

THE SLEEPING LANGUAGE

How to awaken expressive forms in contemporary radio

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We have often heard that the radio is the poor mass-media, especially when it's compared to other mass-media, which are apparently more complete. Also, it's been observed that most of the adjectives that are used to describe the radio usually have negative connotations : the radio is a blind mass-media, is unisensorial.

Those that know the radio thoroughly, considered that it is not only the poor mass-media but it is the one that perhaps has the greater expressive capacity. Indeed its strict characteristic sound is the one that grants its greater creative potential. There are many people that think this especially us whom have worked, studied and analyzed the radio in depth, but it is certain that there are very few that can verify it. It conceals a

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hidden reality to the listener's ear. So, the radio is not a poor mass-media but we have made it poor. At present, the radio that we listen to uses less than fifty percent of its expressive possibilities.

We cannot blame the audience, especially the young audience, of consigning the radio to background. While other mass-media have renewed their language and have adapted it to the audiences' perceptive characteristics, the radio stays still, expressing itself in already obsolete presentation forms. A revision becomes essential to find new expressive ways to awake the sleeping language and adapt it to the new forms of audience perception.

The emotional anchorage

Immersed in the denominated audio-visual culture, the audience is used to receiving messages by the emotional route, especially when it has been contributed to television. Nevertheless, if we listen to the radio, we can verify that it has transformed into a mass-media practically sustained in an element of the radio language : the word ; that is transferred to the listener through a channel is more rational than emotional. We did not give up, but we looked to reinforce it with the capacity to generate emotive messages. We cannot forget that the radio is a born like artistic mass-media, not essentially informative, like today, which means, the radio, in its own essence, is an emotionally stimulating mass-media. Therefore the possibilities that the radio elements combination offers, can provoke the listeners' feelings. Due to this, the mass-media messages cannot remain in the rational word but go to the combination of all the elements of their language : word, music, sound effects and silences, in order to stimulate the listeners emotionally. In look for the maximum expression, it's not to place music while a broadcaster speaks or to introduce in a special situation a sound effect in the story. We try to explore the possible combinations of all these elements. Let us see how we can do it.

Firstly, there are few occasions in which the word reinforces with certain sound effects or music in a news story. The effect is not similar when the element is accompanied immediately by the word to when it's introduced based on the explicit message, depending on the script. It's evident that it is and it will continue being the one word that sustains the rational content, denotative, but if it's combined with some elements from the radio language, we can add an emotive line that generates

greater sensations in the listener. Therefore, the radio task is based on determining which are the decisive moments in the spoken message to strengthen them with sound effects, music or silences.

In general, these decisive moments need to coincide with all radio script parts that produce a reinforcement or turning the spoken story. The reinforcement is obtained harnessing those words that are the keywords in the understanding of the narration, those expressions of action that make the development of speech agile. An example of keywords reinforcement could be the use of a sound effect or a melody while the decisive word in the story is pronounced. The narrated structure appears regularly to this word and throughout the production we can emphasize it with a sound effect or music. To begin with, we look for a redundant effect that it does not have to abuse. It is evident that the radio product is expressive and it does not resort to repetition. The ideal situation would be if the sound effect or melody was different (or if we looked for a certain unit, in the case of music, there could be different fragments from the same melody). The other case of reinforcement consists of harnessing those actions that take place in the course of the story. When the narration describes a movement, this focuses on the music or agreed sound effect according to the action that is described. Again, this is not a repetitive reason as to why the element of the radio language has to be introduced just at that moment and not extended too long. We should not forget that the objective is to reinforce certain situations and not to complete the entire story with those elements.

On the other hand, we understand by plot situations those moments of the story in which a change takes place and transforms the development of the story. In general, we can divide the plot situations into the following ones : transformation, expectation and conclusion moments. The main difference which we can establish with the previous classification is that, in this case, the elements of the radio language are not introduced at the same moment of the word but before or after the same one. Firstly, transformation moments are those in which some events in the narration is going to happen, for example, the case of a protagonist who enters a room and comes across an unexpected situation. In this case, before the protagonist makes his entrance a sound effect or music anticipates what is going to happen. Secondly, expectation moments are those in which they try to create suspense in the story. For example, the protagonist is hit by a piece of good or bad news and right after

we listen to silence, music or a sound effect accentuating it. Finally, conclusion moments are all those that close a situation : all the possible changes of scene or parts in which it divides the script can be solved with a melody or a sound effect.

The seduction culture

The audio-visual present culture is characterized mainly by the seduction search. Seduction is obvious in the emotional anchorage of the messages especially on cinema and television, but also by the way in which the different elements are used, for example, on cinema. The mass-media dominates the use of the sound, as it doesn't happen on the radio, despite excellent sound resources. The cinema takes great care of music and special effects which it uses. This is something we must learn from the mass-media.

Firstly, we must ask ourselves, following the cinematographic mass-media lessons, if the sounds which we have introduced in the form of sound effects or music have meaning or generate sensations by themselves. The important word is not a good reason as to why these elements do not contribute a substantial part to the story. However, the sound combination will not turn out like part of a message with a sense and unique meaning but it will be comprised of different entwined elements. Therefore, expressive effects, is not so effective to introduce, for example, music that harmonizes the word in a certain way, to one melody that by itself generates the sensation that we looked to transmit. The sound, in an independent form, must become a meanings and sensations producer.

Secondly, we must take special care of what type of music or sound effects we use in our story. It would be unthinkable if a recent premier cinematographic production used the music of another very well-known film to illustrate its scenes, or in a scene where voice appears, they used music with excessive percussion or that interfered in the understanding of the main message. Finally, it would be unthinkable to use a style of music that did not agree with the message that it was trying to transmit. If this is unthinkable in the cinema, why the sound mass-media in essence, the radio, does it constantly ? There are many examples in the news, reportages and programs in general, and there are many that use the latest song that appears in the lists of successes and is placed

as background music without considering that it's a contradiction with the narrated content, that has percussion and letter, then it produces noise and interferes in the understanding of the message, and is so well-known that the listener automatically pays attention to that melody and forgets what is being said. Many studies have verified that if you put the audience better in a certain situation when a direct association with an image doesn't take place or made well-known, which means, when the listener does not recognize the melody. Then, we will take care of this aspect and also with the instrumental music style and its characteristics. All of these are fundamental in seducing.

Thirdly, the message seduction can be obtained by the suitable selection of the fragments that we use in our message. If we pay attention again to the cinema, we will notice which music or sound effects are almost never used as a whole, but which certain fragments that harness the different parts from the message, and which are turned to the fiction of the story. This is practice which we have not observed on the radio, where, for example, music or sound effects are chosen and are placed at the bottom immediately, within difference between content and form, or where fragments are used at un-appropriate moments. For example, the ending to the radio program is extended by using music to finalize the story from the beginning by placing and lowering the volume for a few seconds. But it's not the same to use music at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end. Music or sound effects have their own narrative structure. They are introduced in a certain way ; usually they rise until they reach the climax in the intermediate part and finalize solving the situation, which means, it uses the same structure of a story. Therefore, the narrative structure of the story and the one of music or the sound effect must agree. If the story is in the exposition, we use the beginning; if we are in a tense moment, we will look for the intermediate parts, and if we are solving the narration, we will select final parts.

The reality fragmentation

The audio-visual messages are characterized because they construct and represent a fragmented reality. The same thing happens on the radio where narrated stories are adjusted to the audiences mind. Then the main audio-visual mass-media characteristic is indeed the brevity in its messages. Theoretically the radio maintains this tendency, but in practice it is recognized that some aspects could improve. While television

is gradually reducing the time of its shows, radio has continued with its same practice. While television products are more and more brief, radio products continue being too extensive for the audio-visual cultured audience.

We are not going to extend here in the excessive duration, for the time that we lived, of certain radio programs (magazines of five hours, news of 45 minutes...) but especially to elaborate more products, as they can be radio drama, news articles, chronicles or interviews. We have not appealed in this case to the superficiality, but it's necessary to find the right term between the attention conditions of the audiences and the degree of depth in the story. If a news article lasts five minutes and it is a seductive message and with emotional anchorage, it will not cause problems for the listeners' attention. But when it lasts half an hour, it's much more complicated, especially because the communication strategies have to be multiplied and, if we are honest, sometimes the broadcaster makes a forced attempt to maintain the attention of the listener by an artificial form. All the tests about certain radio programs that we have achieved with listeners always produce the same result : a news article of five minutes is better, than one of ten, fifteen or half an hour; a fiction sketch of ten minutes is better than a radio drama of one hour; a chronicle of two minutes is better than one of five.

On the other hand, the audio-visual messages are characterized by a high rhythmical structure obtained through the continuous temporary variation of the elements combined in the production. This means, radio has not developed in the same way as the television and it has continued with the same tempos of presentation for several years. It's a rather slow rate, sustained only in the word, and characterized by a little variation. We can confirm that temporary variation in the combination of the radio language elements practically doesn't exist, when this one takes place. However, to change the tendency and to obtain a seductive message, we must try the continuous temporary variation of the different elements from the language in an attempt to get a contrast. The audiences' attention, human attention in general, is by means of temporary variation of the stimulus. Therefore, if we want to seduce our listeners, we must try a suitable temporary contrast that makes the presentation rate of the radio messages agile.

Firstly, we must consider that the same element that extends in time, loses its effectiveness, therefore it is useful for our intentions at

the same moment in which we try to create that effect, but in a few seconds it will leave that sensation. It is clear to understand the operation of the human attention when there is sound traffic in our cities. Listener is accustomed to that sound and, then, it happens unobserved. In order to avoid it, we must vary the stimulus continuously. One of the commonest errors is to think that we have exposed a seductive message by the simple fact of having placed background music to the text. Perhaps it is attractive but, without a doubt, less effective than the same text with music, sound effects and silences, always introduced with the meaning of the message at the moments that we have described before. In order to achieve a truly seductive production, we must try to make our program a true stimulus producer to the listener as it is important then the stimulus at least varies in an interval between five and fifteen seconds. In this interval it must have introduced another element that renews the listener attention : music, sound effect, silence or a different voice. We establish an interval because the variation of the stimulus will always depend on the message content. When the text describes calm situations, the variation can then extend more in time. However, when we are at tension, agitated or the story takes a turn, this is when the variation has to be raised and the interval change must be less.

Secondly, next to the stimulus variation, to the introduction of a certain sound effect, music or silence to reach a suitable rate, it's important that the elements, which contribute in varying the attention, are not extended the same time as the rest. For example, if the time of the voice is ten seconds, we will make sure that the sound effect introduced later does not extend another ten seconds and so on. This is to avoid the same composition structure that the message reproduces and so that it does not become repetitive to the listener. Therefore, the times of each introduced element depend on the meaning or emotion that we want to transmit to the listener. At the moment that we obtain it, it will be necessary to vary the message again, changing the strategy.

The logic of the action

In addition to the emotional anchorage, the seduction and the fragmentation of the reality, the audience of today is used to what we can denominate : the logic of the action. The television or cinematographic messages tell us about the stories represented, not narrated. Even in the news, we can verify how it arrives to personify stories in an attempt

to put into action the character and to obtain the audiences appeal. At the same time, it facilitates the attention and the improvement of the audiences understanding because information is more difficult to understand. This is not frequent on the radio, when nevertheless the mass-media have had enormous tradition in this aspect. Radio drama indeed plays with the logic of the action personifying stories and creating sound scenes that possess these characteristics.

Present radio no longer creates scenes where certain characters exemplify a given reality. This has caused little use of certain sound resources. In first place, the shot, in this case the sound shot, is one of the most powerful elements to create reality sensation and to stimulate the listener imagination. A recent study made by our investigation group, show that many people value this resource that stimulates the listeners imagination, and it concludes saying that the distance is the best resource to determine the space that an action is located, to perceive the distance and the movement on the radio and, really, to create reality sensation. In the age of technology, when it turns out so easy to use certain sound resources like pitches, echoes, reverberations, modifications, distortions or sounds balance, it's indeed when we verified that they had disappeared almost completely from the radio; when their expressive possibilities are infinite at the time of creating scenes, locating situations and portraying the characters or creating sensations. If we always talk about the radio like mass-media of sound images creation that stimulates the listener imagination, we must recover all these resources that offer us present technology.

Secondly, the contemporary radio hardly creates characters to illustrate its stories. Throughout the History of the Spanish radio it was a resource highly used. There are many examples of this : the voice of Mr. Casamajor - an old man protesting and during the program represented the combative part of the subjects - or the voice of the boy Manolito Gafotas, who contributed the childhood ingenuousness in another one of the well known Spanish radio programs. But, gradually as time goes by, this resource is being withdrawn. In addition, this causes the loss of the listeners' identification, attractiveness of the message and variation in the spoken presentation. The introduction of characters on radio programs, with its suitable characterization, makes it easier for the vocal stimulus to renew constantly. The voice can be used in many diverse forms, but we have limited ourselves to the personal style of the

presenter and we have lost the dramatized voices. The presenters style varies but the use of the voices on the radio do not. The voice is the most expressive resource which the human being counts on and along with the new possibilities that technology offers - echoes, reverberations, pitch modifications, pans... -, we can create infinite characters. Television and even publicity are using these resources constantly, but the radio, the word mass-media, has forgotten this aspect.

Conclusion

The loss of expression on the radio, characterized by messages that do not adapt to the new forms of audience perception, prevails a revision in which the radio uses its own language. A language that has become poor, in spite of counting on many resources that can help the radio recovers its emotional anchorage, elaborates brief and seductive messages and appeal to the logic of the action. Only if we spoke the same language of the new generations at the audio-visual culture, we could recover the power of a magical mass-media.

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