Multimodality of the TV Format

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This article analyses the multimodal construction of various global TV formats and the modes through which the format negotiates reinforcement of its ideological bases, innovation, change and unlimited semiosis. Theoretically, this work draws on social semiotics, multimodality and political economy. Methodologically, it applies semiotic analysis to really popular global formats. The results show that the format is an extraordinary and powerful example of multimodality which speaks the global language of signs. On the one hand, different languages and forms of communication reinforce its ideologies, such as competition, primacy of money, objectification of human bodies and consumerism; but the format also puts forward a kind of self-propaganda; in many cases, in fact, its communication aims to support and promote itself, even when this contradicts other messages of the system; it is by being successful that producers make more money, become more successful, may further influence the audience, and so on. On the other hand, the languages and the forms adopted continually renew the format, change the relationships between signifier and signified, and create new symbols. This unlimited semiosis allows the format to refresh or adapt its image, get more audience and remain competitive in the market.

Keywords: TV format, who wants to be a millionaire, wheel of fortune, multimodality, social semiotics

Introduction

This article analyses the multimodal character of four global TV formats: *Wheel of Fortune, The Price Is Right, Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* and *MasterChef.* The first two titles were created before the 1990s and in this article they are thus considered as belonging to the first generation of the global format; the other two products, conversely, were conceived and commercialised from the end of the 1990s onwards, the era that here is called the second generation of the format. The three aims of this study are firstly, to explain how writing TV formats has changed from the first to the second period; secondly, how the new narrative of the digital media have contributed to this change; and, thirdly and more in general, how telling stories has changed over these years. Finally, a final section also adds a critical view to this TV genre.

The format is in a state of flux, as it renews its modes by continuously producing new meanings, activating what in semiotic terms is called "unlimited semiosis." Conceived by Umberto Eco, who worked Peirce's (1931) previous reflections, unlimited semiosis is the continuous adaptation of the sign to changing conditions, from societal to political, from aesthetic to historic. Unlimited semiosis

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continually allows the sign to change its meaning (Eco, 1976, pp. 71–72). Drawing on this theory, this article argues that the format is an extremely flexible text that adapts its various modes to different aims. Thus, in creating TV formats the writer has a series of instruments that may combine in different ways. How this combination has changed over the years thanks to the new media is the focus of this study.

Literature Review

This study is interested in the mutual exchange between multimodality and society. In fact, on the one hand "in order for something to 'be a mode' there needs to be a shared cultural sense within a community" (Bezemer and Jewitt, 2010, p. 184). On the other hand, cultures may be influenced by modes, which may shape new trends and habits (Kress, 2010).

The format is a sort of matrix containing all the elements forming a show. In a text called *bible*, the TV writers responsible for the project precisely explain the various parts forming the concept, including details of narrative structure, duration, settings, music, dressing codes, languages, and even non-verbal languages adopted by the hosts. Thus, we may say that the *bible* is a multimodal text. This matrix is experimented with by a couple of TV channels and, if successful, it is sold all over the world with the agreement that only a few of its elements may be changed by the acquirer and almost always with the green light of the original producer. Usually, the changes between the original and the various versions of a format are motivated by the needs and preferences of specific, national audiences. However, the first aim of the format is to sell globally (Thompson, 1990; Steemers, 2004; Chalaby, 2009). To do so, formats must be the right combination of universal narrative structures, as narrative is "international, transhistorical, transcultural" (Barthes, 1977, p. 79), and specific cultural elements, as any good narrative must be based on familiar structures (Hodge and Kress, 1988, p. 230). Thus, the format also relies on recognisable elements, cultural beliefs and ideologies (Brennan, 2012, p. 86).

The format has an interesting history, really illuminating in understanding the intrinsic nature of its multimodality. Until the 1980s, in fact, TV was among the most important media and the format was one of its powerful weapons. However, after the rise of the internet and of the new media, television has been included on the list of the "traditional" media along with radio, newspapers, magazines and others (Doyle, 2013). Here, "traditional" is an elegant way of saying "old," as these traditional media adopt a *unidirectional* form of communication, also called top-down, which implies that there is a unique and powerful source that sends the message to a passive receiver. Since the 1990s, the new media have turned this form of communication into something old. In fact, the internet, social media and all the new ways of communicating rely on a *multidirectional* form of communication, also called bottom-up, in which there is not a unique sender, but all the users are in turn senders and receivers, the audience is active and may react to the message, and the system allows almost every person to become a producer

of messages (Buscemi, 2017). Writing for these media is relevantly different from writing for the old TV, as in the new media the author and the members of the audience continually exchange their roles.

Importantly, the new media have taken communication closer to the human brain. In fact, the new, bottom-up communication is based on multiple connections (the links of the websites, for example). In this new scenario, the completeness of communication is proportional to the number of connections given to the user. A website is richer when it offers many links and more interaction to the users, and a social medium is more powerful when it connects the user to a higher number of other users, sources, and media. This multiplicity of connections is exactly the way in which our brain works (Carr, 2010). This means that, with the new media, we communicate with the same way as we think.

TV is the newest medium among the "traditional" one, but its metaphorical DNA does not permit it to become multidirectional. While the new media are able to communicate as we think, TV still functions as a low-developed brain or an ill mind. Also the format suddenly became redundant. What to do, then? This article argues that multimodality has been the desperate attempt of television to keep up with the new media. As a result, since the late 1990s writing formats has become something more similar to writing for the new media.

Finally, this article also draws on critical approaches to the media. Modes may also have political value, either supporting or challenging dominant political views (Fleitz, 2009). In his late studies, Bourdieu (2003; 2005) has demonstrated that neoliberal policies have concentrated the power in a few hands and that technology and the media are fundamental weapons that guarantee the consolidation of power. Moreover, Bourdieu (2003; 2005) sees globalisation as the expansion of the economic field to the entire world. This must be linked to the concept of new television, developed by Eco (1983) and Casetti and Odin (1990). Since the 1980s, a new kind of TV has taken its place in Europe, the so called *neo-televisione* (new television). It is characterised by neoliberal approaches to commerce and business, a positive representation of consumerism, and an abundance of advertising and globalisation.

Methodology

Multimodal analysis is an immense and multifaceted method. It may include any form of investigation and link to any cultural, aesthetic, social, political or historical discipline. The specific form of analysis that this study adopts relates to social semiotics, and is called social semiotic multimodality, which "aims to shed light on how people use modal resources in a certain social context" (Fortanet-Gómez and Crawford Camiciottoli, 2015, p. 1). In this study, it is adopted to analyse the various modes of the analysed formats.

However, this research also draws on the opposition between the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic dimension of signification. To put it simply, syntagm is "the *combination* of 'this-*and*-this-*and*-this' … while the plane of the paradigm is that of the *selection* of 'this-*or*-this-*or*-this'" (Chandler, emphasis in the original, 2002,

p. 80). Syntagmatic analysis investigates sequences. Instead, paradigmatic analysis "refers intertextually to signifiers which are *absent* from the text" (Chandler, 2002, p. 80). Clearly, formats, as any narrative structure, can be studied through the sequence of their constitutional elements, and thus syntagmatically; and paradigmatically, as the various versions, especially in the first generation, choose one of the various options given in the paradigm to adapt the universal structure of the matrix to specific, national audiences. For example, if a version of a format chooses to represent the public as silent and in the shade, and another version of the same format depicts the public as encouraging the contestant loudly, we may say that the two shows have chosen different options from those offered by the paradigm of the format. In this article, "paradigmatic analysis involves comparing and contrasting each of the signifiers present in the text with absent signifiers which in similar circumstances might have been chosen, and considering the significance of the choices made" (Chandler, 2002, p. 99).

Finally, this study has selected a purposive sampling of formats belonging to both the first and the second generation, comparing works created and commercialised before the 1990s, to those developed after. Even though the old formats are not the focus of this study, they constitute a necessary background for this research, as it is in the comparison between the two generations that we may catch relevant aspects of the multimodality of the format. Specifically, "purposive sampling is a non-random sampling technique in which the researcher selects elements supporting a particular theory or presenting specific characteristics" (Buscemi, 2015, p. 127). The formats selected in this study do not support a specific theory, but have been selected because they offer interesting elements in terms of multimodality. A random sampling (based on time or specific media production companies) would have resulted in only a few items to investigate, and the study would have been seriously limited. As stated above, the two formats of the first generation are *Wheel of Fortune* and *The Price is Right*, while the two titles of the second generation are *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* and *MasterChef*.

The TV Format and Multimodality

The First Generation of Formats and "Bland" Multimodality

To fully understand the multimodality of the format, it is necessary to look at how old formats were written when TV was not so globalised yet and when unidirectional communication was still "cool." If, as theorised above, multimodality has strong links to the political and social scenario, what about the format from the 1970s and the 1980s, when the political and social situation was different from today; and in many countries TV also had the mission of educating people by also representing diversity and the plurality of points of view?

This section focuses on two global formats of those years, *Wheel of Fortune* and *The Price Is Right. Wheel of Fortune* was created in 1959 by the Australian producer Reg Grundy, and in the 1980s became one of the most widespread global formats (Chalaby, 2016). *The Price is Right* was, instead, created in 1956 by Bob

Stewart for the American producers Mark Goodson and Bill Todman, who produced many other global formats (Newcomb, 2013). Interestingly from a political economy perspective, in 1978 Goodson and Todman reached an agreement with Grundy and a global TV production, Freemantle, and since these deals producing and commercialising formats has meant a multiplication of income and the concentration of ownership and power (Chalaby, 2016). Freemantlemedia is today the second producer of formats after Endemol (Moran and Malbon, 2006). As is also demonstrated in the next section, concentration is one of the main characteristics of both the format market (Moran, 2010) and the neoliberal society (Bourdieu, 2003; 2005).

This analysis clearly shows that the two formats build their representations on various modes, as any TV show. In fact, written and spoken language, music, clothes, architecture and many other modes were indubitably parts of the show (Wheel of Fortune, 2016; The Price is Right, 2016). In an episode of *Wheel of Fortune* in 1976 (Curry, 2016), for example, we can see all these modes in the first minutes of the show. To sum up, what the viewer watches in the first sequences of the show is: a first setting with many commercial products; a second setting with the big, unrealistic scenography of the game, and the contestants and the hosts talking to each other; the spoken language of the hosts explaining the rules of the game; the entertaining music without any connotation or connection to the rhythm of the images; and the ironical language of the hosts and the contestants. The format is clearly multimodal, but each of the modes adopted refers to specific meanings. Among the others, the first setting clearly refers to the happiness of consumerism; the second setting links to the game as a break from everyday life; the music does not underline anything specific but mostly fills the void of silence; the rules of the game force the contestants to answer the questions, but also the hosts and the guests tend to be friendly to each other, so the feeling of suspense given by the game is often lost. It is clear that the many modes employed do not go in the same direction. The problem with this kind of multimodality is that the modes adopted do not form a whole, an ensemble, as they should do to form a complete and contemporary multimodal form of communication, according to Bezemer and Kress (2016).

This form of modal disconnection is even more evident in *The Price is Right* (The Fun and Games Channel, 2016; The Price is Right, 2016). Here the setting relates to the roundness of comics and cartoons but the images of the products offered as a prize are contextualised in an exclusive and refined setting. Again, music is neutral and disconnected from the rest of the show, and the suspense of the game is watered down by the irony of the spoken words. As in the previous case, the impression is that the various modes go in different directions.

If the format is a global product that must be adapted to various audiences, how have these formats been changed in other countries? Have the various modes been saved and the original versions respected? If we look at the various versions of *Wheel of Fortune* around the world paradigmatically, for example, we can see that TV writers created different products according to the country, relating to the various options offered by the paradigm of the format. Among the various versions, in the British show, we do not see the amount of money on the wheel, as in the US

original version, but numbers corresponding to points that the contestant may accumulate. Similarly, the final prize is not cash but a valuable object. In the Spanish version, the public is more active, standing up and participating while the contestant tries to guess the final puzzle, and the questions belong to given categories. In Russia, contestants are freer and may also answer before spinning the wheel, but they also give the host gifts from the areas they come from. In Poland, the green colour of the wheel has replaced the blue one. Finally, in France, the public is seated behind the contestants, while in the US version the same place is occupied by the screen with the puzzle. This gives the French public much more visibility than the publics of other countries.

A fast overview of the various versions of *The Price Is Right*, the second format that I analyse in this article, confirms this trend. In Italy, the host is on a diet and every day, she checks her weight receiving applauses if she lost weight, or criticisms if not; in France, colours are soberer and the big wheel of the original version is replaced by a traditional clock; finally, in Britain, the amount of money to be won was decreased and a new game, called *Supermarket*, aimed to reward contestants' skills, rather than simple luck. From TV writers' point of view, thus, the greatest effort was adapting a format to a specific audience. The writers of the original format only created a big box containing various tools, while 'local' writers had to adapt the box to their audience.

This demonstrates that the bland multimodality of these shows encourages changes in the representations of the modes, and that these changes link to cultural variations. In semiotic terms, it encourages paradigmatic choices, which alter the syntagmatic, narrative structure. Just to summarise the most evident reasons behind the various variations, it is clear that the British choice of writing points and not amounts of money on the wheel, decreases prizes and rewards authentic skills relating to the less commercial aim of British TV version, compared to the US show; the Spanish public participating actively in the show builds a more emotional and Mediterranean scenario; and by giving the host a present from their remote birthplaces, the contestants of the Russian version demonstrate the cultural variety of that large nation's regions. In conclusion, the bland organisation of modes favours cultural adaptations.

On the one hand, these adaptations match the needs of the various audiences, who see, in the show, something belonging to their specific traditions; on the other hand, this also weakens the idea of the format as a whole. The fact that the original format is watered down, and is thus not recognisable and permeable to extraneous elements, threatens the wholeness of its concept. This also has commercial and ideological effects. To put it simply, commercially, the format becomes less necessary, and ideologically it does not express a precise point of view, but it can be modelled, to sometimes satisfy nationalism, other times consumerism, here tradition and there change, etc.

These "loose" rules were able to work on TV before *neo televisione*. What is interesting, then, is to see how new television has changed multimodality and the way the formats were written. The next section analyses the multimodality of the format on new television, but a relevant result may be already added here. Interestingly, the formats analysed so far have not changed their bland multimodality

with the rise of new television, and the episodes broadcast in the 1970s are not very different from those broadcast in the 2000s. This means that they were conceived and produced based on this type of multimodality, and that it was impossible to change their nature when television put forward new requests and ideological needs. Instead, it was easier to write new formats, based on a different form of multimodality and guaranteeing a major fidelity to the ideological and political-economic goals of new television.

The Second Generation of Formats and Tight Multimodality

The focal shows of this section are *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* and *MasterChef*. The first format was produced by the British company Celador in 1998 (Newcomb, 2013) and also distributed by the already mentioned Endemol, for example in Italy. Endemol and Celador are the most powerful format producers today (Lange, 2006).

Already at a glance, it is clear that the multimodality of this format behaves differently. In *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, the contestants play individually, "against" the host, who asks the questions. Each right answer allows the contestant to double his/her money and go ahead. When the contestant answers wrongly, s/he is eliminated. Along the whole itinerary, each contestant has various forms of help, from a call to friends to advice from the public, to the elimination of two of the four multiple choices of the question. They can use each of these helps only one time (Who Wants to Be a Millionaire, 2016).

It is clear that writing such a format is totally different from what we have seen above. The 'new' format adopts many different modes: firstly, music is linked to the rhythm of the images, to the info-graphic and to the development of the game. When an answer is right, there is in fact a particular jingle, a specific graphic animation and a precise camera movement. The same happens when the answer is wrong. Secondly, and differently from the formats analysed above, the public is often in the dark, and the viewer cannot see it. Moreover, the members of the public are also silent, and they only clap their hands when the answer is right. Significantly, the public becomes visible when it enters the mechanism of the show, that is, when the contestant asks for help from its members. Thirdly, the info-graphics visualises the entire itinerary of each contestant as a climb, from the bottom, with the initial and lowest amount of money, to the top, where the final prize of 1 million is written in larger fonts. Fourthly, the host tells the contestant pre-fixed phrases with precise gestures, and even these details are explained in the *bible* of the format. Specifically, the host almost never laughs or jokes with the contestant. Fifthly, time is expanded and interrelates with music while the contestant reflects before answering, and even more, before the host says whether or not the answer is right. We see close-ups of the contestant and of the host, while the cliff-hanger music in the background underlines the importance of the moment. Finally, the setting of the format is simple and essential, and dark colours predominate.

It is interesting to note that the modes adopted by *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* are almost the same as those adopted by the formats of the first

generation. What is different is the way in which the various modes interrelate. In fact, it is impossible to define the multimodality of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* as "bland." The TV writers have interlinked all of the modes employed by this format, in the attempt to function like the multidirectional communication of the new media. This also relates to the idea expressed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), who argue that, while in the past the modes of each text had a precise hierarchy, in the digital age they become equally powerful and relevant. Clearly, this "tight multimodality" is only an attempt, as TV does not permit the same interconnection of the new media. However, the narrative structure of the new media has changed the old rules of writing formats. Clearly, who works on format writing must be aware of it, however, also who writes on social media should know that interlinking the various modes is an extraordinary strategy to strengthen the message and to communicate more effectively.

Moreover, the format has been locked by the producer, Celador, and the show has been broadcast in the same way almost all over the world (Korseman and Shepherd, 2003). This global adherence to the original has been referred to as "MacDonaldization" of the format (Moran, 2010, p. 13). The only changes allowed were created by Celador (Singh and Oliver, 2015) who changed only minor mechanisms of the game. In some countries, like Germany, each episode of *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* has comprised fewer questions, while in others, like Italy, various contestants have challenged each other at the beginning. However, the modes of the show have remained the same and have been adopted in the same way. Music, setting, info graphic, colours, and the other aspects listed above have been represented in the same way because this was the intention of the producer.

Thus, tight multimodality is not only a matter of multidirectional communication. It also serves the purpose of pushing the format in a precise direction. Now the greatest effort in writing a format is in the work on the original format, while 'local' writers may only change minor elements. In semiotic terms, in this second generation, by forbidding any change, the producers prevent any paradigmatic development and stress the syntagmatic narrative structure, which is their creation. In banning the paradigmatic axis, they accumulate power as the authors of the syntagma.

At a denotative level, all of the modes described above increase the sense of tension and competition, centring the attention of the audience on the fight between the host and the contestant and on the itinerary leading to the final victory. For example, the background music during the time in which the contestant reflects before giving the answer underlines the suspense before the choice; the dark colours dominating the studio increase this sense of uncertainty and wait; the almost absence of the public, hidden in the dark, focuses the attention on the contestant and the host; and the info-graphics highlighting the itinerary of the contestant underlines the narrative journey and the continuous getting closer to the final prize.

The second format belonging to the second generation which is analysed in this study is *MasterChef*, a format created by Frank Roddam for Shine (MasterChef, 2015) and distributed by the already mentioned Freemantlemedia (Bowrey, 2013).

Shine is a company owned by Elisabeth Murdoch that merged with the above cited Endemol to create the Endemol-Shine group (Chalaby, 2016). It is evident that all of the power in this case has been concentrated in the hands of only a few agents in the field, which is, as said before, a frequent characteristic of neoliberal TV.

The format is a contest among wannabe chefs, who prepare very complex dishes and are evaluated by professional chefs. A precise mechanism of elimination is developed through the episodes of each series, and in the end there is a final winner (Official MasterChef UK Channel, 2016). *MasterChef* is a talent show, as the format is based on a competitive mechanism with a winner among many contestants, and it is thus comparable to other game shows. Certainly *MasterChef* is based on a form of multimodality that is similar to that adopted by *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, but it also adds something significantly new. It is easy to see in this format the same interconnections among the different modes as in the other product of the second generation. In *MasterChef*, music, camera angles, non-verbal communication, expansion of time, close-ups of the contestants and of the professional chefs assessing them, and settings interrelate and all together contribute to the construction of competition and tension. Moreover, as in *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, among the various versions there is little difference, mostly concerning the mechanisms and the number of fights.

However, there is a novelty, as said above. In *MasterChef*, as in many other formats of the new generation, specifically talent shows, multimodality constructs power relationships, much more than on *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. In fact, in each round, the chefs and the contestant enact a power relationship, which is built and supported by the orchestration of the different modes. Close-ups of the severe chefs and the sweating contestants, cliff-hanger music, impolite words of the chefs and imploring says of the contestants, details of flaccid fry-ups and curdled mayonnaises, chefs filmed from the bottom, and contestants shot from the up construct difference and power relationships. The show represents a form of examination, with the chefs as the examiner and each contestant as the examined. As in Foucault (1995, p. 153), the examination here is a technique of "disciplinary power", a form of power descending from everyday practices and shared habits that are orchestrated and organised in order to create difference. The various modes, taken apart from the others, are considered "as extensions of existing practices … But taken together these simple techniques add up to a qualitatively new form of control" (Hoskin, 1995, p. 4), supporting dominant ideologies (Rowsell, 2013). This leads to a more critical view of these formats, which is based on connotation and is developed in the next section.

A Critical Account: TV Formats, Neoliberalism and Unlimited Semiosis

This section concerns the connotative reading of the TV format and a critical account of this genre. Ouellette and Hay (2008) have already underlined the link between the most popular reality TV and neoliberal values. For Declercq (2014, p. 110), these kinds of shows "portray a market where people compete fiercely for profit". More specifically, many formats turn each participant into an "object that

are to be manipulated" (Declercq, 2014, p. 114). The result is that contestants are "expected to conform to the ideal of the new neoliberal worker, who is competitive and assertive, keen to learn, adaptive to shifting market demands, individualistic yet able to work in a group" (Declercq, 2014, p. 110).

The more developed and organised multimodality after the 1990s has permitted a much stronger support of these values. Due to the extraordinary popularity of television, these formats have become part of our everyday mediascape. The idea that climbing is one of the fastest ways to be successful, as in *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*, or that you must put up with the insults of your chef/chief in order to be a winner, are today rooted in our collective imagery. In Barthes's (1972) terms, they have become myths.

Barthes (1972) underlines that myths and ideologies are strongly interconnected, as they both hide their socially constructed origin and tend to appear a "natural," organic part of our everyday lives. For Barthes, myths serve the purpose of naturalising the cultural, turning dominant values into seemingly natural elements, to render them stronger. If in the 1970s, Barthes believed that all myths are bourgeois, today we can say that all myths are neoliberal, and that multimodality has been one of the fundamental tools adopted to achieve this identification. Thus, supported by multimodality, the format has become one of the most powerful instruments of neoliberal ideology.

We have seen that the formats of the first generation have often been adapted to different countries. Various modes of the original formats, from one country to the other, have acquired new meanings, like the less or more participative public, the colours of the setting or the relationships between the host and the contestants. Tension, competition and even visualisation of money have been sacrificed to meet the needs of specific publics. Thus, unlimited semiosis has involved fundamental modes of the formats in order to adapt the original concept to the audiences of various countries. This is clearly a commercial need. Variations guarantee that the public of that specific country receives the show more favourably, securing higher ratings and consequently more money. In the end, unlimited semiosis and paradigmatic choice allow the format to refresh or adapt its image, get more audiences and remain competitive in the market.

In the formats of the second generation, unlimited semiosis only applies to peripheral elements such as the number of rounds and the mechanisms of some games. Instead, the fundamental modes of the format remain untouched, as the syntagma, its narrative structure. As seen above, this helps to support the dominant neoliberal ideologies, and the many representations of the format do not change their meaning. If the format wants to satisfy the needs of specific audiences, only minor parts of the show may be changed, while their ideological meanings remain untouchable. Importantly, there appears to be a shift in terms of priority between the first and the second generation of formats. While in the first group, the priority is commercial success and all the elements of the format may be sacrificed for it, in the second generation, the priority becomes ideology. Thus, in the case of the second generation of formats, the control of the message is of primary importance, and the show conveys the given, and wanted, meaning.

This has to do with a broader category that concerns neoliberal society, which

shifts from considering people as citizens to consumers (Bauman, 2011). While in the first generation of formats, the audiences were primarily considered as specific groups of citizens to "be fed" according to their national belonging and culture, in the second generation of formats, they are considered as a whole group of people whose primary destiny is to consume. Thus, the format may be considered as a part of the complex social shift theorised by Zygmunt Bauman.

However, even all of this has a commercial advantage, but in a different way from what happens in the first generation. In fact, in the past changing the format nation by nation gave great power to the various, local broadcasters and production companies, which worked on adapting the format. Instead, in this second stage, the format broadcast in the same way all over the world is more recognisable and more difficult to copy. It belongs to the production company that created it. The commercial business, thus, consists in giving more power to the original production company, concentrating the power in the hands of only a few agents in the field. This relates to Bourdieu (2003; 2005), who argues that concentration is one of the main tool of neoliberal policies. It may appear strange, but this also happens in social media. In another article (Buscemi, 2017) two web forums on food have been analysed, and it has been demonstrated that in one of them, owned by the BBC, the visual structure and the layout of the format influence the way in which users write in it. The titles given to the various sections of the forum, the space and the word limits, even the language adopted for warnings and suggestions may persuade the users to write in a more formal way, to adopt a 'cheffy' approach and to highlight technical elements of cooking rather than personal and 'romantic' details concerning the people who dine with the cook. As in the TV programmes of the second generation, the powerful company has created 'the format', and 'local' writers may only stick to the rules, with only little room for individual creativity.

Conclusion

As underlined at the beginning, this article aims to explain firstly, how writing TV formats has changed from the first to the second generation of formats; secondly, how the new narrative of the digital media has contributed to this change; and thirdly, how telling stories has changed over these years.

As regards the first issue, what has emerged is that the first generation's multimodality was somehow *bland*. The various modes were not much interconnected, and commercial priorities suggested that they were easily changeable and adaptable to the various audiences of the nations where the formats were sold. Semiotically, it may be said that paradigmatic developments (choosing across a range of options the most appropriate element to the specific cultural context) has right of way to the syntagmatic level, that is, the whole narrative structure of the format.

The formats of the second generation are instead based on *tight* multimodality, and this links to the second aim of this article, that is to explain the role of the new media. In fact, tight multimodality is the desperate attempt of the format to stay current and compete with the language of the new media. Actually, TV cannot

reproduce the form of communication of the internet or of smartphones, but interconnecting the modes much more than in the past helps the new formats not to be disadvantaged in comparison to new media. From TV writers' point of view, thus, while in the first generation of format 'local' writers did the most important job by adapting the original bible to specific national audiences, in the second generation the writer of the original format result much more powerful than the adaptors, who are only allowed to change minor elements. The format, in fact, is now written with the same rules of the new media, with the different modes much more interconnected.

All of this relates to the third issue, regarding telling stories on both old and new media. This article has demonstrated that there are two ways of telling stories multimodally. The first was useful until the 1990s, had to do with national audiences, and modes were blandly interconnected. The new media have revolutionised the old way of narrating stories. Since the 1990s, telling stories has meant interconnecting all the narrative ingredients. This has happened with the new media, but the old ones have tried to adapt to the new environment. Thus, if today we want to tell a story in the old or new media, we have to deal with these new rules, and interconnect all the modes as the format of the second generations do. Not only are audiences more used to this kind of narrative, but also tight multimodality, as seen above, increases the sense of suspense and tension, keeping high the attention of the public and thus resulting in a good narrative strategy.

Finally, this article has also underlined critical elements of the tight multimodality of the format, which writers and users should clearly bear in mind. The fact that big, multinational companies control the format and its meaning-production process implies that prevailing perspectives can hardly be challenged. As already underlined by Bourdieu (2003; 2005) in relation to the whole society, we may say that also in the case of the TV format neoliberalism transfers power from national institutions to global concentrations. In using new media and in writing on them, thus, we must be aware of this. Certainly the new media allow us to write globally and to address huge audiences. However, as in the case of the web forums on food, multinational concentrations are less sensitive to 'local' themes and limit the independence of 'local' users, as it has also happened in the field of the TV format.

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