

## TRANSFORMATION OF THE INTERVIEW ON RUSSIAN TELEVISION: THE HISTORICAL ASPECT

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**Abstract.** The article presents the arguments of the authors about the features of the interview genre. It gives a comparative description of the genre features using the example of the interview with Nikita Khrushchev, which makes it possible to identify the main factors influencing the transformation of the interview and its subtypes. The independence of the conversation genre is now beyond question, but the Soviet typology of genres did not single out the conversation separately but used it rather as a synonym for the interview form for presenting information and the interview method for obtaining information. During the Khrushchev years he had given interviews and press conferences more than 80 times. The term “interview” in those years as a truly bourgeois one was not used, except for the cases when reprints from foreign media were carried. Moreover, the genre of interview is fairly democratic, involving the active participation of a journalist in a dialogue with the character of the interview. In journalism of “thaw” such approach to communicating with the first person was as a matter of principle impossible – this is N.S. Khrushchev’s conversation with journalists, and not vice versa. Meanwhile, an analysis of interviews with N.S. Khrushchev allows us to expose some specific genre features of the interview.

**Keywords:** media, television, genres of journalism, interview, conversation, traditions, transformation, factors, interaction.

### INTRODUCTION.

The development of mass media in different historical periods is determined by a variety of objective and subjective factors. Among them a special place is occupied by technological, economic and political factors. Scientific and technical progress reduces the cost of production and dissemination of information, expands the spatial and temporal boundaries of communications. The role of the state and its leader, state policy in relation to mass media, the state of freedom of speech, the status of the audience – all this also determines media change. The relevance of this study consists primarily in the fact that the study of the historical aspect of transformation processes is important for understanding the current stage in the development of mass communications and journalism. Attention to changes in the main typological characteristics that occur at different periods, such as, for example, the typology of genres, deepens our understanding of the correlation of the formative concepts of journalistic works and historical processes in society. The object of the study is an interview on Russian television in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods; the subject – the historical aspect of transformation of the genre.

### METHODS

We relied on the works of Russian and foreign researchers when presenting the methodology of our research.

To begin with, in the foreign science the concept of “mass media” refers to mediatized quasi-interaction – a form of communication focused on the dissemination of a message intended for a mass audience and non-predetermined audience. These messages can be disseminated via television, radio, print, cinema.

The concept of “media quasi-interaction” has been suggested by John Thompson [1]. He has singled out three forms of communication: non-mediatized interaction (the interaction of several individuals without the use of media, for example, oral speech); mediatized interaction (technically mediated interaction of several individuals) and mediatized quasi-integration (technically mediated transfer of information from one addressee to many mediated addressees, when this interaction (the exchange between the recipient and the addressee is really difficult).

At the top of D. McQuail’s Communication Pyramid is the macro level – mass communication aimed at society on the whole and at its individual social groups. McQuail gives the following definition of mass media: an institutionalized (existing in the form of enterprises or structures) production and general distribution of symbolic goods by means of fixation and transmission of information and symbolic content [2].

The problems of media changes and their connection with the political and economic state of society are traditionally in the center of attention of foreign scholars. Schiller [3] notes that the concentration of the media capital in the hands of a limited number of commercial corporations leads to a real narrowing of pluralism and the dominance of right-wing political views. Garnham [4] has written about the decrease in the role of the state in the media over the past decades, this caused important changes - instead of providing guaranteed socially important information, the media turned into an entertainment machine.

At the beginning of the 21st century, Hallin and Mancini [5] in the analysis of media changes emphasize that any attempt by the state to undertake “public function” de facto leads to the emergence of state-controlled regimes in which the needs of the state are posed as social benefits. The degree of media fixation and accessibility in time and space determine the ability of using a powerful resource, - believes Harold Innis, a representative of the Toronto School [6]. In analyzing the process of transformation of genres, we relied mainly on the typology developed by Russian scientists (A. A. Tertychny, V. V. Egorov, V. L. Tsvik, G.V. Kuznetsov, A. Y. Yurovsky, M. N. Kim and others). The approaches proposed by scholars Ph. Breton and S. Proulx [7] were also useful. They differentiate all types of messages into three genre groups: compelling, expressive and informative. The compelling genre is used in political communication and jurisprudence, expressive – in literature, informative – in journalism. The compelling genre, which is used primarily in political communication and jurisprudence, is aimed at striving to change the opinion of the

recipient of information or to encourage him to take some kind of action. The expressive genre is used in literature and performs the function of expressing individual experiences about the proposed content. The informative genre is mainly manifested in journalism – this is here where a certain model of the world is created. However, information may include emotional and reasoned elements, but the main thing is to present a range of opinions on a specific issue, using “contract of objectivity”. As an example, the news on television, which initially has to contract objectivity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The paper analyzes the interviews of the Soviet period. An empirical base is the publications the character of which is N.S. Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet State in 1953-1964. For the formation and transmission of the political image he used, to a greater or lesser extent, various media. The genres of interview and conversation are the most frequently used methods of interaction with political leaders and forms of providing information about them.

Interview (English literal meaning – meeting, conversation) – a genre of journalism, which is a conversation of a journalist with a socially important person on topical issues. In the semantics of the English word interview, the prefix inter- means interaction, interdirectionality, the word view – judgement, opinion. Thus, the interview is an exchange of views, information.

The interviewees are divided into three categories:

- 1) politicians and statesmen, specialists and other people who possess specific knowledge in a particular field; they are interviewed to try to find out about something;
- 2) celebrities who are interviewed in order the details of their life and work to receive a lot of publicity;
- 3) ordinary people we meet at home, out-of-doors, at the service; they are interviewed to find out public opinion about a particular event.

The genres such as conversation, press conference and discussion are based on interview. They have also dialogical character. The historical aspect allows us to trace the evolution of the use of the interview and its forms.

Let us refer to an interview with Nikita Khrushchev. We have chosen the empirical base not at random. The materials published and broadcast are interesting to highlight the characteristics of the conversation and interviews as the genres of journalistic work. According to our data, during the N.S. Khrushchev years, he had given interviews and press conferences more than 80 times [8]. The intensity of the interaction of the leader of the Soviet state in mass media was uneven. So, in 1953 and in 1954 there were no interviews, in 1955 – one interview, two press conferences with N.A. Bulganin (in Delhi and in London) and one material, organized as an answer to the question of the correspondent of the newspaper “Pravda” about the events in the North Africa. Further, the activity increases, and the peak of the popularity of N.S. Khrushchev in the media is the years 1958-1960s. In this case, foreign interviews with N.S. Khrushchev make up 90% of all his speeches. In 1963–1964 N.S. Khrushchev began to actively speak on burning political questions on Soviet radio and television and on the results of foreign visits of Soviet government delegations.

Almost all visits abroad ended with an extensive press conference which brought together the reporters from many countries. There were also improvised press conferences, for example, in the mornings near the residence of N.S. Khrushchev or on the balcony of the building, or on the train.

Publications in the Soviet press about these meetings often had stenographic character and a touch of communist propaganda. It is clear that the final text was carefully edited and verified on different levels. Nevertheless, these publications which reprinted all republican, regional and regional newspapers give us an idea of N.S. Khrushchev as not only the leader of the Soviet state and bold politics but also as an extraordinary interlocutor.

Soviet newspapers covering N.S. Khrushchev’s meetings with representatives of the Western media almost never considered them as interviews. These were, as a rule, “conversations” or “answers” by N.S. Khrushchev to the questions put by a correspondent or editor of a particular publication, although the basis of the organization of these materials was the same traditional question-answer dialogue, on which any interview is built.

This is explained as follows. Firstly, the term “interview” was not fundamentally used as a truly bourgeois in those years in the Soviet newspaper and magazine practice, except for those situations when reprints from foreign media were put. Secondly, we view the genre of interviews as fairly democratic, with the journalist taking an active part in the dialogue with the character of the interview (the journalist interviews, the journalist thinks through and asks questions, holds the conversation). It seems that, such approach to communicating with the first person of the Soviet state was basically impossible in “thaw” journalism – it was N.S. Khrushchev who conversed with journalists, and not vice versa. These materials never indicated the names of Soviet journalists, thereby excluding the author’s beginning.

Another approach was demonstrated N.S. Khrushchev’s “conversations” with foreign correspondents whose names and status must be indicated in the subtitle of the material. These were the meetings of N.S. Khrushchev with foreign journalists of note: William Hearst Jr., Walter Lippmann, Drew Pearson, David Susskind, etc. As you can see, the best representatives of the Western journalistic world were interested in the personality of the Soviet leader.

William Hearst Jr. is the son of one of the foreign media kings, the legendary owner of the largest newspaper and publishing empire of the USA, “Hearst Newspapers”. First meeting of N.S. Khrushchev with him was in 1955. Then Hearst spoke with the head of the Soviet state as one of the journalists of the group, admitted to the head of the Soviet Union. This conversation was recorded by the translator of Khrushchev, O. Troyanovsky, and it was published in the Soviet press [9]. The second conversation took place in 1957, in which William Hearst acted as head of the publishing trust [10].

Khrushchev was thoroughly preparing for an interview with Walter Lippman, knowing who he would have to communicate with. W. Lippman – the famous American essayist, political columnist, author of the original concept of public opinion – a unique personality, whose opinion many politicians considered carefully. His conversation with N. S.

Khrushchev was an exceptionally serious and, according to translator V. M. Sukhodrev, “comprehensive, global” [11]. The text of the interview was unexpurgated in the Moscow press. Experience of N. S. Khrushchev’s appearance on foreign television is associated with the channel “CBS”, which televised the talk show of popular TV journalist and film producer David Susskind in the 1960s. The famous American showman asked serious and catchy questions [12]. As a television person, it was important for him to show N.S. Khrushchev speaking with various emotions. And D. Susskind managed it. The edited text of the conversation was also published in the Soviet press.

The monitoring of the newspapers “Pravda” and “Izvestiya” over the period of 1953–1964, conducted by us, showed that Khrushchev communicated with foreign journalists more often than with Soviet journalists. Communication with the representatives of the Soviet press was based on the “answers to questions” scheme – Khrushchev answered the questions of the correspondent. For example, in October 1955, Khrushchev gave an answer to a question from a correspondent from “Pravda” about the events in North Africa; in August 1958, concerning the termination of tests of nuclear weapons; in a month – the answers to the questions of the correspondent from “Pravda” about the events in France before the upcoming referendum there on the draft of a new constitution (Pravda. 1958. September 22); in April 1959, he answered the questions from the editorial staff of “Pravda” about the appearance of US President D. Eisenhower before the graduates of Gettysburg College in Pennsylvania, etc. As we see, specific international events have always been the reason for such materials, the very materials had a pronounced propaganda character. Judging from the style of these “answers”, these were rather not the author’s but editorial materials that were prepared according to the recommendations of the press group that existed under the Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers N. S. Khrushchev or the press department of the USSR Foreign Ministry. Perhaps this explains the fact that these materials almost never indicated the name of the correspondent, whose questions Khrushchev answered to.

It can also be assumed that the presentation of these materials deliberately excluded a personalized approach – the wording of the questions and answers was rather official. This is particularly striking against the background of N. S. Khrushchev’s rather lively, interesting communication with foreign journalists, where he proved himself not only as a political figure but also as a personality. It can be argued that newspaper materials with the participation of N. S. Khrushchev, prepared directly by the editors of “Pravda” and “Izvestiya”, were declarative, clearly instrumental.

In this connection, a consistent question arises: why did not Khrushchev give meaningful interviews to his Soviet journalists? There is no a clear-cut answer to this question. First, it can be assumed that the leader of the Soviet government did not see real professionals in the Soviet journalists, perceiving them as obedient performers. He considered it more necessary to pay attention to foreign media that were outside his field of political influence, their activities were uncontrollable and ungovernable on his part. In addition, he understood the significance of his meetings with foreign journalists much more widely than simply informing the foreign community about life in the Soviet Union. Much, for example, says the confession of Khrushchev at a meeting with participants of the First All-Union Congress of Soviet journalists: “I shall be honest with you that it is difficult for me to answer the question the articles of journalists of which countries I read more, soviet or not soviet. I think that I read the bourgeois writings more. In particular, the editor-in-chief of “Pravda”, P. A. Satyukov (Pravda. 1959. Nov. 13) spoke about this in his report at the opening of the First All-Union Congress of Soviet Journalists. You do not take offense, it is in our interests. We need to know well what is happening in the capitalist world, to know what is being told and written about the Soviet Union. What is alarming now in the capitalist world?”

Secondly, Khrushchev was likely not to consider it necessary to reveal his true form as a personality before the Soviet society– it contradicted the norms of communication between the first person of the government and the representatives of the society adopted in the Soviet state. Meanwhile, the analysis of interviews with N. S. Khrushchev makes it possible to identify some specific genre features of the interview.

#### **4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

An interview is a focused conversation, the purpose of which is to get answers to the questions envisaged by the program. Such mixture of concepts is also found in translations of foreign publications. When, for example, describing a conversation, the words “interviewer” and “interviewee” are used instead of “a presenter”, “audience”, “respondents”. And vice versa. The independence of conversation genre is beyond doubt now, however, according to the Soviet typology of genres, according to a review by A.V. Pichugin and V.B. Smirnov [13], conversation was not singled out separately but it was rather used as a synonym for interview-form for presenting information and interview-method for obtaining information. A.A. Tertychny classifies conversation as analytical genres in general typology.

Both genres have a number of similar features:

- both interview and conversation are the methods for obtaining information through a survey (along with a questionnaire);
- focus on the study of the motives and needs of the interlocutor for the sake of obtaining information (both planned and unforeseen);
- overt or covert exchange of information between the two parts and, as a result, the two-part text.

When we talk about media texts (print or audiovisual), we always mean a pronounced specificity: despite the text dialogueness, there is always an invisible third party – the audience. And the shift of the attention of the audience away from the events to the creator of these events predetermined the success of interview and conversation.

We have identified the following significant features that distinguish these genres:

- the purpose of communication;
- the form of exchange of thoughts or a way to formulate a thesis;
- a degree of freedom and a position of the presenter;

- a degree of freedom and a position of the respondent;
- the course and situation of communication.

The interview involves two parts - a journalist and his interlocutor. Each of them plays a certain role. There are different opinions about the relationship between these roles. S.V. Shtyreva speaks of the equality of their social roles and the asymmetric nature of speech roles: from the point of view of organizing an interview, the interviewer plays the main role, while from the position of content the interviewee plays the leading role [14].

We do not find the personal position of the journalist interviewer in the interview. This is due to the requirements of the genre, the purpose of obtaining information from a competent, involved person, differently interesting for audience. Moreover, the interlocutors are restricted in the choice of areas for discussion by the questions of interview. Nevertheless, the values, personal attitudes, stereotypes and specific knowledge of the interviewee determine what he will speak on. And he, perforce, will answer the questions based on his life experience. Some authors believe that the journalist directs the interlocutor by means of his questions in a pragmatic right course and thus helps to formulate the viewer, from his point of view, a correct opinion [15]. The interviewer is, indeed, the subject of communication, but the communication itself is monistic, that is, we see and hear only one attitude, only one opinion. The journalist is a representative of social groups and expresses, in one way or another, the interests of the crowd in the suggested topic. It turns out that the degree of freedom of the leading journalist interviewer is limited by the rigid framework of the communication plan, which is set by a pre-prepared questionnaire. There may be changes in the wording and additional questions, but the informative aspect of the questions does not change. If, in the role of an interviewer, a journalist can pose only questions, and the interviewee answers them, it is the latter that forms the main content of the publication, its character (in particular, positive or critical) [16]. And all that contradicts a personality of the respondent he omits in his response. Conversation is an informal communication, where the course of communication depends on the scenario – the list of discussion topics, and not on the fixed questionnaire plan. The journalist here is a moderator, he directs the conversation, strive to identify the interlocutor's motivation and to ensure the generation of new ideas. He can use an unexpected turn of conversation and focus his and spectator's attention on the new direction, exposed in the conversation. The moderator has his own opinion, and this obliges him to be competent in the issues raised. If in the interview the journalist can hide his ignorance behind the questions, then in the conversation you need to express your opinion promptly, here and now. Accordingly, there is an equal exchange of thoughts, which enables to consider at least two points of view. It turns out that the respondent in the conversation is the object of communication [17] and the questions can be asked by both parts. That is, both parts are the informed persons. While in the interview a journalist asks questions to an informed person, he himself is not. All this is determined by the purpose of the genres: getting information is for interview, sharing information is for conversation. And all this determines the form of the exchange of thoughts or, rather, the way of forming theses: question-answer or agreement-disagreement and possible reformulation.

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