



The Cultural Podcast. Discursive Strategies

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Abstract: In this article, we examine the flagship genre of journalism—the interview—from the perspectives of communication theory, linguistic stylistics, and pragmatics. Among the various types of interviews, we focus on the cultural radio interview: the podcast. Although the podcast is a form of new media, it adheres to the same well-established laws of discourse. We analyse two episodes of the cultural podcast *All You Can Read*, hosted by Marius Chivu, through the lens of conversational pragmatics, exploring concepts such as the communication contract, phatic function, orality, and discursive strategy.

Keywords: cultural podcast; conversation; phatic; orality; communication contract; interreferencing.

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Introduction

Among the language functions proposed by Roman Jakobson, the one that is specific to journalistic style is undoubtedly the phatic function, as the act of communication becomes effective only with its contribution. The renowned linguist Stelian Dumistrăcel considers that the phatic function is "a component of the appellative function of discourse, with a manipulative nature, aimed not only at establishing empathy but also at seducing and even directly inciting the receiver."¹

The role of the phatic function in communication has been studied concerning discourse, particularly in the context of conversational language. The focus has been on spoken, popular, and literary language, highlighting the relevance of the phatic component in ensuring a favourable atmosphere in interpersonal relationships. Phaticity goes beyond simple negotiation in achieving communication and manifests itself through the verbal and attitudinal ensemble that, in addition to conveying ideas, ensures the effectiveness of contact in general. It reflects a need to establish and maintain contact with the recipient, which is expressed through the exploitation of the specific characteristics of the communication channel.

Conversation represents a domain of communicative action and interaction that is contextually determined.² In managing a conversation, the principle of turn-taking plays a crucial role. Conversational dialogism requires that the locutionary role be occupied alternately by different actors, with participants' various contributions (speaking turns) alternating (turn-taking), thus facilitating conversational cooperation. The alternation of roles, whether managed by the participants themselves or by a moderator, can occur consensually or conflictually, aggressively or politely, explicitly or implicitly—factors that influence interpersonal relationships.

According to Stelian Dumistrăcel³, the term *communication contract* derives from concepts such as *intersubjectivity*, *dialogism*, *collective intention*, and *negotiation*—perspectives that share a contractual definition of speech acts. This definition assumes the presence of two interacting subjects, the existence of conventions, norms, and agreements that regulate linguistic exchanges, as well as shared knowledge that enables mutual understanding, all within a specific communicative situation.⁴ The phrase *communication contract* is used by

¹ Dumistrăcel, Stelian. *Limbaajul publicistic românesc din perspectiva stilurilor funcționale*. Iași, Institutul European, 2006, p. 30.

² Rovența-Frumușani, Daniela. *Analiza discursului. Ipoteze și ipostaze*. București, Tritonic, 2005, p. 41.

³ Dumistrăcel, Stelian. *Limbaajul publicistic românesc din perspectiva stilurilor funcționale*. Iași, Institutul European, 2006, p. 36.

⁴ Savin, Petronela. *Discursul repetat de La Eugeniu Coșeriu la Stelian Dumistrăcel*. In vol. *Discursul repetat între alteritate și creativitate. Volum omagial Stelian Dumistrăcel*, editor Cristinel Munteanu, Institutul European, Iași, 2007, p. 77-86.

researchers in semiotics, psycholinguistics, and sociolinguistics, as well as by discourse analysts, to designate what gives meaning to a communicative act and validates it from the perspective of the co-construction of meaning.

A defining aspect of journalistic style is *orality*, which has been extensively studied by researcher Viorica Molea. The author considers orality to be an appealing domain of language for journalists due to its vividness, exoticism, and accessibility for a wide range of readers. However, it is also noted that excessive use of orality, or its indiscriminate introduction into journalistic texts, can lead to intellectual and educational slippage—both linguistic and psychosocial—potentially resulting in moral dysfunctions.⁵

The *podcast* is a highly popular form of new media, understood as a digital version of a radio show and closely related to blogging and video blogging, both of which are online audio-video products. The term *podcast* combines *iPod* (portable music player) and *casting* (broadcasting) and emerged after 2005, describing an on-demand listening experience, available both online via streaming and offline through downloads from audio or video platforms that host the recording. Podcasts exist in various formats and cover a wide range of topics, from politics to gastronomy, from financial education to music and fashion.⁶

We consider the cultural podcast *All You Can Read*, created by writer, translator, and literary critic Marius Chivu, to be a model of this new media format. It is a unique product on the Romanian market, dedicated especially to fiction and art enthusiasts who wish to learn more about their favourite authors, their books, passions, and lives. *All You Can Read*, like many other podcasts across various fields, is hosted by the online radio station Urban Sunsets on the platform *starcast.ro* and boasts a portfolio of over 120 interviews with prominent figures in Romanian and international culture, including Emil Brumaru, Mircea Cărtărescu, Nora Iuga, Adriana Bittel, Lucian Boia, Ioana Pârvulescu, José Luís Peixoto, Nae Caranfil, Radu Vancu, Vintilă Mihăilescu, Mircea Daneliuc, Ileana Mălăncioiu, Herman Koch, and many other creators of literary and visual worlds.

To illustrate the concepts of *phaticity* and *orality*, we have chosen, as a starting point, one of the many lively and meaningful dialogues conducted by Marius Chivu online: his interview with translator Iulia Gorzo, recorded on the occasion of the 2022 bookstore release of *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, written by the famous director Quentin Tarantino. The guest of the podcast was responsible for the book's translation and footnotes.

⁵ Molea, Viorica. *Oralitatea în textul publicistic actual românesc*. Chișinău, Editura Prut Internațional, 2016, p. 46.

⁶ Floria, Florinela. *Stelian Dumitrăcel – forme de comunicare*. Studii și cercetări științifice. Seria filologie, nr. 48, 2022, p. 21-26.

The interview begins with a casual tone ("Greetings, everyone!"), establishing the objective parameters of communication from the very first seconds. Although the conversation takes place in the public space of the internet, the fact that both participants belong to the same extended professional sphere (authors, editors, and translators— in other words, literary professionals) situates the discourse within an informal public register. At times, a familiar tone is also noticeable, as the podcast format allows it: unlike a rigid political television talk show, where the host and guest must maintain a formal distance and official language, a cultural digital podcast permits a shift from familiarity to playfulness. This is evident when the guest lightens the atmosphere with a joke: "Tarantino couldn't make it, so I came instead." Equally playful is Marius Chivu's remark when introducing the book and the film that preceded it: "A short introduction for those who haven't been living on this planet for the past two years."

As the interview continues, the host explains why the novel does not merely duplicate the film and briefly outlines its narrative. He then delves, together with his guest, into the behind-the-scenes work of a translator, constructing a specialized dialogue that is not necessarily filled with jargon but rather rich in details about the translator's internal process— to paraphrase the well-known work of Russian director Konstantin Stanislavski.

The conversation remains relaxed and familiar, as both the speaker and listener share the same cultural background and linguistic code. Marius Chivu, in his dual role as a writer and translator, speaks as an insider within the creative industry of writing. This allows us to discuss the *coreference*, a concept introduced by Francis Jacques⁷, which, under the umbrella of referential dialogue, refers to the use of the same name for the same extra linguistic element. In other words, both the speaker and the listener use the same terms to designate the same referent— in this case, translation.

At one point, Iulia Gorzo explains to the audience the conventions of translation, which leads to a moment where the moderator and guest take different positions, engaging in a minor debate over footnotes. Marius Chivu expresses his view that footnotes ruin the novel's essence and states that he would have approached things differently. However, the debate remains friendly, and the listener can immediately recognize that this is a clash of ideas, not a personal conflict.

What is essential for our analysis is the fact that the interviewer possesses the competence to express a differing opinion, which is entirely appropriate when both dialogue partners are on equal footing, discussing as experts speaking to experts. The speaker and listener negotiate, within the framework of each participant's expressive competence, a shared reference— translation as an act of re-creation.

⁷ Jacques, Francis. *Dialogiques*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1979.

We also find interreferencing illustrated in the dialogue, as it is continuously constructed and developed through the interaction between the two discourse participants. They constantly complement each other, setting up new questions and responses, providing fresh and original arguments beyond prefabricated ones. The meanings of communication emerge synergistically, and their roles are no longer fixed but become interchangeable.

Moreover, their interpersonal relationship and openness toward each other highlight the concepts of *alterity* and the *communication contract*. The speaker and listener cooperate constantly, engaging not only at a linguistic level but also socially and psychologically, fostering empathy: "I'm asking you this because I am also a writer" or "I understand because I, too, have translated, though not at your level of expertise." The moderator does not just ask questions—he speaks extensively, explains, provides details, guides the audience into the world of translators, and shares personal experiences. However, he does so with modesty, never forgetting that his main goal is to highlight his guest.

We learn that Iulia Gorzo has translated extensive works by renowned authors and that she and Marius Chivu have successfully collaborated on a short story anthology—an opportunity for the host to once again praise her accomplishments and associate her with some of the biggest names in the field. When she receives compliments on her natural and skilful translation of dialogues set in the Woodstock-era American world, she responds with "Thank you, I was on the edge of my seat waiting!" This moment reinforces the mutual validation between the two dialogue partners, as they recognize each other's competence.

The relational dimension of the exchange further highlights the phatic function of language, which remains consistently present. Marius Chivu constantly engages with his guest and identifies with her, enriching the discussion between these two professionals of the written word.

Regarding paraverbal communication, we observe how vocal timbre, accent, intonation, inflections, pauses, and emphasis all contribute to shaping a fully realized oral space. The way the two communicate is composed not only of verbal elements but also paraverbal and nonverbal cues.

A distinctive element of this podcast is the musical interludes, where the conversation is interrupted by tracks chosen by the guest—another way to gain insight into their personality. Similarly, the show's closing questionnaire offers a final glimpse into the guest's world:

- Which books opened your eyes?
- What music would you send into space for other civilizations?
- If you had a time machine, which famous author would you share a glass of wine with?
- Which classic book have you never read or never managed to finish?

- In which movie would you like to live?
- What are your favourite places in Bucharest?

This segment personalizes the interview, making it both introspective and engaging while maintaining the conversational and immersive style of the podcast.

Considering the aspects analysed above, we reiterate the idea that the podcast *All You Can Read* serves as a model of best practices in terms of discursive strategy and dialogism (the art of dialogue). From this episode, the listener is left with the enthusiasm with which Marius Chivu and Iulia Gorzo debate—a proven formula for persuasion, audience success, and increasing readership. We have reasons to believe that the final call to action delivered by the host will resonate with the audience: "Dear listeners, watch films, read books, listen to music, and stay close to Urban Sunsets!"

Another illustration of a well-executed cultural interview is Marius Chivu's dialogue with the renowned Romanian philosopher and writer Gabriel Liiceanu. The interview was recorded at the end of 2018 and is hosted on the same *starcast.ro* platform belonging to the online radio Urban Sunsets.

The discussion was prompted by the release of Gabriel Liiceanu's book *Așteptând o altă omenire* (*Waiting for Another Humanity*). Demonstrating thorough research and a careful reading of the work, the moderator offers general reflections, which are further enriched by the author's explanations.

In this edition of the podcast, faced with a prominent figure in Romanian culture, Marius Chivu showcases remarkable skill in steering the conversation, ensuring that he holds his own against his celebrated guest—despite the latter's vastly greater experience in writing and life.

This contrast is particularly notable when compared to the previously analysed interview with Iulia Gorzo, where the moderator and guest were of similar age, career stages, and professional backgrounds. In this case, Liiceanu's fame, wisdom, personal charisma, and intellectual stature are exceptionally difficult to match. Nevertheless, the conversation does not feel imbalanced—instead, it builds a communication partnership that only enhances the cultural value of *All You Can Read*.

To begin, Marius Chivu invites his guest on a journey back to his childhood, exploring the books that shaped his early years as a reader. This gives Gabriel Liiceanu the opportunity to vividly recount the miracle of his first reading experience—400 pages of Jules Verne at the age of just eight years old. He describes the fascination of encountering words strung together in the 1940s, when his house was cold, and he would kneel in the family living room, flipping through a Larousse dictionary.

The conversation continues with a story about a reading competition he had with his German neighbour of the same age, an experience that ultimately earned him an impressive library and shaped his childhood. Marius Chivu interjects to point out that Liiceanu's favourite childhood book, *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, is a true celebration of science, adding that the Romanian translation was probably done by Gellu Naum—a detail that Liiceanu does not recall.

The familiar tone resurfaces multiple times throughout the conversation. For instance, Chivu jokingly remarks: "You must have been very pleased when you published Lucian Boia's book about Jules Verne (at Humanitas, the publishing house owned by G. Liiceanu)." To which Liiceanu nods in agreement.

Marius Chivu does not hesitate to interject when his expertise can enhance the discussion. For example, when Liiceanu mentions that his mother used to read Florence Barclay, a 19th-century British novelist, Chivu adds: "I read her book *The Rosary* in the '90s." This pleasantly surprises his guest, reinforcing the dynamic of intellectual camaraderie.

Furthermore, the host offers commentary on several of Liiceanu's own books and asks him pointed, well-researched questions, earning yet another mark of distinction as a writer-journalist.

The interview also features high-level intellectual debates, encompassing concepts from literary theory and criticism, philosophy, anthropology, religion, aesthetics, and cinematography, making it rich in cultural references that may only be accessible to specialists in these fields. However, this is expected in niche interviews, which lack the sensationalist component characteristic of other types of interviews aimed at a broader audience.

At times, Gabriel Liiceanu makes strong value judgments, with statements that could be perceived as definitive pronouncements, such as:

- "Religions are among humanity's great myths."
- "I see no species compatibility between myself and the great torturers of the world."

Yet, these elitist elements are balanced by humour and irony, the kind that only intelligent individuals who do not take themselves too seriously can deliver. The result is a mix of refined reflections and witty, light-hearted moments that keep the conversation engaging.

Additionally, to maintain a digestible rhythm—and because this is the show's format—the interview is interspersed with musical interludes, featuring the guest's favourite pieces, particularly classical music selections. These elements, along with Liiceanu's distinctive voice and expressive tone, contribute to shaping his full personal and intellectual portrait.

One particular aspect of this interview is that, unlike in other episodes, the moderator allows his guest more speaking time. Marius Chivu rarely interrupts,

except when absolutely necessary—especially given Liiceanu's reputation for clarity, coherence, and expressiveness. However, Chivu makes his presence felt exactly when needed, adding relevant insights or clarifying points at just the right moments.

We also observe Gabriel Liiceanu's conversational tact and respect for Marius Chivu. He frequently compliments the moderator, either by asking for his opinion, thus validating him as a true dialogue partner, or by modestly positioning himself in a lower stance:

- "You certainly know this better than I do (...)."
- "I personally struggle to find the right words to express my thoughts (unlike you, of course)."
- "What a fine observation you just made!"

This dynamic keeps the discussion engaging, and before the listener realizes it, the conversation exceeds two hours. The host acknowledges that it is the longest episode in the show's history, while the guest humorously apologizes for "not having a break."

Thus, we consider both of the podcast interviews analysed above to be models of best practices in illustrating concepts from linguistic stylistics and pragmatics, such as:

- Discourse and conversation
- Speech acts
- Functional style
- Communication contract
- Phatic function and orality
- Coreference and interreferencing
- Verbal and nonverbal communication

These interviews are true examples of the art of meaningful dialogue, thanks not only to the intellectual calibre of the guests but also to the highly skilled moderator—himself a man of culture and a formidable discussion partner.

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