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Interview or talk-show – Polish conversations on the screen

Looking for new forms of journalist communication, at the same time making them more attractive to recipients, is one reason for the disappearing of boundaries between various journalist genres. Earlier established theoretical frames do not work in practice, hence resulting are increasing difficulties in establishing clear cut border lines between genres similar to each other in form, especially regarding TV broadcasts, which due to their complexity are more multi functional. That is why, basing on theoretical genre characteristics as well as analysis of TV programmes, an attempt was made to establish the boundaries between an interview and a talk show.

Conversations in a TV studio are a popular journalist and entertainment information form. A large part of TV schedule is devoted to various forms of audio shows such as short meetings during breaks in programmes¹, debates, interviews and talk shows. Such interaction can but does not have to include elements of exchange of ideas². Generally, in direct conversation between parties present is the exchange of opinions, however, not all participants in the interaction are always active. Recipients who are indirect participants in the dialogue usually do not take part. Nevertheless, dialogue's direction aspect through words does take place in both cases.

The beginnings

In media terminology, an interview possesses two definitions. It is a form of journalist activity, a conversation between a representative of media with another person to obtain information or find out opinions; in other words, a tool for collecting information in order to present it in other forms of expression³, or, a conversation between a journalist and a public person carried out via any medium⁴. In both cases, the predominant goal of an interview is to acquire information or to find out the opinions of an individual or a group of people. Talk show is a type of TV show which bases on loose conversation between the host and invited

¹ Characteristic of Polish public television, when a journalist talks to one or more people about an up-coming show or something promoted by media. It usually lasts 2 to 3 minutes and is monothematic.

² M. Kita, *Wywiad prasowy. Język – gatunek – interakcja*, Katowice 1998, p. 173.

³ *Słownik terminologii medialnej*, ed. by W. Pisarek, Kraków 2006, p. 236.

⁴ M. Wojtak, *Gatunki prasowe*, Lublin 2004, p. 238.

guest(s) in front of an audience which, at times, takes part in it⁵. The style of conversation or its theme, in accordance with the genre, is unlimited which is why it may take many different forms.

The interview, as a journalist genre, first appeared on October 13, 1835 in the “New York Herald”. It was a publication of conversation between James Gordon Bennett and a post master from Buffalo⁶. Others are of the opinion that it was initiated by Horace Greely from New York’s “Tribune”. He was the first, in 1859, to print exactly recorded conversations. Earlier forms were rather summaries of previously carried out interviews⁷. In Poland, this genre is also known as an *interview*, with a focus on seeing the other person during this act of communication. Today, this term means mainly “finding out” or obtaining certain and information and expanding knowledge.

Talk show is a genre, also initiated in the US in early XX century which, contrary to popular opinion, first appeared on radio. In 1909, there was a programme about women’s rights with a new element, that of live discussion on air⁸. On TV, talk shows have been present since its beginnings. Its precursor is considered to be Sylvester “Pat” Weaver, the author of *Today* programme which was first broadcasted on January 14, 1952 on NBC. The programme was initially hosted by Dave Garroway and included phone-in conversations, music, weather forecasts, press reviews and, most importantly, gossiping with invited guests⁹. Cited is also another date, May 29, 1950, when broadcasted was the *Broadway Open House* show in which Broadway actors, in front of an audience, gossiped about their own circles¹⁰. In Poland, Irena Dziedzic’s *Tele-Echo* programme is considered to be the first talk show, initially broadcasted on March 26, 1956¹¹. However, in reality first talks shows, similar in style to the modern form of talk show, first appeared after 1989 and have been continuously present on TV since then.

Characteristic traits

⁵ *Słownik terminologii...*, p. 212.

⁶ M. Wojtak, *Gatunki...*, p. 238.

⁷ A. Magdoń, *Reporter i jego warsztat*, Kraków 2000, p. 87.

⁸ Z. Bauer, *Gatunki dziennikarskie*, [in:] *Dziennikarstwo i świat mediów*, ed. by Z. Bauer, E. Chudziński, Kraków 2008, p. 167.

⁹ W. Godzic, *Telewizja i jej gatunki po „Wielkim Bracie”*, Kraków 2004, p. 41.

¹⁰ Z. Bauer, *Gatunki...*, p. 168.

¹¹ K. Guzik, *Od Tele-Echa do Rozmów w toku – kariery gadania w telewizji*, [in:] *30 najważniejszych programów TV w Polsce*, ed. by W. Godzic, Warszawa 2005, p. 143.

Both interviews and talk shows are popular TV programmes. Their popularity is partly due to human social nature with a preference for dialogue¹², as well as man's natural curiosity toward others, particularly regarding celebrities. Interviews and talk shows alike are based on conversation which is key to in these programmes. According to Urszula Żydek-Bednarczuk, "it is other factors, generally outside language, conditioning the text as a genre"¹³. Hence, the great similarity of the two forms. The main point of an interview is conversation, while in a talk show the show element must also be present. Generally, it is dialogue which is the centre of the programme but it is enhanced by other forms expression and entertainment bits. In political programmes such as *Teraz my* or *Tomasz Lis na żywo*, it is usually different types of surveys or reports supplementary to the show's given topic. In the *Szymon Majewski Show*, it is short films about invited guests or issues related to them. Additionally, every episode includes a competition and a satire on political life (*Rozmowy w tłoku*) as well as a short satire series. All these elements increase the entertainment value and place the show somewhere outside the genre, making it a multi functional broadcast. Interview programmes such as *Kropka nad i* and *Temat dnia* do not include any additional elements, there is only pure conversation, while *Fakty po faktach* and *Magazyn 24* are preceded by short introductory films or news brief reports of events to be discussed on the programme. Nevertheless, it is dialogue which is the basic characteristic of both of these journalist forms.

The conversation which takes place is determined by the status of its participants, with preset roles. In both cases, their rank or position is different but the initiative lies with the journalist or host who invited the guest(s) into the studio. In an interview, the journalist asks questions and the guest answers. The host plays two roles simultaneously; he is himself with individual traits but he also represents viewers by expressing their interests. Many experts in the field argue about how individual a journalist can or should be during interviews. On the one hand, he represents his audience so he should be loyal to it and not express his own opinions. The invited guest is the expert presenting his opinions and the viewers' attention should be focused on him. On the other hand, interviews can and often do present the host's individuality. This is evident in the construction of questions, their order and in the art of making difficult enquiries and touching on sensitive subjects. The journalist's position is visible in the style of conversation and the role played during it, anywhere from being a

¹² Z. Bauer, *Gatunki...*, p. 188.

¹³ U. Żydek-Bednarczuk, *Wzorzec wywiadu telewizyjnego (na podstawie analizy programu 100 pytań do...)*, [in:] *Kultura, język, edukacja*, ed. by R. Mrózek, Katowice 1995, vol. 1, p. 432.

mirror or a helper to a partner or a fully fledged disputant¹⁴. Both types of behaviour are represented in interview programmes on Polish TV. Monika Olejnik always carries out her interviews from a strong position; she often interrupts her guests and argues with them. Anita Werner, despite being resolute, attempts to remain in the position of a public opinion representative. In a talk show, the role of the host is easier to delineate. He/she is in the centre around whom the show revolves. He/she is the star of the show who shines brighter than the invited guests. Kuba Wojewodzki is an example of such host. He takes advantage of this opportunity to the extent that he sometimes does not even allow his guest to answer the question asked and continues to talk as if he was talking to himself in front of someone. It is apparent that he plays the leading role and his guests are just a pretext for the show. Tomasz Lis is more subtle and not so overbearing towards his guests. Seemingly, he plays second fiddle, however, his accuracy, ripostes and directness as well as control of the programme and guests show him as the star of the programme. According to Małgorzata Kita, “talk shows have a simple recipe – a popular journalist invites into the studio someone interesting or weird”¹⁵. That is why, often times, their titles include the name of the host. This is particularly apparent in American talk shows, for example, *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, *Jerry Springer Show* or *The David Letterman Show*, although in Poland the same trend has also been adopted hence *Tomasz Lis na żywo*, *Szymon Majewski Show* and *Kuba Wojewódzki*.

Interviews and talk shows both include participation of recipients in these acts of communication. It is the audience which is being addressed when questions are answered. This is also visible in the language use such as, “Ladies and gentlemen...”. In both cases, however, contact with audience is different. In a talk show, the host creates personal or intimate contact with viewers suggesting they take part in the conversation and enter into close contact also with the invited guests¹⁶. Despite what theoreticians say about the commonness of this type of communication in talk shows, it seems that intimate character of conversation is typical only in programmes with ordinary people who frankly talk about their problems, experiences and beliefs. In such situations, the viewer identifies himself with the guest while the host, being sympathetic, creates the atmosphere of intimacy. Such relations are also possible in conversations with celebrities but only in situations in which they do not talk about show business gossip but rather their own personal experiences or important life

¹⁴ For more on this see: Z. Bauer, *Gatunki...*, p. 195–196; M. Kita, *Wywiad...*, p. 80–81; B. Sobczak, *Strategie prowadzenia wywiadu*, “Zeszyty Telewizyjne” Nr 9 (Summer 2005), p. 8–10; M. Worsowicz, *Gatunki prasowe*, Łódź 2006, p. 50–51.

¹⁵ M. Kita, *Medialna moda na dialog*, [in:] *Dialog a nowe media*, ed. by M. Kita, Katowice 2004, p. 175.

¹⁶ For more on this see: W. Godzic, *Telewizja...*, p. 43; J. Uszyński, *Telewizyjny pejzaż genealogiczny*, Warszawa 2004, p. 112.

events. Ewa Drzyzga is a master at entering into personal contact with her guests. In her programme, *Rozmowy w toku*, both ordinary people as well as celebrities talk about personal matters and the host gives them advice and comments on their statements and behaviour. Drzyzga is liked both by viewers and guests for the warm atmosphere on the show. She has talked to prostitutes, raped women, parents with adopted children, quarrelling neighbours and many other people on a great deal of difficult and sensitive subjects, also including people's secrets. People trust and value her, also for her direct comments, recorded from close-up creating the atmosphere of close contact with the host. In an interview, the journalist is conscious of his recipient but he does not enter into personal contact with him. The recipient is an observer of the conversation and even though the audience may be mentioned, it is referred to in the third person and treated as someone on the side. In interviews, the journalist's attention is focused on the guest and he does not look straight at the camera.

Also, the themes discussed differ somewhat between the two journalist genres. While in political programmes, these disparities are minimal, in conversations with celebrities or on social issues they are a lot more apparent. It should be noted that in case of interviews the guest is most often a public person. A public person is considered to be anyone who as part of their work plays a public function or whose activity is cultural, economic, or any other type visible in the public sphere. This is usually a person who is in a notable position in the public sphere (political, economic, etc.) or who is admired for their accomplishments in the artistic, scientific, professional, sport or other spheres. Interviews with ordinary people are sporadic; they may take place if they are witness to a event or to collect information. The subject of conversation in interviews is generally more serious than in talk shows. Most often, discussed are current issues, commenting the present political, economic or cultural situation. Also, popular are social, biographical or entertainment interviews. In talk shows, the guest can be anyone who fits the current episode theme. These are "extraordinary" people, often representatives of strange professions, having interesting hobbies, with peculiar social status or those who want to talk about their life experiences. They are people with whom viewers can relate or ones that are simply interesting because they are exceptional somehow. The subjects are delineated by programme author's ideas and the people found to talk about the given subject matter. Generally, in order to be a guest it is enough to want to talk about one's intimate secrets. As far as conversation with media people, the dialogue centers around their personal life and gossip but it can also be about serious matters. It can also introduce the star to his audience or be on difficult issues. There are not many Polish show so far with this theme, in fact Drzyzga's show is the only one of the sort.

There are significant differences between the two types of programmes in the way they use the audience. In a talk show, its role is significant, while in an interview it is sporadic, a kind of background to the on-going conversation. In talk shows, the audience is part of the show, reacting vigorously to the answers given and, more importantly, directly interacting with the host and guests. The audience can ask questions, comment and discuss, as well as sometimes take part in tasks prepared by the host. Interviews do not make use of audience, hence, it plays no part in the programme. Polish talk shows, to a large extent, do not involve the audience. Only in *Rozmowy w toku* the host allows people to fully state their views¹⁷, presented either by experts or ordinary people. These are often spontaneous, emotional and controversial statements which are so characteristic of the show and the genre in general. In Kuba Wojewódzki and Szymon Majewski shows, audience reactions are only in the background, without individual people making statements or asking questions. They may, at times, only take part in tasks prepared. In political programmes, audience participation is limited to applause or “booing” in reaction to what is said.

The time in which the two types of programmes are broadcasted also varies. Interviews are frequently live, as direct commentaries to current events, although, there are also ones recorded and aired at different times. In that case, they are mostly biographical conversations. Talk shows, even though they look like live shows, are generally not. It is apparent in shows like *Szymon Majewski Show*, *Kuba Wojewódzki* and *Rozmowy w toku*. Wojewódzki even emphasizes this element when he says, “we will cut that out later” or when he confuses the day of the recording with the day of broadcasting. Political theme talk shows like *Teraz my* or *Tomasz Lis na żywo* are, however, live. This is due to the specificity of these programmes which, similarly to interviews, comment on current events.

All in all, the most imperative difference between the two genres is in their aims, despite the fact that both are based on conversation between a journalist and invited guests. Interviews focus on obtaining information while talk shows are purely entertaining, with conversation, based on which the show takes place, in the background. This is their characteristic trait, regardless the topic of conversation or talk show type. This is what differentiates the two genres the most. In consequence, different are the ways in which the programmes are recorded and edited. Interviews are shot from close up or further away, with an easy change of camera angles which allows the viewer to focus on the subject matter

¹⁷With the exception of programmes with famous people in which the audience does not usually speak, ask questions or comment.

discussed. There are no sudden camera jumps with the participants in the spotlight. Talk shows, on the other hand, are lot more dynamic. There are many camera angles used and the narration pace is much faster. There is a greater variety of shots. During the conversations, the host and guests are shown from up-close, medium and long shots. After editing, the final product is versatile with quick narration. These editing techniques are present in all talk shows, regardless their theme. It is logical that in more entertaining shows the editing is even more dynamic while in more serious ones (political or intimate) it is somewhat slower but still it is much more dynamic than in interviews.

Synthetic comparison of both genres

Similarities and differences	
Similarities	
Dialogue	Both forms are based on dialogue, with a steady exchange of questions and answers
Obtaining invited guest(s) opinions	The goal of both interview and talk show is to present the guest, his opinions, experiences, information and beliefs to mass audience
Differences	
Programme realization	Interview are characterized by close up and long shots and easy changes of camera angles; talk shows are dynamic, with a greater variety of camera angles and quick changes between them
Subject master	The subject master discussed is similar with the exception of controversial, atypical and intimate subject characteristic to talk shows
Role of journalist	In interviews, the focus is on the guest who the journalist ask questions; in talk shows, the host is the star of the show which he creates
Invited guest	An interview, according to its definition, is most often a conversation with a public person, with ordinary people it is short conversation when they are witness to an event or part of a journalist report; in talk shows, the guest can be anyone who fits the character of the programme and its subject matter
Audience	In interviews, if it is present, it is silent; in talk shows, it is an element of the show and takes active part in the conversation
Relations with recipient	In interview, the journalist is aware of the recipient's indirect presence but treats him as a passive observer; in talk shows, the host focuses on entering into personal or even

	intimate relations with the recipient
Recording vs broadcasting time	Interview are generally live programmes; Talk shows, despite looking like live shows, are normally recorded, edited and then broadcasted

Polish talk show are a relatively new journalist genre, still with numerous possibilities for development. What has, so far, not taken place is what is characteristic to American programmes – the division into day and night schedule. During the day, broadcasted are shows for all viewers, while at night – for adult ones. The specificity of Polish society as well as historical determinants may not allow the creation of such open forms of shows as in the US. In the past, there was Mariusz Szczygieł's *Na każdy temat* night talk show which broke taboos and talked about controversial issues with guests not normally represented in Polish media¹⁸. At first, the show evoked a lot of emotions and discussion but with time people got used to it.

Polish talk shows are making progress, although they still do not take full advantage of all the opportunities this genre provides. There are still many journalists who use extensive elements of interview in their shows. Tomasz Lis, Andrzej Morozowski and Tomasz Sekielski, who all have political talk shows with a strong position on the market, oscillate somewhere between the interview and talk show format, not choosing either of the two genres. Ewa Drzyzga today is only associated with her *Rozmowy w tłoku* programme and hardly anybody remembers her as a TV presenter or a radio journalist. Even though she became famous as a result of her show, some say that she does not emphasize enough her strong position as a host. Kuba Wojewódzki and Szymon Majewski, on the other hand, are typical examples of showmen who use their show to promote their own selves but do not take full advantage of audience opportunities. There is still a lot of experimenting to be done with the talk show format which will most likely take place in the near future.

Practice vs. theory

In order to delineate a strict borderline between these two journalist forms, theory must be distinguished from what happens in practice. Classic definition of an interview states that it should be a journalist conversation with a guest on more than one subject and without an audience. A journalist should be an intermediary between the guest and his audience for which he collects information about the guest's opinions and beliefs. A talk show is a

¹⁸ *Na każdy temat* was broadcasted by Polsat between 1995–2001.

combination of conversation and various entertainment forms. The host is the star of the show who talks to his guest(s) in front of an audience which he engages in the dialogue. Recipients are an important part of the show. Even though they are not directly taking part in the conversation, they are taken into consideration and can be directly contacted by the host.

What takes place in reality stretches the theoretical frames resulting in the disappearing of border lines. In interviews, it is often not enough for a journalist to just ask questions. They prefer to also present their own opinions and be equal partners in the discussion. Monika Olejnik and Jacek Żakowski are so involved in their programmes that their interviews are more like shows which viewers watch not to find out the guest's opinions but to see what the journalist will say, playing the leading role. Meanwhile, Andrzej Morozowski and Tomasz Sekielski in *Teraz my* often talk to just one guest about several different issues. They do not include any additional reports and their audience is silent. Hence, the question arises whether *Teraz my* should even be called a talk show. Political and economic commentary and conversations with experts, normally characteristic of interviews, are now also present in talk shows. At the same time, intimate questions and discussions, initially only present in talk shows, are now part of interviews. There is, for example, Bogdan Rymanowski and his personal questions to politicians regarding their reaction to a negative comment made about them by someone else. He often asks, "How does that make you feel?" Also, politicians do not avoid personal matters, behaving more like celebrities instead of public people that they are. Donald Tusk's entire media image is based on family. That is why, even in serious interviews, he mentions his wife's opinions or experiences on raising children so that viewers could see his personal side.

So far, the only "untouched" boarder line between the two genres is the way they are made. A variety of shots, short takes and different camera angles are typical of talk shows. As a result, they are dynamic and fast paced. Interviews are characterized by long takes with slower narration appropriate to the style of conversation. They are shot from up close and at medium range with smooth camera angle changes. The analysed interviews and talk shows generally adhere to these principles, however, we may assume that in the future this might also change as a result of continuous search for new and exciting ways of making broadcasts more appealing.