

THE DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF TRADITIONAL BELONGING AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN TV LOCAL BROADCASTING

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Abstract: *In the contemporary global societies, mass media are set on the intersection of several social changes that require persons to acknowledge their “cultural identities” as positioned across boundaries: persons can discover that meanings they live by come from the innumerable “Others”, through which their “glocal self” is shaped (Brinkmann 2011). The cultural individuation process in the flow of socio-economic-cultural changes weaves together the bonds of local tradition and the opportunities of the global openness and reflects the links between sense potentialities and communicative practices (Lucariello et al. 2004). In particular, local television channels can activate contracts of communication (Mininni, Ghiglione, 1995) based on a special identification clause among enunciating sense subjectivities, swinging between old traditions and new perspectives. The main object of our study is to investigate the peculiarities of Apulia local broadcasting as a favorite way to construct, transmit and renew several kinds of local culture. By the means of discursive strategies, local broadcasting organizes and puts into play its “credibility” (Gili, 2005) to identify beliefs and values underlying the various forms of communitarian life (Mininni, 2007). We selected some TV local programs dealing with information, entertainment and advertising. We explored the registered TV texts through Diatextual Analysis (Mininni, 2005). The comparison among these results emphasize pathways based on “crossbreeding” as well as on “polarization” of reality and identity construction strategies acted by TV programs. These contemporary tendencies take several functions: to intensify the national broadcasting formats, to encourage the dissemination of local cultures, to enhance the audience’s loyalty.*

Keywords: *change, cultural identity, global, local, discourse analysis, TV programs, genres.*

1. INTRODUCTION

This work is set in the theoretical background offered by cultural discursive psychology of media (Mantovani, 2008; Mazzara, 2007). In this viewpoint mass media act as cultural artifacts that organize the human experience of reality by offering contents, languages and interpretative tools to dialogically construct both social reality and subjectivity (Mininni, 2013). In particular, the multiplicity of languages and discursive practices represent an essential dialogical opportunity that enables persons to “narrate” and to “figure” the world they live. It’s a “propositive” and “critical” approach, as it tries to investigate the dialogical potentialities of sense-making to activate persons but, at the

same time, to diffuse stereotypes and forms of social control. Really, an half of a century ago, the great scholar of communication Marshall McLuhan (1964) proposed the popular expression “global village” to analyze the changes that mass media were predicting. Nowadays this intuition has an improved vitality, thanks to the diffusion of the digital terrestrial that improved the possibility to enjoy TV through the multiplication of both international channels and specialized thematic and local channels. Actually the “mediated mind” (Lucariello *et al.*, 2004) shapes the public discursive sphere by transforming the social constraints into the affordances of “para-social interaction” (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

2. MASS MEDIA AS DIALOGIC FORMS OF LIFE

Nowadays, the discursive process essential to the formation and functioning of social thought occur both at the interpersonal level and the level of mass media (Mininni, 2004). The mass media very rapidly disseminate knowledge and other information to the public creating homogeneous images in a relatively short time period when compared with interpersonal communication. Indeed, the mass media are the most prolific means of information dissemination, a mediator between scientific and social knowledge, and more often than not the first to communicate new information to the public thereby setting the agenda for further discursive processes in society (McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 1997). In this perspective the “discursive contexts”, generally used by human beings to make sense and to understand events, could be also strategically adopted by the media to shape social thought and to orient social action.

This is why the debate on the discursive genres is improved: in the wake of the tradition endorsed by Bakhtin (1979) about the reflection on the discursive genres, also the media genre features need to be better known as they represent at the same time something “old” and “new” : on the one side the TV programs show an hard functional specialization, as for information, entertainment, advertising; on the other side, they realize continuous contaminations, as for the infotainment, that activates several degrees of pertinence toward the interpretative procedures.

As a consequence, mass media propose new contracts of communications: TV tries to act as a mouthpiece of its audience and offers possibilities of parasocial relations, that is a kind of relation based on a fantasmatic identification and interaction with persons, figures or characters that work as models for little, young, adult and old persons. People can dialogically answer to the polyphonic proposals through a different cognitive and affective involvement and activate several kinds of parasocial activities in accordance with the subjective and relational needs. The

game of proposal and acceptance-negotiation-refusal is the core of the communicative contract that makes the intralocutor an interlocutor and a social actor (Mininni & Ghiglione, 1995).

In the current scenario, the real issue at stake is the construction of self. In the last decades, the claim to “culture” represents a more and more recurring strategy that persons use to define “who I am” (Shi-xu, 2002), through the collaborative or conflicting dialogues among the several positioning that value expressive codes, interpretative resources, juridical, esthetic and religious beliefs and so on. The psychological side of the globalization process engages persons to continuously go through boundaries. In the global village which is built by mass and new media, everyday persons discover that the meanings they construct come from the stories of countless both real and mediated “others” that contribute to the configuration of a “glocal” identity (Mininni, 2007). Indeed the complex process of globalization has to dialogue with “localization”, that is the other side of the coin: if the ask for self-extension implies a pervading experience of “uncertainty”, local values and practices are maintained, defended and improved as they represent an essential “niche” to construct a stable identity (Hermans & Di Maggio, 2007).

In the wide debate about the actual importance of community belonging, well known as the debate between “community lost” and “community saved” (Wellman, 1979), mass media, local channels and the dialogical practices they activate can testify the importance of local experience as an existential anchorage (Manuti, Traversa & Mininni, 2012). Belonging to a community is constructed and improved by social interactions and discursive practices; this facilitates the construction both of a personal (Mead, 1934) and of a community (Cohen, 1993) identity as well as the construction of shared meanings. This expertise enables persons to interpret and reconstruct the messages, also the mass media messages, in the light of a shared background (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004).

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3. AN IDIOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

The object of this study is to investigate the importance of local TV as a dialogic way to construct, to spread and to renovate the local culture, that can be defined as a body of “shared, contested and negotiated stories” (Benhabib, 2002). The main question is to catch how, through their cultural and discursive tools, local channels construct their “credibility” across TV genres (Gili, 2005) as well as depict the audience’s images.

On the basis of a larger research project improved by Apulia Co.Re.Com (the Regional Committee for Communication) we viewed, transcribed and analyzed some TV programs from local channels in a limited time frame: the week between August and September 2011, in the full transition to the digital terrestrial. It’s a period of restart of full activities, of political ferment and of the advancements on news section. Here we propose the main results coming from the analysis of various programs concerning information, in-depth information, entertainment and advertising proposed by 4 local channels. In particular, Antenna Sud has a larger local domain, involving the regions of Apulia and Basilicata; the other channels have a more strict pertinence, since both Bluestar and Studio 100 may be viewed only in the territory of Taranto and Telebari only in the province of Bari.

The media genres here considered are represented by a few programs – newscasts and advertisings for each channel and, in addition, the entertainment program “Medici al Capolinea” for Antenna Sud, the information program “Polifemo”¹ for Bluestar, the advertising program “Locanda Muscettola”² for Studio 100, the sport program “Il Bianco e il Rosso”³ for Telebari. Their linguistic texture has been explored through the specific procedures of a kind of Critical Discourse Analysis labelled Diatextual Analysis, that values the dynamic and dialectic relations

between text and context (Mininni, 1992). It tries to catch the meaning of a discourse by looking for a series of markers which identify the *Subjectivity*, the *Argumentation* and the *Modality* of discourses.

Agency markers include all the textual units showing if the enunciator is source or goal of action; affectivity markers reveal the emotional dimension of texts; “embrayage” and “debrayage” markers allow to reveal whether the enunciator is involved or not in discursive acts. Stake markers disclose the aims and interests animating the text; story markers focus on scenes, characters and models of action; network markers point out the system of “logoi” and “antilogoi” activated within the several narrative and argumentative programmes of interlocutors. Genre markers stress any reference to the typology of text and intertextual references; opacity markers draw attention to rhetorical figures, such as frame metaphors and so on; finally metadiscourse refers to any expression of comment and reformulation.

A few of these analytical procedures are useful to highlight our research questions concerning the different affordances of TV genres, namely:

- 1) In the world of information, how do local channels dialogically involve audience in the public domain?
- 2) As for the in-depth information, which images of audience do they construct?
- 3) In the entertainment aims, how is it possible to “wink” to the audience?
- 4) And which values are dialogically transmitted by advertising?

The main results will be presented in accordance with the reference to these TV “genres”.

3.1 Information. As for the information domain, although it is a multi-colored genre, we can find some regular patterns. For example, in the case of Antenna Sud, which is the less local broadcasting among those considered in this study, the discursive construction of the news aims at creating a sort of continuity in the audience. This happens by means of:

¹ Dealing with political matters.

² Dealing with the presentation of a local manor farm and its products.

³ Dealing with local soccer teams and championships.

a) the “polysyndeton”, a rhetoric figure that creates connections by means of words or propositions (e.g. «and to start let’s talk about... and so you have listened... and let’s turn to the news section»). Most of time, the news starts with the conjunction “and”, thus creating continuity with the precedent edition;

b) the reference to the spatial and temporal dimension (e.g. «and let’s stay in Salento... and let’s move to Taranto...»). Verbs (such as “to stay”, “to move”, “to continue”), geographical indications and the indexicals, create together a sense of shared “positioning” (e.g. «well, that’s all for this edition, the news resume at 8.00 p.m., continue on our websites too, don’t loose the appointment tonight... thank you to stay with us, good afternoon»);

c) the relationship between local and national themes: locally we refer mostly to political or basic news, although there is a systematic shift between places and persons from both national and local contexts, either claimed or shown by images.

Basically local broadcasting is marked by the tendency to construct and renew relationships between the audience and the TV channel, between the person, the local and more global community, where the local acts as a sort of “dialogic” filter.

As for the strictly local information, we also observe dialogical and rhetoric strategies that aim at social “activation”. First, the use of first and second plural person (such as «we could avoid», «let’s reflect», «we could find», «we risk») aims at stimulating involvement and reflection. Second, there is the tendency to put questions to the audience (e.g. «so why not to think to a consensual separation?») and to enhance a sort of injustice and impatience toward the situation by means of specific forms of argumentation, such as the “myth building”, that is referring to particular stories as examples to follow, e.g. «by recovering the magno-Greek idea», and metaphor (e.g. «moving away from a stepmother region»; «going forth the doldrums we risk to keep aground for a long time»).

These broadcastings seem to be more focused on citizens’ needs, independently if they are swimmers, sport people, or workers,

as emerges in the example «so the bathers can quietly come back to attend... with any fear even because the ARPA punctually verifies...», where adverbs and metadiscursive markers take the function to calm down the audience.

In all the considered TV channels, news reports are strictly connected to the context (e.g., “on the street between...”). The context is so considered as stories, where different people with different points of view are included. Stories are full of details, and full of pathos when they deal with complicated family histories. For example, the story of a well-known young girl’s murder is told through little gestures and intentions, by stealing the details and by satisfying the “obsessive” attention that the audience gave to this case. Alongside of the familiar names, both social roles (“the farmer of Avetrana”) and family roles (“his husband”, “his son”) are proposed. The descriptions are so precise (e.g. «out in front the mayor and the vice-mayor... the words of father Dario... the organizers’ will to not make spectacular this event») that they make the audience feel as he/she was there, giving then no space to imagination. All these strategies aim at “going along with” the auditor, proposing then a double form of embrayage: “we are here” in the sense of time and space, and “we are here” in the sense of the narrated stories.

The process of discursively and dialogically “going along with” citizens is also more evident in the in-depths shows. We analyzed those kind of shows in the political and sportive domain.

In the first case, the program “Polifemo” from Blustar attempts to take the audience’s point of view. In particular, the presenter’s presence is marked, as he has a specific role (e.g. «I have entitled ‘few lights, many shadows...’ well, so first of all let’s start to consider... I want to make a meaningful example... I want to remember»): he organizes, puts in order, shows his intentions by using the verbs “to want” in the construction of his “agency”.

In the interactions, the guests try to dialogue with the audience through the use of a particular jargon known as “politics

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language”: in this example «I say one thing... sure there has been a collapse... it has to be built a new executive class... it’s a work that is just began... it needs to walk step by step» it’s testified by the metaphors about the construction and the path and, above all, by the impersonal expressions conveying assertiveness and certainty.

A strong emotional involvement emerges when the talk is about the ingroup-outgroup dynamics: «the man was right talking about ‘Baricentrismo’ and subjection even toward Lecce... We risk to be subjects in Basilicata too». This example emphasizes the concept of “subjection”, the use of “us” and metadiscursive markers such as “even”, “at almost”. In addition, this specific broadcasting extends especially in the south of Region, so that it tends to present the other provinces as “outgroups”.

With regard to sport programs of the Telebari channel, instead, the presenter is more “warm”, he creates a sort of “familiar atmosphere” by involving persons present there and at home (e.g. “he comes to visit us... he chose our program to see again... Hi, Gianni, welcome... and can I do without my guardian angels? An applause... an hug to miss Mary too...”). On the one side, this difference with the political programs may be attributed to the fact that sport programs are more “informal” compared to political ones. On the other side, instead, it seems that it may be related to that: in the political program the presenter is a sort of “citizen in frontline”, while in the second case the presenter acts as a “moderator” which tries to calm down the guests’ affirmations (e.g. «the locker room was split, it was coming out...», «...some little fissures, we can say so»).

On the contrary, the supporters’ voices are more clear and severe: «for supporters it’s easy to say that Matarrese⁴ has to go off... but they have to show in this historical moment... that they wear a glorious and prestigious sweater. We have confidence but if they miss again, we will be here not to wait for them,

rather to contest them». In the extract the opposition between “we supporters” and “they players” is supported by an argumentation based on moralization, through the invocation to the values of glory, distinction and trust.

Ex. 1:

J⁵: An earlier evaluation of your experience in Bari?

C: ...so, you know, in Bari there is the sun, the sun is yet cheerfulness, the guys are helping me because they want to work...

J: Congratulations to Tardelli for the words he found for our town too

Ex. 2:

J: Could you understand his language?

P: Dialect? I know a bit dialect...

J: Are you fascinated by the Bari dialect? Did you learn something?

P: In stops and starts yes, it looks a bit like the French language...

J: For example?

P: I don’t know... the bread is named “ppen” and in French we say “pain”... some words... ...there is similarity

J: It’s a tradition to know what is the first dialectal swear word that a stranger in this program has learnt...

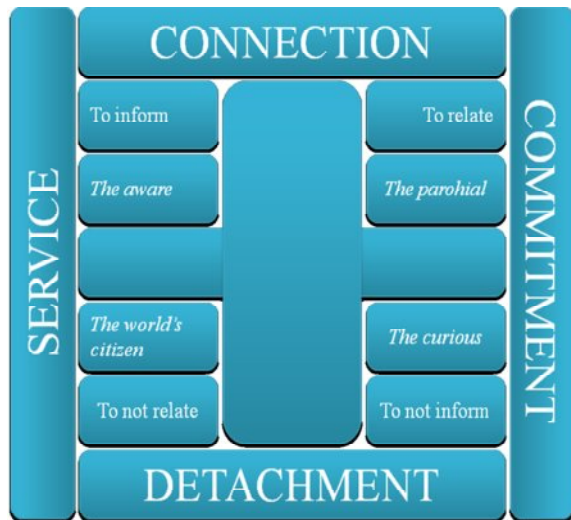
The excerpts 1) and 2) show the dialogues with two “outgroup members”, a coach (from the north of Italy) and a Swiss player, with the aim to “make them baresi [inhabitants of Bari]”. In both cases the persons propose some stereotypes (the sun and the warmth of Bari and the similarity between the French language and the Bari dialect). Nevertheless, they gain the interlocutor’s approval, that in the first case answers by a direct linguistic act (the congratulations), in the second case by an indirect act: the call at “tradition” celebrates live the passage to the ingroup.

What emerges enabled us to refer to a useful tool that may help us to reflect on a topic along the axes of contrariety and contradiction, namely the “semiotic square” (Greimas, Courtés, 1979). Starting from the contrast between “to inform” and “to relate”,

⁴ Antonio Matarrese was the (contested) president of the Bari team.

⁵ J stands for “journalist”, C stands for “coach” and P stands for “player”.

this frame develops along four polarities: “the aware”, that is the person that is connected to the local reality by means of basic information; the “citizen of the world”, that is the person who sums up local and global information with no significant difference; the “parochial”, those who actively participate to local reality, and the “curious”, who is more acted by curiosity and not for a sense of belonging with the local reality.



3.2 Entertainment. As for local entertainment (a sitcom on Antenna Sud), discourses are focused on “baresity”, although this happens in a non-local frame: the sitcom is a parody of the american TV series “ER Doctors in the front line”, transforming in it “end line”, and changing the name of the main protagonist from George Clooney to Dr. Clone. The local is emphasized by the recurrent use of dialectal expressions, contents and sentences typical of the Bari population («uagliò, statt citt»⁶) and it’s intensified by the presentation of polarized and kitsch figures. In addition, some topics are typical of the local and popular knowledge, such as the Fiera del Levante, the struggle against the Naples singer Gigi D’Alessio).

Most of all the sitcom uses humor (e.g. «I opened several commercial activities». «So are you a retailer?» «No, I’m a cat burglar»), which in this case it assumes a strategic

dialogical sense, since as reported in the literature, positive emotions stimulate higher levels of attachment to the minor group of reference (Lawler, 1992: 327). Really, accentuation and exasperation, as well as the construction of a home-made setting (e.g. through the visible microphones), contribute to create a “familiar” atmosphere that stimulates laugh and with which to identify.

3.3 Advertising. Also commercial spots are quite multifaceted. In the case of Antenna Sud, we find reference to local traditions by referring to local products, places and music. On the other side there is the global dimension, for example with referring about “a Mediterranean passion all over the world”, “in Italian, Russian and English”, “we searched in Italy and Spain the most beautiful dress”, etc. Products are presented as unique and exclusive (e.g. “with the extraordinary participation of...”, “the most exciting...”, “only in the best bookshops”), and often the metaphor of the “dream that comes true” is used to convince the audience, as well as the reference to fable (“your wedding party is a one day fable”).

It seems that the broadcasting (Antenna Sud) aims at activating a sort of etic contract in which positivity of local values is underlined, values that are not a synonymous of approximation, and, on the contrary, adhering to them does not mean to renounce to the beauty and variety of global.

The more local channels seem to have a different aim: on the one side a series of possibilities (stores, services, products) are offered together with specific information (e.g. “open in August”; “we offer it at a very low price... take advantage of this moment”; “we will make it for you... to see, to see again and to smile together”); on the other side, they activate a “cognitive simplification”, as they accompany the audience in the decisions and choices (e.g. “it offers to its visitors... you will find brands which will talk about you... they will find way into your hearth”; “so you can both take a holiday and renovate the appointment...”).

The dialogical “credibility” constructed by local TV can be better understood by analyzing the way each channel talks about itself. Antenna Sud and Telebari have a spot

⁶ This is a typical dialectal sentence that means: “hey guy, shut up!”

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devoted to their image. In particular, Antenna Sud proposes a domestic setting where a spectator is trying to tune TV and interacts with the “director”, a very popular figure. The main function is to “reassure” the spectator and, as a consequence, to ask for a renewed loyalty. The slogan of the spot is based on a game of words: «Where you want it, you put it and where you put it, you find it». The same is for Telebari, whose slogan is “Telebari. If you see it, you see again yourself”. The main feature of this spot is the city dimension, through the song “This city is all mine” and the TV that is set at the center of a street of an open-air market, where several persons are walking. The TV shows its most known figures.

The other channels have not a specific spot, but they present advertising for some internal programs. In the case of Bluestar, it’s a sport program. It’s depicted as an exclusive show (e.g. “we are ready, the countdown is started, the Taranto take the field... make yourself comfortable”) and it incites the audience through a direct claim and through the images and the stadium chants.

Finally, Studio 100 realizes a direct dialogue with the spectators: it presents a program that is going to start and that will be realized thanks to the audience’s collaboration and participation (e.g. “If you own... send them... we will realize for you...”), so it evokes the reciprocal commitment and the co-construction of the program.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Diatextual Analysis allows us to emphasize the “favorite dialogical cues” in the different genres we considered. As for information, the dialogical involvement is acted by a heavy use of the textual metadiscourse, above all the logic connectives, the frame markers and the endoforic markers. These discursive cues enable the audience to fully understand the development of the news.

As for the in-depth information, the dialogical strategy is the direct call for the audience, by making use of their (real and supposed) voices and of their positions (e.g. I

as a “Bari Citizen”). The dialogical strategies in entertainment are acted through the whole repertoire of communication: the contents, the rhetoric (e.g. the irony), nonverbal and verbal communication, so that the audience can fully recognize and embrace the local exasperated belonging.

Finally, in advertising the dialogical construction of the contract of communication is realized by the “proposal” to the audience, that is acted both by the reference to values and by the constant presence of verbs, such as to offer, to accompany, to talk, to find, to take advantage and so on. Really each channel tries to propose its credibility and dialogically propose contracts to the audience, by presenting itself in a characteristic way. In the attempt to present themselves as dialogical possibilities of shared construction of reality, local broadcasting show patterns of “hybridization” and “polarization” of genres: national TV formats are stressed but, on the other side, local culture is promoted. Information is used to create bridges with citizens and interpretative communities, so that the local broadcasting appears as a “domestic firelight”, where subjectivity which interferes with glocality can be heated and listened to shared, negotiated and questioned stories, of the specific cultures. This seems to have a strong reassuring function, also when it means to share and demonstrate to be proud and amused with regard to local stereotypes.

The results of our study represent a first step into the long journey to understand how TV local broadcasting nurtures the forms of life inherent to a given interpretative community. Anyway they let us hold that the main discursive genres of TV “parasocial interaction” offer their specific contribution to the psycho-social dynamics activated in the process of construction of a sense of community and identity.

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