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Media Talk and Political Elections in Europe and America

Mats Ekström and Andrew Tolson

Introduction: scope of this book

This book aims to make a much needed contribution to the field of political communication studies.[1] There are two aspects to this initiative. The first, and most important, is the application of techniques of discourse analysis to specific examples of mediated political communication (specifically TV and the Internet), ranging from interviews and election debates, to political speeches and web-based, online communication. Here there is a particular interest in contemporary developments and emerging forms of mediated political communication, such as changing practices of news interviewing, uses of the Internet to develop new campaign strategies (such as those used to promote Barack Obama in the 2008 US presidential election) and the party leader debates which were held for the first time in the UK general election of 2010.

It is responses to this last development in particular that have demonstrated the need for the approach we are taking here. On the one hand, the UK party leader debates were widely judged to have transformed the nature of UK election campaigns (see various contributions to Kavanagh and Cowley, 2010; Coleman, 2011; Wring et al., 2011). On the other hand, some researchers, lacking the appropriate methodological expertise, were expressly struggling to come to terms with them. For example, two of the contributions to Coleman (2011), on the back of conventional surveys of reactions to these debates (in the press and on the blogosphere), recognized the need for political communication studies to move forward, engaging directly with forms of political talk. Stephen Coleman himself called for 'a rhetorical analysis of the verbal semiotics of the debates' (p. 76) and Michael Thelwall concluded that 'we want to encourage strategies that could help us understand better the nature,

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relationship and effects of political talk, debate and deliberation in a mass mediated society' (p. 69). That is precisely the agenda, using various strategies of discourse analysis, that this volume is intended to address.

The second important feature of this book is its focus on political elections in an international context. In this respect (and in its methodology) it follows on from a previous publication, *Talking Politics in Broadcast Media*, edited by Mats Ekström and Marianna Patrona (John Benjamins, 2011). There, the international perspective was designed to explore sociocultural variations in approaches to political journalism; here it represents a challenge to the ways in which 'election studies' have developed in mainstream academic work on political communication. Traditionally and conventionally these have had a national focus – for example, after every UK general election since 1945, retrospective volumes (such as those cited above) have appeared, focusing exclusively on that election in the form of a report on media trends and party strategies. After 55 years these volumes now amount to an impressive longitudinal account, but clearly they do not allow for the exploration of cultural diversity which is made possible here. Arguably that cross-cultural perspective is becoming more relevant as politics is becoming increasingly globalized.[2]

Let us develop this point, for it is crucial to the context in which this book has been produced. For decades, since the Kennedy–Nixon encounters of the 1960s, Europeans have taken an interest in US presidential elections. Today this is fuelled by the global export of TV news, as well as the opportunity of direct access to live transmissions of presidential debates made possible by 24-hour satellite broadcasting. This interest has continued through to Obama's impressive 2008 election campaign, which is the focus for two chapters (Hutchby, Chapter 2; Lorenzo-Dus and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Chapter 10) in this book. However, political globalization today extends far beyond this interest in American political leaders. The political destinies of European countries are also manifestly interlinked, to a greater extent perhaps at any time since the Second World War. The crisis in the Eurozone has not only focused international attention on other political leaders, such as Chancellor Merkel, but also generated a debate in Europe around political legitimacy and effective democracy, with economically weaker countries facing international demands for 'austerity'. This European context is directly reflected in this book in the chapters on Greece (Patrona, Chapter 1) and Spain (Sanz Sabido, Chapter 4), but, of course, the same austerity agenda was also a key focus of the debates

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that occurred in the UK general election of 2010. What all of this means, we would argue, is that it is becoming increasingly irrelevant to limit election studies to events that take place in one country.

Methodology and analytical approach

However, the main focus of this volume is not the contents of political programmes or ideologies but the ways in which these are discursively communicated, particularly during, or in the lead up to, political elections. Previously, research on election campaigns, which forms an important part of political communication studies, has provided extensive knowledge about campaign strategies, news media coverage and media effects on public opinion in different countries (Lee Kaid, 2004; Strömbäck and Lee Kaid, 2008). TV debates have also been researched in some detail with a focus primarily on the effects of the debates on agenda-setting and audience reaction to political leaders. However, as a result of the dominance of quantitative methodologies and the focus on media effects, detailed discourse analysis of rhetorical strategies and forms of audience address are relatively rare. As we have mentioned, this has led to a situation where some researchers in political communication now recognize a need to expand the field of analysis.

So it is to rectify these omissions in the mainstream literature that this book (like its predecessor, Ekström and Patrona, 2011) has been produced. All of the chapters here adopt a qualitative approach to the analysis of spoken discourse (and quantitative data, where it is used, is secondary). The discourse is taken from interviews, debates, speeches and interactive web-based environments. Crucially, the data are not classified according to a coding scheme, or rendered as a statistical overview, but rather they have been carefully transcribed to permit the microanalysis of forms of verbal/social interaction. Such interactions involve journalists and politicians, politicians and audiences, and, on some occasions, audience members as 'citizen-journalists' selected to interact with politicians. It is in the detailed construction of these encounters, we would argue, that mediated democratic procedures are both displayed and inflected; and, by comparison, what happens in subsequent press coverage or in opinion polls is secondary to these main events of mediated political communication.

Taking this approach, this book relates to a growing scholarly interest in the language of political communication, and more specifically in microanalyses of mediated political discourse (see also Chilton and Schäffner, 2002; Bull, 2003; Wodak, 2009). Here communication is an

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object of analysis in its own right and not subordinated to questions about the effects of distributed messages. As Chilton and Schäffner note, 'the doing of politics is predominantly constituted in language' (p. 2), and this concerns key activities, such as the symbolic articulations of political arguments in speeches and debates, as well as public 'accountability' interviews (Montgomery, 2007, 2011). Such activities are to a large extent organized, but also transformed, in the context of changing media practices and genres. Research in this field is multidisciplinary, drawing on media studies and theories of social interaction, as well as studies of discourse and speech communication.

For readers unfamiliar with this approach, it will be helpful to provide an introductory overview. The analysis of spoken discourse practised in this book mainly derives from previous work on broadcast talk, which is itself adapted from key traditions of spoken discourse analysis, such as conversation analysis and interactional sociolinguistics. A useful introduction to these traditions is provided by Deborah Cameron (2001). The work on broadcast talk starts with the basic observation that spoken discourse on radio and TV has to connect with absent ('overhearing') audiences, and, to achieve this, certain performative qualities are necessary. These qualities are variously defined as 'sociability', 'sincerity' and 'authenticity' (Scannell, 1996), and 'interactivity', 'performativity' and 'liveliness' (Tolson, 2006). The key point is that it is not enough simply for broadcasters to 'announce' or 'address' listeners; rather, they need to engage audiences in what Donald Horton and Richard Wohl (1956) famously defined as 'para-social interaction' (see also Hutchby, 2006: Chapter 1).

As far as the present purposes are concerned, there are four main areas of work, with their associated key concepts, that inform most of the chapters in this book. The first is the analysis of the 'news interview' instigated primarily by Steven Clayman and John Heritage (e.g. Heritage, 1985; Clayman, 1988; Clayman and Heritage, 2002; Clayman et al., 2006) and further developed by Ekström et al. (2006), Montgomery (2007), Ekström and Kroon Lundell (2011) and Tolson (2012). Here a key issue derives from the observation that interviewers are institutionally expected to ask questions on behalf of the overhearing audience, and thus to maintain a 'neutralistic' posture or 'footing' (Goffman, 1981), avoiding personal argument or disagreement with an interviewee. However, as Montgomery and Tolson have shown, more assertive interviewing practices have been common, certainly in the UK, and as Hutchby (2011a, b, Chapter 2, this volume) argues, there is, in some US material, evidence of a 'hybrid' form of political

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interview which involves the interviewer debating, even arguing, with the interviewee. This volume also contains chapters which explore other forms of hybrid interview, mixing the serious and the comedic (Baym, Chapter 3), the formats of news interview and press conference (Patrona, Chapter 1) and journalistic accountability with the lay discourse of ordinary citizens (Sanz Sabido, Chapter 4).

Second, and mentioned in passing above, a key influence in the analysis of broadcast talk has been the work of Erving Goffman, particularly his book *Forms of Talk* (1981). There he developed his theory of the 'participation framework' for speech communication, deconstructing the unitary concepts of 'speaker' and 'hearer'. Speaking is thus broken down into three 'footings': 'author' (originator of the utterance), 'animator' (producer of the utterance) and 'principal' (the entity represented). Hearing may be ratified (when the listener is directly addressed) or unratified (when eavesdropping on speech directed at others). Speaker footings become particularly relevant in political speeches where politicians may be speaking for themselves, representing their parties or attempting to align themselves with the general public. In shifting footings between these positions, issues of sincerity, authority and credibility are at stake. Audiences may be addressed collectively or individual audience members may be addressed directly – a tactic used to great effect by Nick Clegg in the UK 2010 party leader debates (Tolson, Chapter 6, this volume).

A third key influence on some of the work in this book will probably need less of an introduction to its readers. This is Max Atkinson's well-known study of forms of rhetoric used in political speeches (Atkinson, 1984). The most distinctive feature of this work (which derives from its underlying conversation analysis perspective) is its focus on the interactive consequences of particular rhetorical devices, or 'claptrap'. Today there can be no student of political communication who does not know about the 'rule of three', but what is less often quoted is Atkinson's argument, at the end of *Our Masters' Voices*, that 'televisuality', in its more intimate settings, threatens to compromise the skills of traditional political rhetoric. Atkinson was writing just as the research on broadcast talk that informs this book was getting under way, and in a subsection entitled 'understanding televisuality' he states that by comparison to his analysis of oratory, 'the dynamics of mass television appeal are much further from being properly understood' (p. 179). In fact the subsequent work on broadcast talk has developed an understanding of these dynamics, and this is reflected in this book. The chapters by Washbourne (Chapter 5) on the 'presidential' construction of party leaders and by

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Sparkes-Vian (Chapter 7) on responses to political speeches on the Internet both engage with this issue.

Finally there is also some engagement here with a related but distinct methodological approach, critical discourse analysis. This draws particular attention to the dialectical relationships between discursive practices (in text and talk) and the wider sociopolitical contexts and changes in society (e.g. Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2001, 2009; van Dijk, 2008). It is a critical approach focusing on the multidimensional role of language in the reproduction, as well as the challenging, of power relations and ideologies. In the field of media studies, this is perhaps best known through the work of Norman Fairclough (1995), but that, in turn, owes a debt to the 'functional' grammar developed by M.A.K. Halliday (1978). This approach is based on a recognition that syntactic and lexical choices determine the ways in which social actions and their agents are strategically represented – as, for example, the subjects or objects of social practices. Those practices themselves may be clearly defined or alternatively mystified by concrete or abstract lexical choices. All this can have ideological effects, as Fairclough himself brilliantly demonstrated in his analysis of the rhetoric of 'New Labour' (Fairclough, 2000), and as is further shown here in a 'discourse-historical' perspective on the rhetoric of the right-wing Austrian Freedom Party (Forchtner, Krzyżanowski and Wodak, Chapter 9). A further observation in much of this work concerns the 'conversationalization' of public discourse, in which public institutions have been infiltrated by informal and colloquial forms of speech, as a consequence, Fairclough argues, of the influence of marketing and its acceptance of the 'authority of the consumer' (Fairclough, 1994).

Key themes and issues

Here we would just like to flag up some key themes and issues with which the chapters in this book, variously, are concerned. These are issues not just for discourse analysts or political communication researchers but also for journalistic commentators and, through them, presumably, interested members of the public. The first issue is simply the one alluded to by Atkinson as 'televisuality'. In the UK it has been common to refer to general elections since 1959 as 'television elections', and today, across the Western world, there is a recognition that electoral systems are 'media democracies, where citizens connect to politics primarily as "media audiences" ' (Mancini, 2011). This transformation of politics, which in certain aspects can be traced

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back to the TV's impact in the 1960s, has inspired extensive research focusing on the mediatization of politics (Mazzoleni and Schultz, 1999; Strömbäck, 2011), the 'restyling' of politics (Corner and Pels, 2003) and the commercial marketing of politics as a media spectacle (Street, 2010).

One question now arises, of course: What does this mean for contemporary political debate and what are its qualitative consequences? It seems to us that the answer can only be complex and perhaps paradoxical. Thus, on the one hand, through broadcasting and now the Internet, citizens have greater exposure to political elites. Media help to make politicians familiar, accountable and open to scrutiny, and thus they arguably contribute to civic engagement. On the other hand, however, there are many academic commentaries that are critical of these developments. Generally these concern the credibility of political debate and the 'public sphere' in contemporary mass-mediated democracies. In the UK this has been reflected in some pessimistic academic commentaries that have spoken of a 'crisis in public communication' (Blumler and Gurevitch, 1995), that have demonstrated a decline in serious political journalism (Barnett and Gaber, 2001) and that have argued that the quality of political debate is transformed by the mediated 'packaging' of politics (Franklin, 2004). Perhaps the most interesting paradox is that the more voters have been exposed to mediated political communication, the more sceptical they have become, creating a crisis of 'trust' in politicians (Blumler and Coleman, 2010; Tolson, 2011).

One reason for this is possibly a second key theme in many discussions of contemporary politics – the way in which leading politicians are represented. Here it is frequently observed that TV is a 'personality-driven' medium, and hence a focus on personalities, particularly in elections, has displaced debates about policies. In some discussions this extends to an argument that some politicians have become 'celebrities' (Marshall, 1997; Street, 2003; Kellner, 2009), which again connects with a concern about the so-called 'dumbing down' of political debate and the replacement of serious political journalism by gossip and spectacle.

Again, however, we would suggest that this situation is complex, requiring detailed empirical study. There are at least three different issues. First, there is the creation by media, particularly TV, of contexts where politicians are expected to perform as 'personalities' (e.g. in chat shows, or the kind of hybrid interviews analysed here by Baym, Chapter 3). Second, there is the 'personalization' of political appeals, particularly those which adopt 'conversational' discourse strategies, such as those used by the Austrian Freedom Party (Forchtner,

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Krzyżanowski and Wodak, Chapter 9, this volume) and (at the other end of the ideological spectrum?) by the US Democratic Party under Barack Obama (Lorenzo-Dus and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Chapter 10, this volume). Third, there is an argument about the structural development of new styles of 'mediated persona' (Corner, 2003) that have less to do with dumbing down and more to do with the 'presidentialization' of political leadership, even in non-presidential political systems (Washbourne, Chapter 5, this volume). Again, this relates to our point that contemporary politics is a global phenomenon, requiring the international approach that we are adopting here.

Our third key theme then arises out of, and is in a sense a response to, the first two. It is the question of how to encourage citizen involvement in mediated political processes, particularly during elections. This is apparently an issue with which media themselves are much concerned, with citizens being invited into programmes as quasi-interviewers (see Sanz Sabido, Chapter 4, this volume), having their questions relayed (Ekström and Eriksson, Chapter 8, this volume) or being a representative public audience for TV debates (Tolson, Chapter 6, this volume). In these forms of mediated communication, citizen identities are displayed, and different relations between media/journalists, politicians and citizens are created and negotiated. Several chapters in this book show that political communication creates citizen relationships in various ways: in the *organization* of discourse, in the *representation* of citizens, in forms of *address* and in the ways in which citizens are invited to *participate* in media events.

However, in addition to the traditional media, it is also clear that new media are now being used in dynamic and unprecedented ways to engage with voters. In part this is by default, as Cassian Sparkes-Vian demonstrates – if political speeches now appear on *YouTube*, they are subject to shared responses and comments beyond the politician's control. But perhaps it is appropriate that we leave the last word to the US Democratic Party (or rather to Lorenzo-Dus and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Chapter 10, this volume). For here we seem to have a new form of citizen engagement which is on the one hand strategic and targeted and on the other personalized and highly 'conversational'. Obama's email campaign of 2008 broke new ground as a new way of doing 'media talk' in political elections, and as our final chapter mentions, this was repeated with an even greater resource base in the US presidential election of 2012. At the time of writing this introduction we now know the result, so no doubt it is to be continued.

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Organization of this book

The chapters in this book have been organized as follows. First there are four on political interviewing, where a key theme for all of them is the 'hybridity' of generic formats. Thus the accountability interview/press conference (Patrona, Chapter 1); the accountability interview/debate (Hutchby, Chapter 2); the political interview/talk show (Baym, Chapter 3) and the 'citizen interview' (Sanz Sabido, Chapter 4). Accordingly, these chapters engage with different international contexts, each with its own political agenda (e.g. the economic crisis in Greece, the growth of regional politics in Spain). And at the same time what is at stake, particularly in the chapters on US TV (Hutchby, Chapter 2; Baym, Chapter 3) is the continued relevance of the normative model of the 'news interview', as previously analysed by Clayman and Heritage. In several countries today it would seem to be the case that broadcasters are prepared to experiment with different interview formats, to find new ways to engage citizens/voters and to demonstrate their own distinctive identities in the political public sphere (e.g. Fox TV).

There then follow two chapters (Washbourne, Chapter 5; Tolson, Chapter 6) on the UK party leader debates of 2010, which focus in particular on the success of the Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg. They can be read together (since Chapter 6 develops analytical points about forms of audience address introduced in Chapter 5). These leader debates introduced a new format for political debate in the UK which, as we have noted, stimulated extensive commentary as well as methodological introspection from analysts of political communication. Within that, the concentration on Clegg is warranted by the extraordinary reaction to his performance in the first debate which triggered an immediate rise in his popularity (as measured by opinion polls). If there is some debate about the influence of this on the final result, its effect on the media narrative (so-called 'Cleggmania') cannot be doubted. The relationship between media narratives and voting behaviour is a topic for further research, but, as we have argued, it is important to understand the communicative events around which those narratives are constructed.

Then there are four chapters on political communication and new media: political performances and audience responses on *YouTube* (Sparkes-Vian, Chapter 7); citizen participation in 'multiplatform' election campaign interviews (Ekström and Eriksson, Chapter 8); the use of old and new media genres in the 'self-mediation' of right-wing populism (Forchtner, Krzyżanowski and Wodak, Chapter 9); and how audiences

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are targeted and relations to volunteers are organized in the genre of campaign e-mail messages (Lorenzo-Dus and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, Chapter 10). These chapters investigate how a variety of new media forms and genres are combined with traditional media in current election campaigns. The performances of politics and the construction of public political debates are analysed with a focus on the concrete discursive resources, rhetorical strategies and communicative styles developed in the context of different media. A key question in here is to what extent the use of new media in election campaigns transforms the relationships between media, politics and citizens. How are audiences addressed and represented? How are citizens involved and invited to participate? What strategies are used to attract and engage voters? In analysing the mediated connections between politics and citizens – as all chapters in the book – these four draw attention to significant democratic implications of current trends in election campaigns.

As a final point, let us reiterate the first statement made in this Introduction about making a contribution to political communication studies. We think there is scope for further fruitful cross-fertilization between that field of academic research and the now substantial body of work that analyses media talk. This book touches on several concerns – journalistic engagements with politics, political 'celebrification' and in particular audience/citizen/voter involvement in political processes – which are at the forefront of current debates about political communication in modern democratic societies. There is an ongoing agenda here for further work on media talk and politics which will require an interdisciplinary and international collaborative research enterprise.

Notes

1. Six of the chapters in this book were first presented as papers at a symposium organized by the Media Discourse research group at De Montfort University, Leicester, in June 2012.
2. We are not the first to make this argument – it was indeed an important aspect of the programme for political communication research envisaged by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995). However, it is interesting that the development section of that book went on to focus entirely on one institution in one country, namely the BBC.

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(IPA) for the transcription of disordered speech and the Voice Quality Symbols (VoQS) system for transcribing voice quality. is introduced and illustrated in the examples provided. The need for training in narrow transcription is discussed as part of a. combination of impressionistic and instrumental description techniques. Key words: Child speech, disï¬,uency, disordered speech, dysarthria, hearing loss, phonetic transcription, progressive speech. degeneration. Introduction. The symbols chosen for the IPA are meant to harmonize with the Latin alphabet.[note 5] For this reason, most symbols are either Latin or Greek letters, or modifications thereof. However, there are symbols that are neither: for example, the symbol denoting the glottal stop, <Ê”>, has the form of a "gelded" question mark, and was originally an apostrophe.[note 6] In fact, there are a few symbols, such as that of the voiced pharyngeal fricative, <Ê•>, which, though modified to blend with the Latin alphabet, were inspired by.Â Beyond the letters themselves, there are a variety of secondary symbols which aid in transcription.Â List of phonetics topics. Phonetic transcription. SAMPA, X-SAMPA and Kirshenbaum are other methods of mapping IPA designations into ASCII. * This summary list contains about 2000 characters for most common ocidental/latin languages and most printable symbols but not chinese, japanese, arab, archaic and some unprintable. Contains character codes in HEX (hexadecimal), decimal number, name/description and corresponding printable symbol. What is Unicode? Unicode is a standard created to define letters of all languages and characters such as punctuation and technical symbols. Today, UNICODE (UTF-8) is the most used character set encoding (used by almost 70% of websites, in 2013). The second most used character set is ISO-8859-1 (about The List of Ship Stations (List V) and the List of Call Signs and Numerical Identities (List VIIA) are merging into a new Service publication entitled List of Ship Stations and Maritime Mobile Service Identity Assignments (List V). This new List will be issued annually and no supplements will be printed. Amendments notified to this list will be available free of charge on the ITU MARS webpage: http://www.itu.int/ITU-R/go/mars. The first edition of the new List V is expected in March 2011.