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### The Formats of Pre-Election Television Debates in Poland and the Czech Republic – A Rhetorical Look at the Genre

#### Formaty telewizyjnych debat przedwyborczych w Polsce i w Czechach – retoryczne spojrzenie na gatunek

### Abstract

The article compares the formats of the final presidential debates in the latest elections in Poland between Andrzej Duda and Bronisław Komorowski (2015) and in the Czech Republic between Jiří Drahoš and Miloš Zeman (2018). The purpose of this comparison based on rhetorical genre criticism was to check whether and how the analyzed media events fit into the genre pattern of the debate. The Polish and the Czech formats were compared with respect to the interaction rules, elements of time and space, as well as the way of moderating and asking questions during the debate. The result of this comparison was the indication of the direction of genre hybridization of pre-election television debates in the last elections in Poland and the Czech Republic.

W artykule porównane zostały formaty finałowych debat prezydenckich z ostatnich wyborów w Polsce, między Andrzejem Dudą a Bronisławem Komorowskim (2015) i w Czechach między Jiřím Drahošem a Milošem Zemanem (2018). Celem tego porównania opartego na retorycznej krytyce gatunkowej było sprawdzenie, czy i jak badane wydarzenia medialne wpisują się we wzorzec gatunkowy debaty. Porównano reguły interakcji, elementy czasu i przestrzeni, a także sposób moderowania i zadawanie pytań we wszystkich analizowanych debatach. Efektem tego porównania było wskazanie kierunku hybrydyzacji gatunkowej debat przedwyborczych z ostatnich wyborów w Polsce i w Czechach.

### Key words

election debate, genre criticism, rhetoric, pre-election discourse  
debata przedwyborcza, krytyka gatunkowa, retoryka, dyskurs przedwyborczy

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## The Formats of Pre-Election Television Debates in Poland and the Czech Republic – A Rhetorical Look at the Genre<sup>1</sup>

### 1. Introduction

The final debates broadcast on television are one of the most anticipated events in the presidential election campaign. The situation of a confrontation between the candidates, which can be decisive for electoral victory, evokes considerable emotions. In the literature on the subject, the pre-election television debates are referred to as great debates (Kraus 1962), media events comparable to the finals of important sporting events (Dayan and Katz 2008), focal points (Carlin 1992, 251-265), or even miniature campaigns (Faas and Maier 2011, 75-91). Indeed, the debates focalize the problems relevant to the entire pre-election discourse. All the participants of the pre-electoral discourse (politicians, media, voters) are involved in the rhetorical situation of the debate. Due to its spectacular history that dates back to the 1960s and its impact on electoral reality (the meeting of Kennedy - Nixon made politicians, media and voters aware of the strength of this element in the campaign), the televised pre-election debate is a topic often explored in the western tradition of political rhetoric research (Kraus 1962, Bitzer, Reuter 1983, Jamieson, Birdsell 1988, Hellweg, Pfau, Brydon 1992, Friedenbergs 1997, Kraus 2000, Coleman 2000, Benoit, Pier, Brazeal 2002, Minow, LaMay, Gregorian 2008, Benoit 2014, Schroeder 2016).

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1. This paper was prepared as part of an international project *Transformations of pre-election discourses in Poland and the Czech Republic after 1989: political genres, communication strategies, media images* carried out since January 2019 by the Centre for Applied Rhetoric at the University of Warsaw and Department of Central European Studies, Charles University (PPN/BIL/2018/1/00028).

On the other hand, the tradition of pre-election debates in the post-Soviet countries which introduced democratic procedures in the early 1990s is much shorter than in Western Europe or in the USA. The process of shaping electoral rituals has been constantly evolving. Due to diverse legal systems, as well as varying social and cultural conditions, there are differences in the pre-election discourses of individual countries, and thus in the genres of communication between politicians and voters. Identifying the elements differentiating pre-election discourse in Poland and the Czech Republic using the example of the final presidential television debates will be the main focus of the article. For the analysis, the debates from the elections in 2015 in Poland and in 2018 in the Czech Republic have been selected.

## 2. A political debate as the subject of research

When examining an election debate from the rhetorical point of view, that is considering numerous perspectives, it may be noted that for several entities involved in the discourse such debates are an important tool of shaping their impact:

- a) **For politicians**, who wish to convince and win to their side as many voters as possible. From this point of view, a debate is not a simple persuasive communication on a given matter formulated by the speakers to their audience, but rather a message aimed at winning more supporters, while also depleting the group of those who could support their rival (McKinney and Carlin 2004; McKinney, Warner 2013; Pfau, 2002, Coleman 2011).
- b) **For the media** such event is a source of content for several days. The media may engage in “preparing” the audience for the debate by speculating on its organisation, course, outcome, etc. (Coleman, Steibel, Blumler 2011, Coleman 2011). They may broadcast the debate, take part in its organisation (as was in the case of state-owned television channels in Poland and in the Czech Republic), and they can also offer follow-up comments for several days after the event. Thus, a debate is an excellent source of topics that are fully exploited by the media to achieve high viewing figures, and this translates into higher proceeds from advertisements (Patterson 1980). Hence, the rhetorical actions of the television channels would be focused on attracting the viewers, by inviting commentators who will guarantee prolonged attention of the TV audience.
- c) **For voters**, who are supposed to benefit from the debate by gaining knowledge about the candidates, which should help them decide which one of them should get their vote (McKinney and Chattopadhyay 2007, McKinney et al. 2013, Benoit and Hansen 2004, Coleman, Moss 2016). Voters, through the media, “exert pressure” on politicians to hold the debates and provide

them with the knowledge society expects to receive (as claimed by representatives of such media).

Outlining the interconnections between the goals of the main actors benefitting from the debate is important to identify the main interpretation areas regarding the communication involved in this media event. The research on the debate format in Poland<sup>2</sup> (Buczak-Sawczyńska 1999, 2000, Mazur and Konieczny 2012, Budzyńska-Daca 2015, Kochan 2016) and in the Czech Republic (Čmejrková 2000, Bartošek 1997, Čmejrková 1999, Čmejrková 2003, Čmejrková et al. 2013, Charvát et al. 2018) is much more modest than in the United States, the birthplace of this genre. Therefore, the adopted analysis procedures will refer to the American school of research on presidential debates.

### 3. Research method

As a methodological tool for researching debates, one of the rhetorical methods of genre criticism has been chosen (Foss 2009). This method is useful in determining the genological properties of examined artifacts. The basis of such profiled research is the assumption that there is a model genre pattern to which other implementations can be compared in order to verify their genological affiliation (Foss 2009, Harrell and Linkuel 1978), diagnose the consequences of deviations from the pattern, determine the level of hybridization of the genres, etc.

It should be underlined that the dispute over the best model of an election debate started in the U.S. in the 1960s and so far has not been resolved, with various arguments proposed by researchers, journalists and also politicians (Kraus 2000, Bitzer and Rueter 1980, Carlin 1991). A model developed in the final U.S. debates seems to be well established though as it has not changed since the 2000 U.S. campaign (Kraus 2000). In the series of discussions, aimed at reaching a model which would embody the democratic idea of providing voters with reliable information on the candidates, the model proposed by Jeffrey Auer (1962, 142-150) was selected, one devised already in 1962. According to Auer, an ideal debate should fulfil five indispensable genological criteria and thus it should be:

- (1) *a confrontation,*
- (2) *in equal and adequate time,*
- (3) *of matched contestants,*
- (4) *on a stated proposition,*
- (5) *to gain an audience decision.*

2. Full bibliography until 2015 in Budzyńska-Daca (2015).

This definition does not specify any detailed criteria of interactions and conditions in which a debate should be held. However, it defines the core of this genre, a set of characteristics that determine the genre's unique nature and its potential for rhetorical impact. If we assume a genological perspective, the above definition can be adopted as a set of rules serving as a reference for a comparative analysis of Polish and Czech debates. These analyses address the format of debates functioning as the organizational structure of a media event.

The issue of formats and their impact on the quality of political discourse is one of the most frequently raised problems in the literature on the subject (Kraus 2000, Bitzer 1980, Carlin 1991, Perloff 1998). The analyses take into account such elements as: detailed rules determining the order of interaction (who, to whom and how they direct questions), the time allocated for the candidates' consecutive statements, the order and mode of the reply (the option of rebuttal or the lack of it), the spatial arrangement of the participants in the studio, the participation of the audience in the debate, the details of the set design, the camera editing techniques with respect to the participants and the audience, as well as other details related to the strategies negotiated by the campaign staffs and the television production capacity of the broadcaster.

The juxtaposition of the two analyzed formats will allow us to assess to what degree the modification of the classic debate genre in the Polish and the Czech implementations changed or even distorted the idea of the debate contained in its original assumptions presented by Auer.

#### **4. Election debates in Poland and in the Czech Republic – an outline**

Until now, in the history of election debates in Poland, no one pattern has been developed that could serve as a certain obligatory programme for politicians and thus assure the voters that each time they will view a political spectacle staged within the same familiar format (Budzyńska-Daca 2016, 321-345, Kochan 2016, 15-89), as has been the case with the final presidential debates in the U.S. (Kraus 2000) or in France (Kostro and Wróblewska-Pawlak 2016, 235-261). The formats of Polish election debates are modelled differently each time by the new campaign teams and the media producers. There are no related regulations in place which could give the audience the sense of taking part in an event based on the rules they are acquainted with.

Polish televised election debates already have a history of its own (Budzyńska-Daca 2016, Kochan 2016). It started in 1995 with the famed debate between Wałęsa and Kwaśniewski (Godzic 2016) that turned out to be a marketing surprise to the politicians, their campaign teams as well as voters, similarly as in the case of the Kennedy-Nixon debate in the U.S. Wałęsa, who had been perceived as the

favourite in the election race, failed in the debate and thus, lost his advantage over the opponent. The debates in the subsequent presidential and parliamentary elections were less spectacular, although they did feature some surprises and turn of events. Considering the fact that these events are broadcast live, the candidates (or rather their campaign teams) prepared some “surprises” for their opponents, by showing documents, press articles, photographs, copies of the Constitution, and other items of symbolic meaning. The debates that turned out to be particularly memorable were the three debates of 2007, in the format of a meeting of 3 party leaders (Tusk, Kaczyński, Kwaśniewski), as they were distinctive in eristic. The debates between Komorowski and Kaczyński held in 2010 were rather predictable. During the parliamentary campaign in 2011, the debates were held between the leaders of many parties and thus, they did not arouse any intense emotions. In recent years, some debates in similar formats were organised between the candidates for prime minister, Beata Szydło and Ewa Kopacz, as well as during the presidential campaign, between Bronisław Komorowski and Andrzej Duda. These two most recent debates will be compared to the Czech debates, given the parallel rhetorical situation – in both cases they concerned presidential elections.

In the Czech Republic, the debates are also subject to various format experiments. The televised meetings recognised as debates were organised during subsequent elections for prime minister in 1998, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2013 and 2017, with party leaders taking part in discussions. Hence, these interactions involved various arrangements, both head-to-head, and with many leaders representing their parties.. For presidential elections in the Czech Republic, two periods of election debates may be indicated –the first one is the presidential general election in 2013 (Rusin Dybalska 2014), and the second one – in 2018.

In the first presidential campaign, the meetings started in 2012, and were held in various configurations: thematic debates (about human rights, the rights of LGBT persons, and the economic crisis), the great debate of all political leaders and the head-to-head debates. The most spectacular encounters took place in the second round of elections, between Miloš Zeman and Karl Schwarzenberg. The politicians met three times during the final debates, organised by both state-owned and commercial TV channels. The last presidential elections in the Czech Republic featured numerous debates, especially during the first round. There were as many as thirteen meetings between November 2017 and January 2018. The second round included two encounters between those candidates that made it to the second round: Jiří Drahoš and Miloš Zeman.<sup>3</sup>

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3. Apart from the head-to-head meetings, there were also two more debates where only Zeman was present (the opponent did not show up), organised and broadcast by NOVA and TV Barrandov. These did not meet the criteria of a debate but were referred to as such.

The following material for the analysis has been selected:

- video recordings of the two debates from the elections in Poland between Andrzej Duda and Bronisław Komorowski: the first debate broadcast by public television on May 17, 2015, and the second debate broadcast by private television on May 22, 2015.
- video recordings of the two debates from the elections in the Czech Republic between Miloš Zeman and Karl Schwarzenberg: the first debate broadcast by private television on January 21, 2018, and the second debate broadcast by public television on of January 25, 2018

## 5. Format of the debate - analysis

The format defines the framework of the debate, and thus shapes the rules according to which the interaction takes place. Therefore, it affects the quality of argumentation, and, consequently, the style in which politicians are presented. The rules of the pre-election television debate format are shaped by several factors. First, the basis for establishing the rules is the rhetorical genre pattern, which is most fully implemented in the so-called tournament debates (Meany, Shuster 2003; Trapp et al. 2005; Rybold 2006; Snider 2008). In this rigid debate format the order of individual participants' statements, time and order of their turns divided into argumentative zones is fixed. The argumentative statements are divided into the constructive part (confirmation) and the negative part (refutation). Constructive statements appear first in the debate and they are followed by the rebuttal. Usually, the time for the rebuttal in the debate is shorter than the time allocated for the constructive part. It is important that each participant has equal time for their statements (Branham 1991). Secondly, the shape of the debate as a media event is influenced by the television broadcaster who offers certain possibilities, but also imposes restrictions on the implementation of the debate format (especially in the case of debates taking place in a television studio). Thirdly, the campaign staffs of each candidate negotiate the format and the rules in accordance with the strategy and tactics they intend to implement during the debate. The first factor that influences the shape of the format derives from the rules of the rhetorical art of debate. The second factor is related to the medium (in this case television) which broadcasts debates to the audience. And the third factor that affects the shape of the format is associated with the individual rhetorical strategy of the speakers. The first factor underlies the continuity of the genre of a television debate and is relatively constant. Too much interference into the structure of the debate on the part of the negotiating campaign staffs, which leads to the invalidation of

assumptions inherent in the genre foundations, results in a departure from the established pattern of the debate.

### 5.1. Debates in Poland

The preliminary comparative data of the two final debates between Andrzej Duda and Bronisław Komorowski indicates that their formats were similar. In the case of the state-owned TV channel the interaction was planned between the politicians and two journalists from various TV channels acting as moderators, while on the private TV channel there were three journalists from the same channel, each moderating one round. The table below presents the rules of interaction.

Place and time	Candidates	Journalists	Format
TVP 80 minutes	Bronisław Komorowski Andrzej Duda	Krzysztof Ziemięc Dorota Gawryluk	3 parts:  I. Questions from journalists – thematic blocks 1. foreign policy and security 2. social and economic policy 3. vision and political system - questions (2 from each journalist), in each thematic block, identical for both candidates - time for the answer – 1.5 minute  II. Mutual questions between the candidates (4 from each); 45 seconds for putting the question and 3 minutes for the answer  III. Summary of the debate (3 minutes for each candidate)
TVN 70 minutes	Bronisław Komorowski Andrzej Duda	Grzegorz Kajdanowicz Monika Olejnik Justyna Pochanke	Thematic blocks:  1. foreign policy 2. social policy (4 questions) 3. foreign affairs  - 1.5 minute for the answer - Each block included 4 questions from the moderator and one 30-second question from the candidate to his opponent (1 minute for the answer and 30 seconds for the reply to the answer given). - Part 4 consisted of a 2-minute summary presented by each candidate

**Table 1.** Debate formats in presidential elections in Poland

The formal discipline of both debates restricted first and foremost the moderators who refrained from comments and additional questions. The politicians felt thus more at ease, more often than not, disregarding the rules of the format and changing the topic or entering into discussions after the time limit was exhausted. The possibility of asking questions between the candidates was used as an opportunity to level accusations and criticism at each other, often of personal nature.



## 5.2. Debates in the Czech Republic

The two final debates between Zeman and Drahoš were organised by the private TV channel Prima and by the state-owned TV channels ČT 1 and ČT 24, accordingly, with different debate formats used (see table 1). The debate held by Prima was organised in the Karlín Musical Theatre, where politicians debated on the stage, in front of a large audience. Karel Voříšek moderated the debate, enthusiastically creating the atmosphere of a political show. The debate included intermissions, when the camera switched to the TV studio where journalist Klára Doležalová presented the upcoming new topic of the debate with some introduction and video materials.

The debate organised by the state-owned TV channel was held at the Rudolfinum Hall. It was hosted by Světlana Witowská and composed of three parts: the first part was dedicated to current affairs and the vision of the presidency. During the second part, the candidates were asked two questions by the state officials present in the audience, and during the third part the candidates put questions to each other. These questions had been placed in sealed envelopes. The moderator underlined that, apart from the authors, no one had had access to these questions. The envelopes were opened during the third part of the debate and only then did the moderator read the questions out loud to the candidates.

Place and time	Candidates	Journalists	Format
TV Prima Karlín Musical Theatre 23.01.2018 70 minutes	Miloš Zeman Jiří Drahoš	Karel Voříšek Klára Doležalová	The moderator asks questions without any time limits. The debate included material from the Prima TV studio and contributions from journalist Klára Doležalová.  3 main debate topics, pre-determined:  1. anti-smoking law 2. the right to possess firearms 3. freedom of speech  Rules: no information on the rules
ČT 1 and ČT 24 Rudolfinum 25 I 2018 90 minutes	Bronisław Komorowski Andrzej Duda	Grzegorz Kajdanowicz Monika Olejnik Justyna Pochanke	Three parts:  1. questions from the moderator: current political affairs and the vision of the presidency 2. questions from the state officials and representatives of voters 3. three questions from the candidate to the other candidate (previously prepared and kept in sealed envelopes)  Rules: no information on the time limit for the answer

**Table 2.** Debate formats in the presidential elections in the Czech Republic

The debates differed in terms of their organisation, in how the debate participants interacted and how this interaction was managed, as well as regarding the general atmosphere of the meeting. The audience gathered at the Rudolfinum reacted solely through applause and only when appropriate. The viewers at the Karlín Musical Theatre spontaneously responded to what the politicians said, often rudely interrupting the speakers and drowning out their words. The debate was, at the same time, an action planned to promote the television channel. Regular information on the viewing figures, the intermissions from the TV Prima studio, underlining how journalists present topics which are important for society and which should have been discussed by the politicians – all created an impression that the focus of the meeting was shifted from the issues important to voters to issues important to debate organisers.

This initial presentation of the debate structure and the comparison of the rules adopted by the debate participants demonstrate the basic differences in the genre composition. The Polish formats, though differing in detail, were rather similar to each other – they featured the same formal rigour of questions and answers and similar sets of general topics for discussion. The formats adopted for the Czech debates were based on two different models of interaction, they had different pre-determined areas to be discussed, and, most importantly, they assumed different styles of communication between all debate participants (politicians, moderators, audience, persons asking questions). With the fixed framework of interaction in the Polish formats, the audience had an impression that both candidates had equal chances and were treated fairly. Whereas in the Czech debates the lack of strict rules gave more control to the moderators managing the interaction, thus making them responsible for the fair treatment of the candidates.

## 6. Debate questions

This aspect of the research concerns the involvement of the media in the process of shaping the citizens' opinions. The issue of questions in the debates is important, as it reveals the perspective of those who organise or co-organise the debate, and even more importantly, it demonstrates who represents the voters, and these are not always the same public entities.<sup>4</sup> In order to analyse how the genre is enacted, it is key to take a look not only at the very content of questions but also at the manner of putting the question, the style and the attitude demonstrated. This indicates the social reception of the debate in a given environment. It also demonstrates how the debate participants understand this genre and its usefulness in the communication process.

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4. In the US, the final presidential debates are organised by the Commission on Presidential Debates which invites those journalists who are perceived as most impartial to moderate the three debates.

In his article on questions in election debates, Jeffrey McCall (1984, 97-104) proposes a list of seven rules which should be observed regarding the debate questions. These rules are as follows:

- (1) brevity, (2) single question, (3) continuity in follow-up questions, (4) focus on an area of disagreement between the candidates, (5) freedom from bias, (6) tone of goodwill rather than hostility, and (7) call for explanation and justification of significant policies.

In the Polish and in the Czech debates the pattern of questions asked by the moderators differed. In the Polish debates, some attention to maintain a similar standard for both interactions was directed, while in the Czech debates various concepts of putting questions by journalists were tried.

### 6.1. Questions in the Polish debates

In the debate held by TVP questions were asked by two journalists (see Table 3), who in total asked 24 questions. All of them were expert questions (Budzyńska-Daca 2015). They also included an ample introduction into a given topic. Some elaborate questions were, in fact, composed of two or three individual questions. The journalists read out the questions and then the politicians answered them, not always in the order of questions asked. After three thematic rounds, the candidates had time to ask each other four questions, in an alternating manner. Both politicians used this moment to formulate accusations against each other. Thus, their questions were only ostensible. In the second debate, the one organised by the private television channel, TVN, each of the three moderators asked four questions, addressed to both candidates (12 in total). The questions were more confrontational than in the debate on TVP. They were also shorter and more precise. The agenda of topics was as follows:

TVP	
foreign policy and security	Eastern policy, sanctions against Russia, cooperation with authorities responsible for security, safety pillars in the EU, reinforcement of the army and leadership in the region
social and economic policy	mitigating the social conflict in the country, reducing unemployment, social groups that benefitted/lost as a result of political transformation, senior-oriented policy
vision and political system	single mandate electoral districts, criticism on how the voters' preferences are not considered in the referenda, access to public information, non-fulfilment of election promises
TVN	
foreign policy	ideologically neutral state, single mandate electoral districts, investigation into the Smoleńsk catastrophe, assessment of the decision of Lech Kaczyński regarding the investigation in Jedwabne
social policy	retirement age, changes to the banking system, increase in the average salaries, purchase of weaponry for the army

foreign matters	policy towards Putin, national security and NATO, alliances in the EU, reception of refugees
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**Table 3.** Topics discussed in the final election debates in Poland

The political topics in both debates were similar while the specific issues raised by the journalists differed greatly. The questions were clearly marked in terms of time and structure. Addressing the same question to both candidates gave the impression of symmetry and fair treatment. The questions asked by the journalists from the private TV channel referred to specified issues, surnames, facts and events, and concerned the worldview issues. On TVP the questions were of open nature and, to more extent, concerned the future and the vision of the presidency.

## 6.2. Questions in the Czech debates

The moderators' strategies in the Czech debates were different from the ones in the Polish debates, and differed between the specific debates. Each Czech TV channel adopted a different model for asking questions. The agenda of the issues discussed has been presented in Table 4 below.

In the first debate on TV Prima several topics to be discussed had been agreed upon – possession of firearms, more lenient anti-smoking regulations, and freedom of speech. After a short introduction from the moderator and a presentation by a journalist from the Prima studio, the politicians asked each other questions. The moderator's questions were not the same for each candidate. One question to both candidates was followed by an additional question to the second politician. And this addition slightly changed the meaning of the expected answer. During the debate, the moderator had to repeatedly ask the audience for silence and several times announced the most recent audience figures for the programme.

<b>TV Prima</b>	
Introductory questions	Reasons for delaying participation in the debate Who should lead the government? Babis?
Mutual questions	Possession of firearms More lenient anti-smoking regulations Freedom of speech
Questions from the moderator	Restitution of church property Reception of migrants
<b>ČT 1</b>	
Introductory symmetrical questions	Why should I vote for you and not your rival? Is this the most important moment of your life? What do you criticise your opponent most for?

Detailed questions to both candidates (non-symmetrical) Babis' Government	Babis' government Advisors to the president Financing of the election campaign
Questions from the audience	Annexation of the Crimea First foreign journey Attitude towards Russia
Mutual questions	False accusations towards each candidate during the campaign

**Table 4.** Topics discussed in the final presidential debates in the Czech Republic

The two debates organised by two TV channels presented an entirely different standard for this genre. The questions in the debate organised by the state-owned TV channel and the style of moderating the discussion clearly differed from the organisation of the event by the private TV channel. Světlana Witowská moderating the debate asked detailed questions addressed to both candidates. She asked about additional things, commented on the words of the politicians, and interrupted them.

She acted as if she led an interrogation of the politicians on behalf of the voters. On many occasions during the debate she underlined that society had the right to know as much as possible about the leader it was going to choose. She asked additional questions. She was not satisfied with the topics being only hinted at, and demanded precise and unambiguous declarations. She interrupted the politicians, cut in, and at the same time imposed a rather quick pace of the question-answer exchange. Only the first three questions were symmetrical, addressed to both candidates in the same form. The remaining exchanges were shaped spontaneously in reaction to the answers the politicians gave. Performance of Witowská on the Czech TV channel and of Voříška on Prima differed significantly. During the entire event Witowská spoke 116 times while Voříšek 44, and this included not only questions to the candidates but also (as in the case of Voříšek) comments to the audience.

In the Czech Republic, the moderators had a decisively more active role to play. It was the moderators and not any predefined rules who shaped the dialogue. On the state-owned TV channel the moderator had a strong position of the *discourse creator* (ethos); she not only oversaw the interactions but also commented on the speeches, requested more precision in the answers, and engaged in polemics with the politicians. The moderator from Prima TV is, on the other hand, an example of the style of moderating which belongs to the pathos area, involving *intermediation between the speakers and the audience*. He addressed the audience at the theatre and at home, suggesting that he was trying to satisfy their needs and expectations.

The moderator's role in both Polish debates was similar – they asked questions, did not offer any comments, and they oversaw the candidates' observance of the

rules. Their role consisted mainly in coordinating the interaction and providing the candidates with topics for discussion (logos, ethos).

The differences between the Polish and the Czech debates regarding questions concern all the levels – the topics, the form of questions, how the interaction was constructed, and also the just/symmetrical approach to all candidates. The Czech debates had a hybrid form in terms of genre. They resembled rather a TV talk show (Voříšek) or a job interview (Witowská) than the debate model adopted in Poland. They were richer in suspense-like elements. On TV Prima these consisted in the comments from the studio, footage, a noisy audience, while on the Czech state-owned TV – in questions from the audience, and mutual questions delivered in sealed envelopes. The Polish debates were conducted along the convention of a tournament debate where questions and answers had to be uttered within the pre-defined time limits.

## **7. Interaction time**

This category perfectly differentiates Czech from Polish debates. Interaction time constitutes an important element of the debate format. The time of the whole meeting is crucial (in Poland: 80 minutes on TVP, 70 minutes on TVN; in the Czech Republic: 90 minutes on ČT1, 70 minutes on Prima), which is, more or less, similar in both countries. However, the internal order of these meetings differed. Polish debates are similar in this respect: both politicians had 1.5 minutes to answer. In the case of Czech debates, there was no regulation in this respect. The debate held at the Rudolfinum was sequenced according to the order of time controlled by the moderator who was asking questions and coordinated the interaction between participants. The moderator on TV Prima managed the interaction in several directions, addressing not only the politicians by asking them questions, but also the audience, mainly asking for appropriate behaviour, and finally three times with the journalist whom he established a real-time connection.

### **7.1. Equal and adequate time**

The condition of fair and sufficient time was certainly not respected in Czech debates. The audience did not observe time, which could limit the length of candidates' statements. Their answers were spontaneous. There was no pressure to take up the time, which usually occurs when the speaker has a time limit indicated for responding. In such an event, an early termination of the speech could be poorly received by the public. Time regulations have resulted in greater speaking discipline in Polish debates. Speeches started to be dynamic and took up the exact time destined for them. In Czech debates, politicians responded at a natural pace and spoke much less than in Polish debates. In the Polish debates, the moderators only

made sure that the speakers did not interact at the time not intended for that purpose, while the regulation of the speech itself was in line with the rules of format and was not dictated by the moderators. This was not the case in the Czech debates. In this respect, each of them had its own dynamics.

If we were to compare the timeframe of both genres and ask about the consequences of the adopted solutions for the individual participants in the debate, what conclusions should be drawn? The regulated time of interaction in the Polish debates was based on the principle of equal timeframe, which fostered a sense of fairness and equal opportunities for both candidates. However, this timeframe was not sufficient. It is impossible to give an in-depth answer in 1.5 minutes. This meant that the responses were clichéd, hasty and often oversimplified. From the politicians' perspective, short timeframe can be seen as an ally (when an uncomfortable question is asked) or as an enemy (when there is more time needed to explain one's reasons in more depth and detail). In the Czech debates, on the other hand, the timeframe was neither equal nor sufficient, because the moderators urged politicians to respond, knowing that the whole debate has to fit in with the specific time allocated for its transmission.

## **8. Rhetoric of the debate space**

Typifying the issue of the time-spatial framework of the debate, we shall only consider the symbolic (Limon 2008) and purposeful construction of space for the rhetorical act. We take into account two types of space: meeting space (intentionally chosen) and interaction space (shaped by the organiser of the debate). (Budzyńska-Daca 2015, 312-313).

The comparison between the Czech and Polish debates will concern only the external aspects of the aforementioned spaces, so as to capture the most important differences in the symbolism of the message, without going deeper into the structure of the activities of the individual entities co-creating the debates.

### **8.1. Space of the meeting**

The Czech debates did not take place in television studios, unlike the Polish debates. This difference is significant and impinges directly on the dissimilarities in the interaction of both media events. The first Czech debate took place in the Karlín Musical Theatre, and the second one in the music auditorium of the Rudolfinum building.

The meeting space was chosen in an attempt to connote the senses connected with the performance. The main actors (politicians and moderator) are on the stage, while the voters sit in the audience. The semantics of the stage allows for interpretation of the roles of politicians as actors who take part in the previously

prepared play. It may be important for the reception of politicians' statements, as well as for the meaning of their words, and the point of organising such an event as an election debate. Politics is a theatre, so it should not be treated as deadly seriously. It provides powerful emotions, and it can be a strong experience, but when the curtain falls, the audience comes back to reality. Politics moves into the backstage, to reveal to the audience, once again, a new political scene of yet another political act.

The choice of TV studio space entails a number of different connotations. Politicians meet at the headquarters of the TV station which act as information relays. Thus, while debating, they pass on information to the voters. They choose the least ritualistic of all the spaces, the least saturated with additional performativity senses that connote with the theatre or a university (as in the case of the final debates in the U.S.A.). Polish debates usually take place on television sets. To ensure balance between the public and private sector, one of the debates usually takes place on public television and the other one on private television.

## 8.2. Space of interaction

In the case of the Czech debates, the interaction space is organised in a slightly different way in each specific event. The Karlín Musical Theatre is a modern interior, with high-gloss flooring and fashionable armchairs. There is a huge screen in the background (the partition wall) on which politicians are shown close-up on a split screen. Above the screen, the spotlights project light in the colours of the Czech flag. The debate at the Rudolfinum, in turn, was set in a neo-renaissance decor. Politicians were seated on elegant and sophisticated armchairs with armrest support. In the background, one could see the stairs to the mezzanine. The overall impression: a cosy, refined setting with discreet moody lighting.

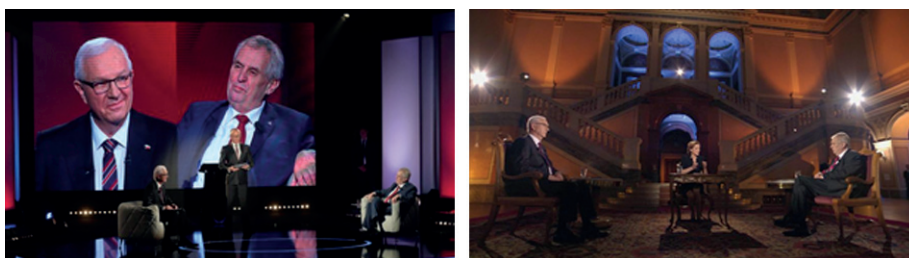


Photo 1

In both Polish debates, the interaction space features similar elements. The settings have the character of a studio space arranged for this specific event. Politicians stand behind the lecterns. In both cases, the political-moderator layout has been designed on a triangular plan. In the debate organised on public television, two moderators stand opposite politicians, while on private television, one person moderates



the debate. On public television, politicians stand on raised circular platforms framed by light lines that separate them from each other. The space on the private television set, on the other hand, is designed in such a way that politicians stand on an illuminated floor in the shape of a decagon, with a dark blue glow behind. Rounded shapes make the space more harmonious, while sharp-edged figures and strongly contrasted colours give the space a more dynamic character (Arnheim 2004). In both settings, rounded walls on which symbolic elements connected with the presidential office are displayed serve as the backdrop to the debate.



Photo 2

Both the arrangement of space and the model of interaction of the two debates in Poland and the Czech Republic are similar within the same election campaign and dissimilar in respective countries. Politicians stand up during debates in Poland, and sit down in the Czech Republic; there is no audience in Poland, while in the Czech Republic – the debate takes place in front of a large audience; the settings are specifically designed for television recording in Poland, while in the Czech Republic debates take place in the existing auditoria settings. Two different models of organising interactions have a distinctive impact on the audience, the reception of the debate as such and the perception of politicians as potential state leaders.

## 9. Conclusions

To sum up the comparison of how the genre of a debate was used in both discourse environments, we will refer to the five conditions formulated by Auer for the so-called model debate.

- a) **Confrontation** – present in both cases discussed since they both included the option of questions put to the other candidate. The confrontation element took the form of personal attacks, especially in the Polish debates. In the Czech debates, it was the moderator who oversaw the order of the disputes, while in the Polish debates the end of the time limit for the answer signalled the end of discussion.
- b) **Equal and adequate time** – this criterion was only partly met in both cases. In the Polish debates, the division of time was more just since both

candidates have the same amount of time for each answer. In the Czech debates, time was more limited but on the other hand it was more freely used by the candidates and the moderators alike.

- c) **A matched position of contestants** was observed in both types of meetings as in both campaigns the candidates had strong social backing, which had won them the second round.
- d) **The criterion of a stated proposition** was not observed in any of the debates. The Polish debates were in this aspect closer to the model genre as the main topics were repeated in both events. In the Czech debates, important issues were mixed with topics that had less meaning politically but were of more importance for the politicians' images.
- e) **The aim of gaining audience decision** – this condition was met in Poland and in the Czech Republic to the extent expected by the audience. The viewers had an opportunity to form their own opinion on the candidate based on his actions in the entire election campaign. A debate is a key point of the election campaign, but it is not the only source of information for voters. It seems that the Czech moderators were more focused (especially on the state-owned television) to gain information which may be useful for voters.

To sum up, the genre examples from both Poland and the Czech Republic include various departures from the genre model. The degree of hybridisation of the Czech debates is higher and makes them more similar to dialogical genres, such as a talk show (Prima) or a job interview (ČT); whereas, the Polish debates resembled the model tournament debates.

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