

Face-to-face and AVT forms of Communication: Pedagogical Interventions – Conditions and Possibilities

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Framework

At Swiss Television, comperes, journalists and employees¹ who work on the TV channel's programs in the widest sense are sent to the communication trainer. The various different tasks, which the employees take on, should then be taught, if these tasks have to do with language-related "forms of communication." The following deliberations originated through and during my work. I teach at a public broadcasting channel – Swiss Television (SF) – and the internal title of my job there is "communication trainer."

The television channel is currently in a so-called convergence process which means that it is doing away with the separation of radio, TV and online presence and products. In the following, we will talk of audio-visual technically transmitted forms or avt forms.

My background as a communication trainer

The task of the communication trainer is formulated here very carefully as "training" in the language-related forms of communication in the processes that the organization uses in order to carry out its "assignment." This careful formulation anticipates the problem: what do we understand by "forms of communication" and what does "language-related" mean?

Those participating in forms of communication probably have an idea or perhaps even an expectation of what they understand by this. In any case, the communication trainer makes a decision: with which understanding of "language-related forms of communication" he/she approaches his or her training assignment. This is certainly varied.

I base my training on the face-to-face (ff) situation of people who are speaking to each other, on people who are acting intentionally both in and through the conversation. The conditions and possibilities of face-to-face situations are then a part of the framework of such speech training. The questions remain:

1. Do the language-related forms of communication in which the organization is interested in also fulfill these conditions and possibilities?
2. Which problems do the speech training solve; what does the speech training achieve if it is based on such communication of face-to-face situations?

If you want to look into these questions it is natural to carry out a comparison between forms of communication in face-to-face situations and forms of communication in avt (audio-visual technically transmitted forms) formations. I do not wish to compare them here but, by means of examples, I would like to raise questions on the differences between face-to-face and avt forms and to put them up for discussion.

Comparing face-to-face and avt forms of communication

It is, however, necessary to say something about the process of comparison. The aim of the comparison here is to find differences. The possible results of the comparison are questions on "other things" in "known areas." What we hope to gain are possible hypotheses with which conditions and possibilities of the formations compared can be examined. The aim is to develop models that prove to be useful or successful. The comparison should therefore not be used

asymmetrically, not as a conclusion by analogy nor be used to form prototypes.

What is compared and what is comparable should therefore be formulated in such a way that this aim can be reached. Thus, it seems sensible to establish the meaning of some terms in advance and to make clear, how they are used or not used in the following discussion.

Definitions

The terms “situation” and “system” are, when related to forms of communication, biased in very different ways. This also concerns the term “context.” The use of these terms normally implies specific connections between different things. For this reason we will speak here of connections of different things and thus we will use the term “formation.”

- Formation is understood as determined by its possible performance, its self-sustenance, by its components and the functions of the components, by being different from other formations and connected to other formations, and by its external conditions and possibilities. Here these are assumed to be created by the organization; the organization is taken as the framework.
- The terms “person” and “role” are also biased and for this reason we will speak here of participants in formations and of people involved in formations.
- The terms “means” and “signs” are also biased and therefore, we speak here of the use of typecast materialized forms and functions.

We understand forms of communication as operations in a formation, creating and maintaining this formation. Therefore, the participants

and the communicative formations are always connected.

A peculiarity of the possible performance of a *communicative* formation can be seen in the fact that it maintains the following features:

- The conditions and possibilities for mutual interpretations by the participants of themselves, of the issue and of the formation. For this the participants use equivalency relations between different factors and create formations in and between different factors.
- The performance, the process, the formation itself prove to be “useful, successful models” for the behavioral possibilities of the participants.

Examples and questions to compare – 1st: “People involved” in avt forms of communication




The chosen examples of avt forms and the questions on the examples are limited to what are, in my opinion, the most important points in the comparison. The examples are taken from Swiss Television’s website.² We use the forms in the same way as they are accessible to every user via the Internet now. We are a “user” of the Sf.tv. website.³

An exception is a video recording – because this example is only on the Sf.tv-website for one day; also in this example we are a “user” of the Sf.tv. website.⁴

For the sake of simplicity, the examples used are transcribed or described in different ways. In the first example we only look at the sequence of the video. The sequence of shown pictures is reduced to larger sections.

Picture⁵

Comment (Author) and Questions (as user with expectations from ftf situations)


| | |
|---|---|
|  | <p>1st start of the videos. You see a “video” When started again, the sequence changes: “Section one” can no longer be seen. Questions: Has my form of participation changed? Am I now a participant in a different way? What was I before? Who is still participating here? Who creates which formation? How can I keep track of this change in my form of participation?</p> |
|  | <p>Last picture of the 1st video at the end of the first start. Related to the time and space orientation of the user different functions of text and picture and different “Etiketten” make it difficult to find out who the “actor” is. “Etikett” in the sense of Nelson Goodman’s “label” (Goodman, 1997, 41ff): forms of the object used as notation.</p> |
|  | <p>On further starting the ‘10vor10’ video (10 to 10 is a weekly SF news broadcast), the following result is produced: Sometimes the advertising is part of the sequence I started – sometimes not – the length of the advertising varies. Questions: Is that by chance – is it an error made when copying? And who copies then – who is the actor? Whom does the picture in the advertisement belong to? Whom does this form belong to?</p> |



Then these pictures follow, they have the "Etikett" 10vor10.




I filmed the next example with a video camera. If I additionally used a monitor camera, I could observe, produce, use and distribute my own participation in Swiss TV's website on a split screen. Unfortunately, the certainty about the actor only exists in self-assurance – as far as the

other "people involved" are concerned "it is questionable." In this example we listen and look at the combination of the used forms: "picture – spoken language – sound."⁶ The example is described here – a transcription is too elaborate in this case.

| Pictures | Text | Comment (Author) and Questions with expectations from ftf situations) |
|--|--|---|
|  | <p>(Lehrerinnen) und Lehrer...</p> <p>(original sound) Geräusch</p> <p>Wer (-den in den) nächsten (Jahren rar⁷)</p> <p>"Male and female teachers will become "rare" in the coming years."⁸</p> | <p>(female teachers) and male teacher ...</p> <p>Sound not "identifiable" – only audible "slightly" when listening repeatedly and when your attention is concentrated on it.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <p>Who is making this sound? Who is taking part in which activity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The sound engineer? - The actor who is speaking the text? - The figures on the picture? - Another "source" which "belongs" to the sound ...? - Who creates this form? |

The Term "Figures" is chosen to maintain the difference between the forms used in avt and face-to-face communications, and to avoid that the visible forms of the pictures here are interpreted inconsiderately as representations of persons, or the other way round, persons as exemplifications of pictures.

In the next example we look at the "figures" in the pictures, we listen to the spoken language and thus we use the picture and the sound as a "reflection" of a "reality" to which picture and sound refer.

| Picture | Text | Comment (Author) and Questions |
|--|--|--|
|  | <p>[...] Christoph Nufer. Sind die Leute gluecklich ... feiern sie schon fast den Sieg ... wie ist die Stimmung? Ch.N. Are people happy ... do they already nearly celebrate the victory ...what's the vibe?</p> | <p>The figures in the picture are speaking – we assume to each other.</p> |
|  | <p>.....</p> | <p>There is a break between the question and the answer. It is a special kind of break. You can see the actor making two moves (2 times moving the micro-phon towards the head).</p> |
|  | <p>Ja, die Stimmung ist unglau- blich, die Leute sind ueberglueck- lich, vielleicht sehen sie das ein bisschen hinter mir [...] Yes, the vibes are incredible ... people are jubilant ... perhaps you can see this behind me [...]</p> | <p>Who creates the break: - The technical staff? - The director? - The character? - Or does it belong to a different formation?</p> |

Assumptions

Summarized, the questions are:

Who does what - or - how to identify the participants as actors - as people involved by doing something?

Who owns which “form” and which access to the use of the forms? Who participates and who is involved also and in which way?

Without going into it more deeply, one can assume *that you can use* the Internet address as the actor and so one can say: “On this day Swiss TV said...” *but that you cannot yet decide* who the actor is in the individual program on the surface of the form, neither concerning the figures in the picture nor the forms used. So far, this means:

- Without knowledge of the production and usage formation it is not possible to decide who takes part in which way.
- Without knowledge of the framework and production conditions it is not possible to decide what is due to whom.

How participants see themselves as actors or can be identified as actors is not reconstructable from these clips.

Back to the face-to-face situation

If you transfer these conditions and possibilities into the face-to-face situation, then it is not always possible to allocate – in face-to-face formulations – person and action – fixed on the observed form of the action on the surface of the forms and / or the use of the forms.

We must further consider what this means for the pattern of action which depends on the connection between person and action for its effectiveness. Here is just a clue: What does this mean for argumentations, which are used as reasons for actions?

If they are based on the credibility of people and aim at the attitudes and convictions of people, then the avt person must first be assured.

Only then is it possible to create something like credibility - the credibility of the avt person it should be noted. However, this does not yet solve the problem. Person and action are still not connected – at best the form of the “actor” and the materialized form that is used are connected. It goes without saying that argumentations no longer aim at the search for common attitudes and convictions but at the “framework” in which “people act.”

In this case the framework is the “form” avt forms of communication and obviously the “owners” are those people or those organizations

which can control the access to and the use of the avt forms.

This has consequences for the attempt to give reasons for actions intentionally. These reasons are then not sufficient from the point of view of the actors. In my opinion, they must be combined with further attempts at reasons, e.g. with functional reasons such as: “the participants as actors believe that this form maintains the formation and its performance – on conditions that the actors had alternatives to the form which they used – the actors have used / or use this form within the avt forms of communication.” This of course also applies on behalf of/ from the perspective of the explications of the action.

Examples and questions to compare – 2nd: The forms used and their reference

Back to the previous examples: The following may be banal – much of it is known to us from our everyday use of avt forms. Let us take the arrow with which we play the video, a thing we usually take for granted. We start the video with a “click” onto the “Arrow”:



Questions:

When I “click” onto the arrow where do I act?

- In the form?
- Or is the arrow used as an “object”?
- Am I using the surface of the form?
- What am I changing?


What lies “behind” it:

- The equipment?
- The object on which the arrow is placed?
- The picture, which the arrow is a part of?

Let us look further. This time we look at the first picture of the video. Which relations can be created here?

Pictures

Comment (Author) and Questions (as user with expectations from ftf situations)

| | |
|---|---|
|  <p>The screenshot shows a video player interface. At the top, a grey bar says 'Noch 2 Sekunden'. Below it is a red square with the white letters 'SF'. Underneath is the URL 'www.tagesschau.sf.tv'. The main video area shows a crowd of people with a large red diagonal line and a blue square containing a white play button. At the bottom of the video area, a digital clock displays '21:50:00' and the text 'AXA.ch' is visible. The video player controls at the bottom show a progress bar at 00:00 / 25:26 and various icons for volume, full screen, and settings.</p> | <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is that a clock or is it used as a “picture” – a picture of a clock? Is the form “picture” in the sense of the framed two-dimensional picture? What then is the frame of the picture at all? The small part or the monitor? Is it a picture whose characteristics I refer to when I say: the cipher stops here? Do I assume the picture refers to something by being a part of something? Is it a specific picture of a specific clock? Of “the clock” of the assurance “axa” at this time? Does the picture show a typical “chronometer”? Is it a “picture” which is recreated, a picture which refers to its recreation? |
|---|---|

This list does not claim to be complete and it may not be surprising that references can be used in different ways. In order to decide what is used here and how, we need tips on the use.

One possible way to find such tips is to look at the connections. Let us see how it continues. The question is then: do I get indications of how the previous form was supposed to be used?

Pictures

Comment (Author) and Questions (as user with expectations from ftf situations)



Questions:

How do I use this: as a picture of a person in a studio?

Or as a part of a program?

Or as a part of a picture from a program?

We continue (except the headlines):



I think that intuitively it is clear that I need knowledge about the use of the forms. I must know:

That is an “event in a studio” – that it is “advertising” – that it is a “signet” (SF TV 10vor10 sign).

Furthermore, I must know here:

Is what I am using there a form with reference to something – or is it an “object” to be used?

We find similar problems when using acoustic forms. Let us take the example “news update” again. The question was: who makes this sound? When using acoustic forms we are used to combining the sound and the source and to take the sound as a sign/index for something. The question is then: What “source” comes to mind when we hear the noise in the example above?

Can it be used as “sound” with reference to something?

We should not have the problem to this extent with spoken language because we are used to differentiating between the speaker, his message and what he is referring to. Let us look at – read – in the example:

Picture

Text

Comment (Author) and Questions



(Lehrerinnen)
un(d) Lehrer
...Geräusch...
wer (-den in den)
nächsten (Jahren rar)⁹
(female) an(d) male
teachers will become rare
in the next years¹⁰

In which way does the spoken language refer to the “picture”? To what does the picture refer to and in which way?

Does the picture become a document of an event through the use of spoken language? Does it become typical of certain events?

Does it become a fictional event?

The difficulties can be found not only in the sequence but also in the synchronous use and in the combination of the forms.

Assumptions

It seems that it is necessary to reconsider the use of avt forms and their references that one cannot reconstruct from the use of the forms, their combination and spatial and chronological order, and which possibilities of the reference are weighted in which way. No principle of any stable continual emphasis can be reconstructed. You must reckon with the fact that the references used change *fast* and that forms without references are used.

“References” in communications should be seen here under the assumption that equivalency relations are used and formed with them. These are simple existential statements such as “that *and* that” and combinations such as: this form in this modality, for example, visual, is used to refer to it. So this optical form is used for example as a picture “of it.” To put it colloquially: Which reality do the used forms and their use refer to?

Which reality do people involved model with these forms, which they combine and arrange in time? Do they model a reality of the “objects” and of the physical possibility of manipulating the objects? Do they model a “reality” of the used forms? Do they model a combination of both?

Back to the face-to-face situation

Here references and their conventionalization, in and through the use are an essential achievement of the formation. This proves useful or successful for creating formations and to act both in and through conversation.

In the **avt forms** it seems that on the side of the forms I sound out the possibilities of the combinations of forms and their temporal and spatial configuration. Sounding out combinations means applying forms to characteristics of forms. In the best possible case, I will reach the limits of the formation in which these forms exist. At the same time that is what becomes possible as a result of the use of the forms on actions.

How can one then communicate concerning the “subject matter”?

You could now conclude that from the point of view of the person who uses the forms the use of the form and the contents of the form are identical. This form refers to itself as a characteristic (the contents) and this form refers to itself as a creation, to its technical reproduction.

You could come up with the idea that the use of the form and the “used” contents are not distinguishable. From the observer perspective one still does not know “who” can be pinned down as the “actor”. If, however, there *were someone*

whom I could still see as the person acting, he/she would not be distinguishable from the forms and from the contents which are used.

If you continue along this line of thought, avt forms offer the possibility for actor, form and contents to be used identically, without being clearly reconstructable who the participant is. You need no longer create any equivalency, no longer honor or negotiate any usefulness or any success. Making the forms and their use *mutually common* is replaced by the acting – the doing – in the presence of the others. The vulnerability in the mutual interpretation is replaced by the observability of “I am what I do and what the other person sees – observes that I do something.”

Examples and questions to compare – 3rd: the used forms and their typification

Back to the examples: In avt formations, how do participants gain typifications of the forms which they use functionally – always assuming that you can attribute sensory impressions to communicative functions? Thus gained typifications then fulfill the conditions and possibilities in a communicative formation. The following are at least plausible:

- a. the distinction – thus also the differentiation
- b. the recognition

- c. the reproduction – the completion is also part of this
- d. the use of references
- e. the combinability of the types

The problems are well known: selective listening, differentiating between useful and disturbing noises, orientation in space and time – where – what – paths when watching etc. These will not be listed in more detail. Here again the differences between face-to-face and avt forms of communication and their connection in face-to-face based speech trainings are questionable.

Before we had the example of the “noise” which was not identifiable and the example of the spoken language in which sounds and sound sequences were hard to differentiate and identify. One cannot decide in which formation these acoustic forms belong, which functions they can have, how we can distinguish them from other “noises,” whether we would be able to recognize them again and how they could be combined with other “noises.” Maybe they are forms without function in this formation? But, what do we base this decision on – above all, as all technically reproduced forms follow instructions on production because they are reproduced forms?

With the optical forms, too, it is often not easy to decide what the used functions are in an avt formation. Another short example:

Pictures



Comment (Author) and Questions (as user with expectations of ftf situations)

Questions:

What is the compere focused on:

- On an object in the room?
- On a picture of herself on a monitor in front of her?
- On her movements on the screen in front of her?

Assumptions

If we assume that this is a picture of an event in a room – no matter what kind of event, then the questions are:

- How does the actor gain or create typifications of the form of himself or herself assuming he or she is acting in a communicative formation and is not without form?
- Does he or she use the framed two-dimensional picture with its contrasts and movements etc.; or
- Does he or she use himself or herself in the room and towards his or her opposite; – or – Does he or she use a combination of both: a picture as a typecast form of oneself?
- Which kind of production of the form does he or she assume?
- Does he or she assume the technical reproduction?

Then for the reproduction, the recognition and the combination, it is sufficient to have characteristics and technical instructions on production – in the simplest case a “copy paste” and thus it seems functional typifications can be gained. Distinctions and exploration and maintaining the typifications by using them functionally in the way it is done in ftf communication, are then not necessary.

Face-to-face and avt communications in speech training

If you follow the considerations up to this point, it should become clear that conditions and possibilities of face-to-face forms of communication cannot be accepted unquestionably for avt forms of communication. At least this applies to the following points:

- “People” can be used as technically reproducible components in functional formations.
- References created by the use and the combination of typecast forms are not stable and can be used as “models” of differing “realities”.
- The typifications of forms can be gained by characteristics. It is not necessary to

gain and save them functionally in use. Thus, it seems that conventionalizing forms follows other mechanisms.

- Who takes part and with which activity must be newly defined: all people who have access ... users, participants, people involved, actors, spectators ...?

If one follows the deliberations so far, it goes without saying that one must differentiate between face-to-face and avt communication and that they must be accepted as different forms of communication. Thus, it is possible to pursue the second question, which was asked at the beginning: which problems does “speech training” solve, what does speech training achieve when the training of avt forms of communication is based on face-to-face situations? This means one must ask what kind of connection speech training creates and uses between face-to-face and avt contexts.

- Is the face-to-face situation used as a problem solving metaphor and thus – in the sense of functional explanations of actions – maintains the performance of the avt formation and the formation itself? e.g. the technical possibilities for distribution and access as “possession” of an organization – that would mean, in the examples above, that the speech training keeps the organization as the framework of the avt forms of communication.
- Is the face-to-face situation used as a prototype and are we then looking for deficits or exclusions of avt forms of communication?
- Is the face-to-face situation used as the starting point for an asymmetrical comparison and are, thus, avt forms of communication at a deficit in comparison to face-to-face situations?
- Is the face-to-face situation used as a conclusion by analogy? The picture and the sound as images of reality? If the conclusion by analogy proves to be effective, does it support and maintain the effectiveness of the “medium,” the effectiveness of the avt forms?

Conclusion

The question remains as to whether there is a way out, without giving up, so that “speech training” can develop and encourage communicative abilities by using the forms of communication. If one assumes that face-to-face and avt are different communicative forms and if one takes into account the differences but also the connections between the forms of communication, then there should be other solutions. By the way, in the 1960s, Nam June Paik already created a possible setting for this with his installation “real fish live fish.” It could then be possible to approach avt formations with the following questions:

- How do the participants use the materialized forms and within which framework do they use the forms?
- What access do they have with avt forms of production, distribution and use?

- Who takes part in which *communicative* formation? Within which framework? What access to the formations do the participants choose?
- How do the participants differentiate between face-to-face and avt forms of communication and how do they connect them in such a way that they remain differentiated?
- How do the participants discover, develop and use typified forms in avt forms of communication. How do they combine different kinds of types?
- How do the people involved differentiate and maintain communicative formations?

At the end of the day, it looks as if the answers were questions.

Notes

¹ This always means both male and female employees

² The examples are chosen randomly close to the time of writing this article.

³ We use the website:
Sf.tv/videoportal/sendungen/10vor10:
10vor10 - 25.06.2010

10vor10 - 30.06.2010

10vor10 - 28.06.2010

10vor10 - 29.06.2010

Sf.tv./videoportal/sendungen/10vor10; 6.7.2010;
C. Nufer and S. Klapproth talking about football.

⁴ The recorded example is: Sf.tv/interactive;
news update of 2.7.2010

⁵ The software “snag it” is used to print out the pictures from the website

⁶ Tone = international Tone (it), Effects, Music. In this case, everything one can hear when listening.

⁷ (*italics*) = difficult to understand, sounds and sequences of sounds cannot be differentiated and identified exactly.

⁸ (*italics*) = hard to understand: sounds and the sequences of sounds cannot be identified exactly.

⁹ (*italics*) = difficult to understand: phonemes and sequences of phonemes cannot be differentiated.

¹⁰ (*italics*) = hard to understand: sounds and sequences of sound cannot be differentiated and identified exactly.

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