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Infotainment Media Forms.

Mixing Genres in the American and Romanian Televisual Press

(summary)

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	
INTRODUCTION	
CHAPTER I: PAST AND CURRENT TRENDS IN JOURNALISM. THE NEW MEDIA.....	
1.1. Introductory Remarks on Today's New Media	
1.2. Informative Journalism and/or Journalism of Opinion?	
1.3. Utilitarian Journalism: A New Perspective?.....	
1.4. The <i>Society of a Spectacle</i> and the Press Today	
1.5. <i>One-Man-Show</i> and the Humourist Journalist Today.....	
1.6. A New Reform in Journalism – <i>Media Heterogeneity/Hybridity</i>	
1.7. Final Considerations	
CHAPTER II: REASSESSING MEDIA GENRES. THE BIRTH OF INFOTAINMENT	
2.1. Introductory Remarks on the Concept of Genre	
2.2. <i>Genre</i> Reflections in the Journalistic Field.....	
2.3. <i>Genre</i> Reflections in the Linguistic Field	
2.4. Defining the <i>Genre</i> – The Need for an Interdisciplinary Approach	
2.5. Televisual Media Genres – The TV Show	
2.6. <i>Infotainment</i> : The Epitome of Media Hybridity	
2.7. Infotainment Today: Why and Whereto?.....	
2.8. Final Considerations	
CHAPTER III: INFOTAINMENT VARIABLES. HOW GENRES MIX.....	
3.1. Introductory Remarks: <i>Serious</i> versus <i>Non-serious</i> . Distinctions	
3.2. <i>Serious</i> Genres – Definitions and Categories.....	
3.3. <i>Non-Serious</i> Genres – Definitions and Categories.....	
3.4. Infotainment: Towards a New Genre Scheme?	
3.5. Final considerations	
CHPATER IV: CORPUS SELECTION AND TRANSCRIPTION	
4.1. Introductory Remarks on Corpus	
4.2. Basic Principles of Corpus Construction	
4.3. Corpus Description	
4.4. Corpus Annotation	

4.5. Final Considerations	
CHAPTER V: AMERICAN INFOTAINMENT AND THE <i>NEWS COMEDY</i>	
5.1. Introductory Remarks.....	
5.2. “Last Week Tonight” – The Death Penalty.....	
5.2.1. Corpus Transcription	
5.2.2. Study Premises	
5.2.3. A Contextual Framework	
5.2.4. Corpus Analysis – Evidence of Serious Discourse	
5.2.5. Corpus Analysis – Evidence of Non-Serious Discourse	
5.2.6. The Shift from Serious to Non-Serious Discourse	
5.2.7. Concluding Remarks	
5.3. “The Daily Show” – President Trump Takes (Executive) Action	
5.3.1. Corpus Transcription	
5.3.2. Study Premises	
5.3.3. A Contextual Framework	
5.3.4. Corpus Analysis – Proving the Informative Side.....	
5.3.5. Corpus Analysis – Proving the Entertaining Side	
5.3.7. Concluding Remarks	
5.4. “The Late Show” – The Road to the White House	
5.4.1. Corpus Transcription	
5.4.2. Study Premises	
5.4.3. A Contextual Framework	
5.4.4. Corpus Analysis – Evidence of Serious Discourse	
5.4.5. Corpus Analysis – Evidence of Non-Serious Discourse	
5.4.6. The Shift from Serious to Non-Serious Discourse.....	
5.4.7. Concluding Remarks	
CHAPTER VI: ROMANIAN HYBRID SHOWS AND THE <i>PAMPHLET PRESS</i>	
6.1. Introductory Remarks.....	
6.2. “România de la A la Z” (“Romania from A to Z”).....	
6.2.1. Corpus Transcription.....	
6.2.2. Study Premises	
6.2.3. A Contextual Framework	
6.2.4. Corpus Analysis: The Informative Side	
6.2.5. Corpus Analysis – Evidence of the Entertaining Side	
6.2.6. The Transfer from Serious to Non-Serious Discourse	

6.2.7. Concluding Remarks	
6.3. "Lumea lui Banciu" ("Banciu`s World") – Excerpt from the Show Aired on February 19 th , 2017.....	
6.3.1. Corpus Transcription.....	
6.3.2. Study Premises	
6.3.3. A Contextual Framework	
6.3.4. Corpus Analysis – Evidence of Serious Discourse	
6.3.5. Corpus Analysis – Evidence of Non-Serious Discourse	
6.3.6. The Shift from Serious to Non-Serious Discourse	
6.3.7. Concluding Remarks	
6.4. "Starea Nației": Acești bolnavi care ne conduc ("The State of the Nation": The Sick People Who Lead Us)	
6.4.1. Corpus Transcription.....	
6.4.2. Study Premises	
6.4.3. A Contextual Framework	
6.4.4. Corpus Analysis – Evidence of Serious Discourse	
6.4.5. Corpus Analysis – Evidence of Non-Serious Discourse	
6.4.6. The Shift from Serious to Non-Serious Discourse.....	
6.4.7. Concluding Remarks	
6.5. "În Gura Presei" ("In the Press`s Mouth").....	
6.5.1. Corpus Transcription: În gura presei – „Sunt prea bătrân ca să mai cred în guvernare” (In the Press`s Mouth – „I Am Too Old to Believe in the Government anymore).....	
6.5.2. Study Premises	
6.5.3. A Contextual Framework	
6.5.4. Corpus Analysis –Evidence of Serious Discourse	
6.5.5. Corpus Analysis – Evidence of Non-Serious Discourse	
6.5.6. The Shift from Serious to Non-Serious Discourse.....	
6.5.7. Concluding Remarks	
6.6. Final Considerations.....	
CHAPTER VII: CASE STUDY: NOVEMBER 2015 PARIS ATTACKS – A COMPARATIVE APPROACH	
7.1. Introductory Remarks	
7.2. Paris Attacks in the American Infotainment Press	
7.2.1. Corpus Transcription.....	
7.2.1.1. "The Daily Show" – Tragedy in Paris: The Three Stages of Political Grief	

7.2.1.2. "Last Week Tonight" – Paris Attacks	
7.2.1.3. "Late Show" – We stand with the people of France	
7.2.1.4. "Late Night" – A few words on Paris.....	
7.2.2. General features	
7.2.3. Serious discourse particularities	
7.2.4. Non-serious discourse particularities.....	
7.2.5. Conclusive remarks	
7.3. Paris Attacks in the Romanian Infotainment Show.....	
7.3.1. Corpus transcription	
7.3.1.1. "România de la A la Z" – Ce ne așteaptă după atentatele din Paris? ("Romania from A to Z" – How will it be after the Paris attacks?)	
7.3.1.2. "Starea nației" – Ultimul concert la Paris ("The State of the Nation" – The Last Paris Concert)	
7.3.1.3. "Lumea lui Banciu" – 15 Noiembrie 2015 (Banciu`s World" – November 15 th , 2015)	
7.3.1.4. "În gura presei" – 15 Noiembrie 2015 (In the Press`s Mouth – November 15 th , 2015).....	
7.4. General features	
7.5. Serious discourse particularities.....	
7.6. Non-serious discourse particularities	
7.7. Conclusive remarks	
7.8. Romanian versus American Infotainment: Resemblances and Differences	
7.9. Final Considerations	
CONCLUSIONS.....	
APPENDIX.....	
General Transcript Conventions	
Corpus Transcription.....	
Bibliography	
Corpus URLs:	

By becoming more and more present in journalism today, *TV infotainment* is constantly in a revival process. As we are planning to show further on, its *numerous forms* regularly require specific scientific analyses in order to determine the grounds of these changes and accurately describe this phenomenon. The essential idea that guides our study is observing and investigating this constant re-creation of the *infotainment genre* in matters of television. There are various particular TV shows that are created within this macro-genre, but at the same time they have originally developed their own distinctiveness. Predominantly, they are conceived by combining two or more distinct genres and by associating different discourse types.

Consequently, we decided to conduct these analyses clearly focusing on *eight* specific television programmes that deal with national and international press in a distinctive manner, combining elements from several genres, clearly proving one of the most powerful characteristics of nowadays press: its *heterogeneous nuance*.

Before further proceed, we would like to reinforce the fact that our study is mainly driven from a *linguistic standpoint*, focusing first and foremost on the *verbal* elements present within the text. Surely, the richness of *non-verbal* and *paraverbal* aspects within these texts cannot be contested, and there are high chances that we could use these aspects to strengthen some of our statements and support our arguments. However, we believe that the richness of this field does not allow an equally divided analysis, and therefore, the main path we have chosen for our study is a *linguistic* one. Hence, following the large path of *discourse analysis* with a special focus on *genre study*, we shall be working with our gathered corpus by means of a *sequential type of analysis*. Next, we attempt to provide an overview on each of the seven chapters we have included in our study.

CHAPTER I: PAST AND CURRENT TRENDS IN JOURNALISM. THE NEW MEDIA

On account of the aforementioned, this first chapter addresses only the concept of *infotainment* in the media area as a major direction in the current press, aiming to provide a solid, yet compressed, description of this fairly new concept. Our main objective here is to offer some guidance regarding the challenges of this type of journalism, and of course, to provide the theoretical ground for further analysis. In that respect, many international opinions in this matter proved to be highly indispensable in building our arguments. Since our thesis is an attempt to build a bridge between both linguistic and journalistic approaches in the matter of the rise of *infotainment* in media, several authors from both sides have proved to be valuable assets for our research. Patrick Charaudeau, Teun A. van Dijk, or Pierre Bourdieu, Geoffrey Baym and Jeffrey P. Jones are only a few examples. Romanian authors, such as Liana Pop,

Mirela Lazăr or Cristina Coman have also helped us provide the theoretical frame for our research paper.

We have divided the first chapter into seven sub-chapters and each deals with new patterns in modern journalism patterns, which helped us set some of the theoretical tools we have planned to employ. We have begun with a few general observations and particularities of the press today, and we ended the chapter with a series of meaningful conclusions in terms of our thesis, stating the importance of studying infotainment media forms within corpus-based studies in order to better know the world we live in and the challenges faced by modern journalism these days.

This entire first chapter has aimed to provide a general background with respect to journalism. We have started with the basic distinction between *informative* and journalism of *opinion*, attempting to link them at a conceptual level. An important mention is that our study has kept a certain distance from the major topic of journalism today, which is *fake news*. Although these case studies could have been very relevant from this point of view, we would like to emphasize once again that the main point of discussion within our research is *genre hybridity* and all the *journalistic concepts* we have thus considered are certainly meant to prove our hypotheses previously mentioned. The next major change in modern journalism we have decided to discuss is *utilitarian* journalism, whose main direction states the need to create journalism according to market rules and taking into consideration various financial and economic limitations. We have also offered a theoretical frame of the concept of *utilitarianism* in journalism, and we have agreed that *utilitarianism* is a key concept in discussing *infotainment*, because the two are highly interconnected. Another key-concept used is *hybridity* in order to identify the extent to which the idea of genre is still relevant to *infotainment* today. We believe all the above-mentioned elements that characterize a modern type of journalism are each responsible for the progress of *media infotainment* and can all be easily connected to it. Within this theoretical frame, the next chapter will discuss the idea of *genre*, approached both from a linguistic perspective, and a journalistic one.

CHAPTER II: REASSESSING MEDIA GENRES. THE BIRTH OF INFOTAINMENT

The aim of this chapter was to provide a general theoretical background of the term *genre*, and its roots. What we intended to do in this chapter is not to offer a diachronic perspective upon this concept, but to select and emphasize a series of theoretical notions related to this concept that need introduction so that our analysis chapter could take shape.

Of course, since our study is conducted both from a *journalistic* perspective and a *linguistic* one, we have attempted to interspace the two theoretical approaches, and eventually compare them. Hence, in this chapter, such genre definitions in the field of linguistic discourse analysis (as given by Sophie Moirand and Catherine-Kerbrat Orecchioni, as well as the definitions given to the *media genre* by Silvia Silverblatt or Alessandru Duranti, will separate the two areas for this purpose.

Hence, we started by briefly defining the *genre* in the media context, as well as in the field of discourse analysis, considering *infotainment* as a *macro-genre* for further analysis. Most importantly, the focus for this chapter was to introduce the notion of *genre* and *hybrid genre* from a theoretical point of view, by generally describing them and emphasizing the elements relevant for our research.

The main purpose of this chapter was to offer an overview of the idea of *genre*, in general, highly connected to the birth of infotainment as a main genre in discussion. Of course, observed from both a *linguistic* and a *journalistic* lens, its aim was to also provide the reader with a theoretical framework in regard to our research paper, and to develop several concepts that will prove to be extremely helpful in advancing our hypotheses. In this sense, one of the most important concepts we shall work with in the future chapters will certainly be the idea of *hybridity* in the *media area*. And due to the immense complexity in discussing, defining and describing a certain *genre*, we eagerly argued for the need of using an interdisciplinary approach in this respect. We have also attempted to touch base with the *televisual media genres*, as well as the *TV show*, which will be our main focus in the following chapters.

CHAPTER III: INFOTAINMENT VARIABLES. HOW GENRES MIX

This chapter aimed to offer a synthesis of the main media genres we intend to use within our further analysis. Since we agreed that hybridity represents a pertinent concept in *infotainment* today and keeping in mind the main directions of journalism that we articulated in the previous chapter, we further focused on the concept of *media genre* and *subgenres*. We provided a distinction between ‘*serious*’ and ‘*non-serious*’ genres. The intention for this chapter was also to offer a classification of news genres, as well as observing how *hybridity* is generated therein. In the first sub-chapter we have discussed the *serious genres*, which are the ones primarily based on the idea of informing the public. Here, we provided a description of the *news program* and the *news magazine*, in the attempt to further offer an analysis on how they are mixed with the *non-serious genres*. Next, the following sub-chapter was a synthesis of the *pamphlet* and *satire/comedy* as main *non-serious genres* we shall deal with during our

analysis chapter. Finally, in our third sub-chapter finished with some purposeful conclusions about everything discussed within the chapter. The essential concluding element, however, is the apparent huge difference between the two genre categories and how they are brought together in the *infotainment TV shows* cluster. Yet, further details on how hybridity is produced were only provided in the analysis chapter (fifth and sixth chapter), where we shall carefully investigate our case studies.

The purpose of this chapter was to create a brief theoretical background for analysing the TV shows in discussion. We have presented so far the theories of some researchers that we believe will be relevant in our further demonstration. Although mentioned already, it is essential to highlight the novelty of our study, that is the perspective we have chosen to approach the topic of *infotainment*. Although far from being unfamiliar to the large public and despite the large amount of studies carried in this respect, the birth of *infotainment* as a hybrid process between *discourse genres* represents a rarely discussed idea. We, therefore, believe the lack of linguistic studies of the macro-genre of *infotainment* may generate real opportunities for further studies on this topic that can help towards a better understanding of the origins of this concept, but also towards anticipating further similar media phenomena.

FOURTH CHAPTER: CORPUS SELECTION AND TRANSCRIPTION

Speaking from a combined journalistic and linguistic perspective, our intention within this chapter was to link the two fields by adopting and clearly stating the use of an interdisciplinary approach. By using *corpus linguistics*, *discourse genre analysis* and *televisual journalism* theory, our research project aimed to use a *comparative approach* in describing these programs, as we intended to consider similar shows from different countries. We therefore wanted to explicitly show how powerfully our research is linked to the discourse linguistics analysis and why the usage of corpus becomes highly indispensable.

Since our entire research is based on *corpus analysis*, some definitions and particularities of this notion are required. The main aim of this chapter was to offer some parameters for the corpus selection and transcription that were used within our research paper. We have tried to make a rigorous selection of the corpus used based on several principles that we have stated above. An account of how we created our corpus and its enlargement were also mentioned in this chapter, as well as a short depiction of all TV shows that will be later observed and submitted to analysis.

FIFTH CHAPTER: CHAPTER V: AMERICAN INFOTAINMENT AND THE NEWS COMEDY

This chapter aimed to individually analyze the four American TV shows we have chosen to develop in our thesis. Therefore, we have dedicated to each show a sub-chapter that can easily be identifiable by means of its title. For a more accurate organization of our text, as well as for a better visibility of our intentions, we have chosen to maintain the same pattern of analysis for each TV show, following seven main reference points: *corpus transcription*, *study premises*, *the contextual framework*, *serious discourse elements*, *non-serious discourse elements*, *the shift from serious to non-serious discourse*, as well as some *concluding remarks* with respect to the analysis of the show.

All these elements have been discussed in detail in each of the four sub-chapters, emphasizing the specific elements of each show that will help proving their affiliation to the *macro-genre* of *infotainment*. Our predefined goal was to offer an analysis of the way in which *infotainment* has arisen in each specific situation, with a special emphasis on how several genres have contributed to the *birth of these infotainment variables*.

The bottom line of this chapter has been to expose the main particularities of the four American infotainment shows chosen for our research. To this purpose in view, we have provided the same sub-chapters and analysis patterns for each show, in order to provide the final comparative chapter.

We have seen across this chapter four American variables of *infotainment* majestically combining *entertainment* means with *informative* content. Some of them define themselves as *comedy news* or *news satire*. These are not just counterintuitive terms, but also a validation of the dual nature of the shows.

Although in matters of setting, organization, distribution and intention, the four shows are highly similar, we can also see that the way in which they chose to combine *serious* and *non-serious* discourses, they tend to vary from one presenter to another. Even if the gestures and mimicry betray the presence of humour, the manners in which comedy makes room for itself within the shows is different from one show to another.

SIXTH CHAPTER: CHAPTER VI: ROMANIAN HYBRID SHOWS AND THE PAMPHLET PRESS

Our sixth chapter continued the round of analyses with the Romanian *infotainment* shows. Built in the same manner and following the same pattern as chapter V, we have chosen

four broadcasts that we will analyse: *Romania de la a la Z*, *Lumea lui Banciu*, *Starea nației*, and *În gura presei*.

The structure of our analyses remained the same, we have used the same format for each show in discussion. Hence, the main elements we have considered are: *corpus transcription*, *study premises*, *a contextual framework*, *markers pertaining to serious-discourse*, as well as to the *non-serious one*, the ways in which we can discuss *the transfer from serious to non-serious discourses*, and, of course, a sub-chapter that will sum-up our *conclusions* regarding each programme.

In terms of the *seriousness* of Romanian genres, we have dealt in this chapter with the *news programme*, the *news magazine*, as well as with the *political editorial*. As far as the *non-serious discourse* is concerned, we have seen how *pamphlet* prevails in most of the shows. Still, from the viewpoint of *entertainment* and *non-seriousness*, the Romanians show a divergent perspective, making it very hard to frame the genre and situate it into a specific context, as the means of *entertaining* are very diverse.

The purpose of this sixth chapter was to emphasize four Romanian variables of the *macro-genre* in discussion, in order to sum up both their common and distinguishing elements. As mentioned in the beginning, we have followed the same pattern of analysis as we did in chapter V, focusing on identifying the main tracks of *non-serious* and *serious discourse* within the corpus.

As we have observed so far, the *serious discourse* is poorly represented in the four excerpts we have chosen to discuss, mostly based on brief fragments from the daily press or short public speeches of the Romanian politicians, used by the presenters as arguments to endorse their own opinions. Most of the shows are aired live, showing no preparation at all and emphasizing long moments of pure subjectivity, where the hosts even come to discuss events from their personal lives.

In matters of the *non-serious discourse*, humour sources are also showing less astuteness and a vast degree of *egocentricity*, emphasizing a large number of digressions and alienating their speeches monologues from the main topics discussed.

Although the following chapter will punctually design resemblances and differences between the two nations in terms of how they choose to represent *infotainment*, it is worth emphasizing the main conclusion of this chapter, which is the immense *diversity* shown by the Romanians, the *spontaneity* in the construction of the shows, as well as their predilection for *improvisation* and *colloquial offensive vocabulary*. An interesting parallel to be made here

concerns the book by Mircea Iorgulescu (*Marea Trăncăneală*¹). Its title is highly representative for the Romanian discourse in terms of the press and especially concerning episodes that we have analysed. *Chatter* has certainly engulfed this type of shows in Romania and it represents one of their main characteristics. All these aspects can easily lead us towards the conclusion that this *macro-genre* is highly disseminated in Romania, and very much based on unprofessionalism when it comes to fulfilling the main goals of the shows.

SEVENTH CHAPTER: CASE STUDY: NOVEMBER 2015 PARIS ATTACKS – A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

This chapter aimed to draw a comparison between two nations (American and Romanian) from the perspective of these *infotainment shows*. The fundamental question that was answered here was to what extent the shows are different in terms of *serious* versus *non-serious* discourse presence, what are their similarities, but also by which elements they can be distinguished one from another.

For this specific purpose, we have chosen to represent a singular topic discussed within all the shows: the terrorist attacks in Paris, November 2015. As it has been worldwide debated news, the broadcasts of our choice dedicated more or less show space to this topic. Therefore, we have structured this chapter in three main parts as follow: the first one committed to the way in which the Paris attacks were illustrated in the American shows: *Last Week Tonight*, *The Daily Show*, *Late Night* and *The Late Show*. Here, we had five sub-chapters emphasized: *corpus transcription*, *general features*, *serious discourse particularities*, *non-serious discourse particularities*, followed by some *general conclusive remarks*.

As we wanted to offer equal chances to all the shows, the next sub-chapter covered the Romanian shows: *În gura presei*, *România de la A la Z*, *Starea Nației* and *Lumea lui Banciu*, and followed the same structure as the previous one: *corpus transcription*, *general features*, *serious discourse particularities*, *non-serious discourse particularities*, and in the end, some *general conclusive remarks*.

The third and maybe the most relevant and compelling part of this chapter was the one dedicated to a punctual comparison between the *Romanian* and *American infotainment shows*. In our attempt to punctually identify elements of *serious* versus *non-serious discourse*, this sub-chapter's goal can also be seen as a summary of our thesis, as it will be meant to present the shows in parallel, emphasizing both the common and distinct elements. Of course, our last

¹ The Big Chatter (*Our translation*)

sub-chapter revealed the main conclusions we have reached. It is also important to mention that we have preserved the *corpus annotation* style, as well as our focus on the *sequential* type of *analysis*, as the next chapter will show.

The fundamental goal of this chapter was to draw some connections between American and Romanian infotainment. For this specific purpose, we have preserved the eight shows, but we have gathered all the excerpts discussing the same topic (Paris terrorists attacks from November 2015), so that the comparison would be all the more, justified. We have therefore divided the chapter into two major parts, describing the American and the Romanian shows. Each of these two sub-chapters pursue the following structure of analysis: *general features of the shows*, their *serious discourse particularities*, their *non-serious discourse particularities*, and, finally, some *conclusive remarks*.

Hence, the first sub-chapter was dedicated to the American shows, illustrating the way in which they have chosen to deal with the *topic*. As we have seen, the *seriousness* of the American monologues resides in approaching national/international interest topics and delivering powerful messages towards the audience. What is more, they employ *news programmes* or several instances of reported speech from other broadcasts which represent real assets in offering a sombre nuance to their shows. In matters of *non-seriousness*, we have found out that the primary means of *entertainment* engaged by the Americans is certainly *humour* with various subsidiary aids. Subjectivity is also a prevailing element, as it creates a certain familiarity between the presenter and the public.

The second sub-chapter handled the Romanian shows, where we have seen a different way of dealing with *infotainment*. In discussing the *serious type of discourse*, we have learned about the *news magazine* as one of the "remainder serious genres" encountered, as well as the approach of public interest topics. However, the manner in which these topics are approached show they do abound in subjectivity and chatter, as they lack the display of a core idea and some serious sustainable arguments.

As a fair conclusion, the last part of this chapter was dedicated to a summary concerning the relation between *American* and *Romanian infotainment*. What this part has managed to do was to see to what extent the eight shows resemble each other, but mainly what are their distinctive elements in terms of *serious* and *non-serious* discourse. The chapter closes with some final remarks, resuming all the steps that have been taken in writing this chapter.

Key words: *genre analysis, TV infotainment, TV show, entertainment, serious genres, non-serious genres, hybridity.*

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