of some acts of the government, to propaganda for elections, to an auto-defence or an attack against an opponent, etc. These are, together with the aims of press or other mass media for attracting readers or spectators, and maybe also together with a certain snobbery and imitation of the Western countries, the causes of the outburst, the fashion of PsC, Is, "Ds 3."

1.2 All of these FsC are considered, in these post-totalitarian ("closed") states, to be a democratic, "open" way of information. They are public acts of communication of press representatives or journalists at large, and broadcasting reporters etc., with leaders belonging to the state power or with the ones of opposition. Their large audience is mostly due to mass media, including especially TV. More often than not, these FsC delivered in a political key establish a hierarchical position, sometimes marked by a special semiotics. These FsC will be analysed here and we shall try to state to what an extent they are, in the above mentioned context and, in the political key, true Ds.

2.0 Theoretical basis for analysing these FsC

2.1 **The model of the concrete act of communication (the DC model).** The essential prerequisite of this model is its starting point in the *concrete reality* of a communication act. Its fundamental com-

ponents are to be found in the scheme of the act of communication (scheme 1).

The general rule operating in language functioning is “the principle of the adaptation to the context” (Slama-Cazacu 1954/1956, 1959/1961). The *context* was long viewed, in this model, not only as the *explicit* context — the linguistic configuration — but also as what is *implicit*, i.e. the situational and social-historical ones, as well as the partners’ system of co-ordinates (personality, skills, experience of life, etc.), all constituting the *total context*, with its various *contextual levels* (scheme 2).

2.2 A definition of D. Criteria of its existence (function and fulfilment of its aims). The following definition of a true D was formulated and validated by many studies on D in children (Slama-Cazacu 1961, 1977) and in grown-ups (Slama-Cazacu 1981, a.o.). This act of communication consists of an *exchange of replies* (at least two: if there is only one, i.e. address and its reply, the D is “born dead”); and exchange between one or more partners *oriented one to the other(s), alternating their replies* and allotting them a *proportional “dosage” (length), including information*, and having recourse to a *linguistic special form* (a syntactic-context-concatenation of replies, very often — mostly in less formal Ds — in the shape of “*dialogic syntax*,” i.e. the reply of the partner is completed by the replies of the following one(s), thus forming a single sentence — e.g.; “A.- We have done -B.- a lot -C.- of activities.”). If the D occurs *orally* (as the majority of these acts of communication) and face-to-face, some verbal components are replaced by other categories of signs (non-verbal, as: gestures, facial expression etc.), which are mostly received via the *visual channel* (see the “*mixed syntax*,” Slama-Cazacu 1976, a.o.)

The criteria of a (true) D (Cr): α the Cr of the proportional length of each interlocutor’s reply (avoidance of the “monologue” form); β the Cr of the respect for the partner’s rôle, i.e. equal rôle of the emitter and of the receiver; γ the Cr of alternating replies, free and equal turn-taking; Δ the Cr of orientation to the interlocutor (the partner); ϵ the Cr of vehiculating (true) information. See (1,3,4,5,6,7,9,10,11,12,14).

3.0 Analysis of the corpus (of published and recorded PsC, Is and “D3”), according to the DC model and the Crs of a (true) D.

To what an extent are the functions and fulfilment of the aims of a true D existant in the FsC submitted here to analysis?

3.1 The corpus. Besides the observation of daily occurrence for over 2 years (1990, 1991, partially 1992) in TV, press, broadcasting — by putting down protocols and fragments of these FSC — a number of 20 published Is (and Ds2) and 4 recorded FsC, from TV (2 complete PsC and 2 Is of prominent members of government), were submitted to a more in-depth analysis also through quantitative processing. Out of the 20 Is (and D2), 12 were political (8 in formal situations), while 8 were non-political (NP): with 4 essayists (one of them was E. Cioran), 1 woman-designer for clothes, 1 French physician, 1 film director (A. Wajda), 1 D2 with marginal children in their ambience.

3.2 Some remarks

a) Out of the entirely published Is or D2, the reporter’s (R) interventions had, in the great majority (80%), the form of *questions*; only about 20% were the R’s comments, statements for eliciting the interviewed person’s (Ied) reply. In the other such FsC observed or recorded, the R’s interventions were also, as a majority, questions.

b) In the *political* (P) Ds2, the frequency of the R’s questions is much greater (about 90%), while in the NP ones there were about 70% (much less with some persons, as E. Cioran (table 1).

Table 1. Questions in 20 published Is or Ds2

Political	Non-political
90%	70%

c) The verbal productions of the Ied was always longer than the R’s ones. Differences are even more obvious between the P and NP here to.

Table 2 Number of words (sample)

	Political				Non-political	
Ied	98%	67%	70% ^x	75% ^{xx}	90% [*]	52% ^{**}
R	2%	33%	30%	25%	10% [*]	48%

^x Pre-electoral period

^{xx} A non-important political leader and an important journal of the opposition

^{*} Brief statement

^{**} True D (literary page of important journal of opposition)

In the pre-electoral period, the part allotted to the R is greater (see table 2), by the two most important leaders. It also depends on the importance of the journal or of the R.

d) In the P PC, I and D3, there are very few interruptions by the R (they sometimes occur, in TV Ds3, between competing partners, at hot points, in the pre-electoral period); also, almost no dialogic syntax or mixed syntax are noticed in the formal FsC (except in the hot situations mentioned above), while in NP communication and mostly in quite informal everyday life these features of real D occur. When some political partners feel "equal" or want to compete, interruptions also occur.

e) PsC of some political leaders in these last two years usually begin with a (very) long *monologue* (as it is the use also in other countries, but not with such a frequency). They are followed by questions put by mass media Rs. The answers are usually very long. However, when the question supposes a *difficult answer* or represents a *sensitive point*, the answer may be very brief (or longer, but in both cases avoiding the true answer). So, the political leaders in these situations of FsC use to give long answers for justifying some activities — mostly if they pertain to the government — for explaining but in fact the true reality is often avoided, by a special style: brief and unclear answer, a long and vague one, with detours, roundabout ways, often using the "langue de bois" (which may include a too technical code not understood by masses, clichés, etc.).

f) A certain hierarchy — based on a previous known implicit context — between the R and the Ied(s) or the leader of the PC, is established by various semiotic (nonverbal) signs and also verbally. This hierarchy seems also to be a target to be attained by a covered negotiation and a competition between the partners of a D3, who at the starting point are presumably equal. Thus, the style may differ. Sometimes, the R's intervention is interrupted or cut off by the political leader. Or, in D3, a partner who is also a leader is interrupted by another leader, who wants to be considered as being more important. This unequal (undemocratic) status of the partners and mostly of the Ied and the R — who does not seem to be "equal" with the former — is a striking feature for an analyst watching these FsC. For not very important leaders, the I or D2 is "cut" by the R of the TV program — a fact that does not occur with the very important leaders in the state.

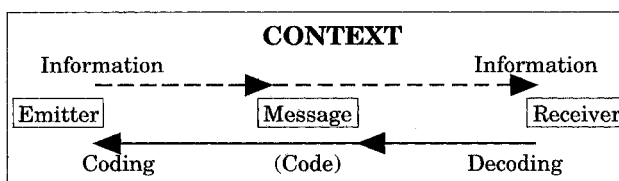
4.0 Final evaluation and conclusion

One may say that none of these watched, recorded and analysed FsC in political key answers the Cr of a true D. Comparing P and NP Is, one notices that the former are less "democratic" in this respect. Among the NP or, rarely, in P ones, with an outstanding R or a dreaded journal, there are instances when an I or D2 (such as the one marked with ^{xx} in table 2) arrives to be a discussion between two "equal" partners. Also, in certain contexts (such as the pre-electoral period — when political leaders aim to appear as "democratic," permissive — or, as mentioned above, with more "respected" Rs or journals), the rôles of the Rs and Ieds may attain a better score, decreasing the differences between them (see c, table 2, and d). Some closer respect of the Crs of a D is also noticed in D3 when the various leaders begin to compete; the equilibrium is however fragile in such contexts, because the excess of interruptions, of superposing of replies, of some provocative nonverbal behaviour, may infringe the rule β of respecting the partner. Generally, in these FsC, the Cr, of bringing new (and real) information, is less respected: the political context often generates a communication of masking the reality, manifested by avoidance of clear, correct answers at the partner's questions, by giving vague or long, intricate, false "explanations," and much by the use of the "langue de bois" [15, 17], [also 2].

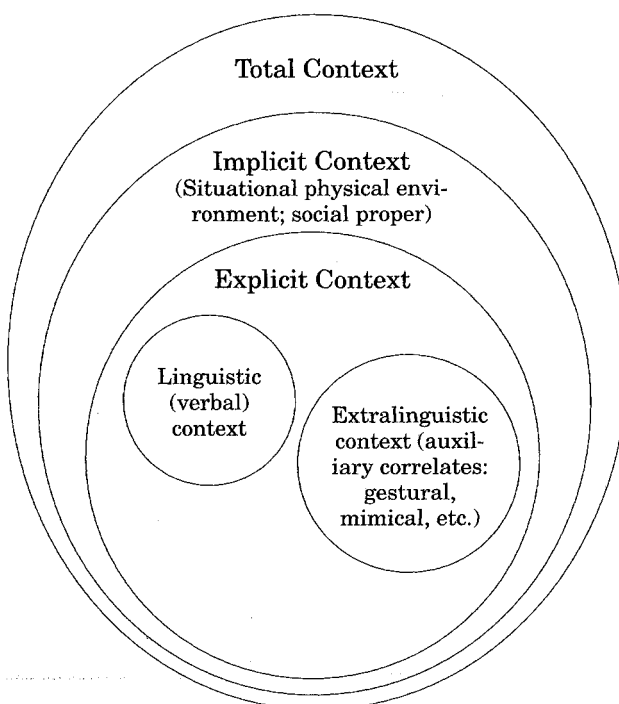
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Scheme 1. The DC model of the act of communication (Slama-Cazacu 1959/1961, 1968/1973)



Scheme 2. The contextual levels (Slama-Cazacu 1959/1961, 1968/1973)