

From Education to the Promises of its Objects: Discursive Migration of a Symbolic Framing

The Case of Fact-Checking

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[Numbers in brackets refer to the corresponding slide on the attached visual aid]

We have formulated together an observation according to which a majority of discourses expressed in the public space about the media, about their productions or about the practices attached to them, put at stake a series of key paradigms, which end up forming a common horizon of recurrent values: independence, impartiality, transparency, emancipation, participation, reflexivity (2). These paradigms expressed in the discourse on media – whether this discourse is carried out by journalists, or by media education actors – form a network of media meta-categories that interact with each other and seem to activate a series of preconceived delimitations (true/false, legitimate/illegitimate, transparency/secrecy, passive reception/critical activity).

I would like to focus here on the example of fact-checking by using a sample of French and Belgian practices (3). I will not refer to the particularity of each initiative but, rather, to what brings them together, namely the elements of discourse that transit between them. More precisely, and in accordance with the perspective we are dealing with, my case study will centre on the discourse that accompanies these fact-checking platforms through “Charters”, or sections entitled “Instructions for use” or “About us” (4). These texts, now referred to as “escort discourse”, set out the promises of the device. More than an appendix, this escort discourse is conceived as a ‘structuring discourse for practices’ in that it ‘sets a symbolic framework’ (Renaud 2019, p. 89) (5).

I would like to examine how, in enunciative and rhetorical terms, these paradigms are mobilised by the escort discourse of fact-checking.

I. Promises and figurations of the device

By offering to rectify—or confirm, or nuance, or reject—information that is already present in the public space, the fact-checking device adds to the relationship that the person seeking information has with an information already relayed in the public discourse.

In France Info's 'deontological charter' and its "Vrai ou Fake" section (6), for example, the verification exercise is scenarized by creating a **collective ethos** of

- professionals who keep a watchful eye on public discourse ('Les Observateurs', 'L'œil du 20 heures');
- who position themselves against the deviant information available on the Internet or in other media (« l'envers de l'info », « Retour vers l'Info », « L'instant détox », « Désintox »);
- an ethos of meticulous and implacable professionals (« passe au crible » , « part chaque jour à la chasse »),
- who are eager not to let false news, rumours, approximations, or political communication strategies circulate or exist in the public sphere.

The fact-checking device is thus displayed as a **tool that acts as an intermediary**, but one that is **disembodied through the valorisation of a procedure**, of a method (7). This can be seen directly in the sub-headings of the escort discourse ("How we check", "How it works", "According to which method do journalists proceed?").

The figuration of this process then allows for the enrolment of an impartial neutrality, which is not said but shown here: "At the end, we give a form of evaluation of the initial claim, according to the reality of the facts" (Vrai ou Fake).

From the statement to be verified up to the formalised evaluation, there has been a process (a starting point and an end point). However, this process tends to erase the journalistic work inasmuch as it is reduced to the test of "the reality of the facts". The intermediary dimension inherent in the process is melted into the truth value of the procedural path that is undertaken. The mediation displayed is transformed into **natural evidence** by the normative force of the 'reality of facts', of the numbers and of the raw data. The process is then naturalised by means of an objectivity which establishes it as a consensus. This phenomenon produces an assimilation that can be read as a response to a "confused communication situation" that is specific to the role of intermediary taken on by the device. It is its responsibility to put the reader in touch with verified information without, however, exercising any authority over this relationship.

This leads us to the point of **discursive tensions (8)**, specifically when they are related to the speaker's enunciative posture (on which I will not comment today) or when they lead to an ambivalence in the instructions directed at the addressee.

Above all, there is a tension in the communication contract in which the discourse engages the addressee. The headline of Les Decodeurs "Venons-en aux faits", 'Let's get to the facts' connotes a double bind, as it acts on the playful level of double meaning. It has both the meaning of deciphering and explaining (let's turn to the facts and explain) as well as that of an operation of reduction (to the facts), which seems to indicate that we should stop an ongoing process of discussion and reflection in order to "get to the facts" (let's get this over with, let's cut matters short here).

In the same vein, let's consider the paradoxical constitution of the addressee, namely the one who is meant to be or to become a user of the device. The different modalities of **participation** that the device offers to its "model-user" are another explicit promise of the escort discourse

and this tends to emphasise once again the processing dimension of the device. Les Décodeurs state: "It is an evolving work, which takes into account the remarks made to us".

Participation is highlighted by directly addressing the reader (e.g., "The CheckNews site is yours", "We are also counting on you to send us information") and by the promise of power to make changes ("Their comments are taken into account and can lead to changes in the content"). This paradigm takes part in the constitution of the following interlocutive positions.

The enunciator of the escort discourse appears as careful and impartial while developing a representation of the addressee who is engaged in critical activity (that is, looking for true information). The latter is thus critical, demanding and close to the enunciator since he shares, through his participation, a part of the editorial responsibility.

Yet, paradoxically, the reader is also projected as the receiver of a form of vulgarization (9) insofar as he remains the one who needs to be enlightened and helped in sorting and untangling as he is facing the risk of falling into the traps set by disinformation:

"a tool that aims to [...] help Internet users find their way through the jungle of sites that produce or relay information", "we believe that it will provide everyone with the means of discerning the most obvious of them, and to be warned when consulting a site that is known to disseminate false information" (9).

More specifically, the device is conceived as an initiation step, designed to "awaken critical thinking"; the Belgian initiative "Faky" describes itself as "a platform that helps you fight against disinformation by giving you the keys to exercise your critical thinking and evaluate the information you consult online" (10).

But what kind of critical thinking are we talking about? The vagueness of the statements leads to the following inferences: **the citizen is expected to educate himself through the device and to remain active in precisely what the tool proposes, namely the sorting and evaluating of the factual truth of information. The discourse focuses attention on a single dimension of the pragmatic complexity of communicative processes and therefore tends to reduce the mediation of fact-checking platforms to this aspect alone.**

This further promise of the device thus suggests that its use would make the reader a critical, aware and emancipated user. Véronique Madelon studies initiatives similar to fact-checking but on television. In trying to describe the generic specificities of what she calls "metadiscursive mediacritique", she likewise identifies what she calls a "declared vocation", namely the programme's ability to "modify the status of its audience in order to transform them into meta-users". Madelon questions this classical normative approach of a "critique that must make critical".

Finally, through the idea of a transformation, this relationship to the reader refers once again to the figure of a process, in which the apparent gap of the double address 'vulgarisation/participation' seems to be resolved. **The gap between the address to a reader in distress, to be enlightened versus a reader valorised by its critical need would thus be filled in the inference of a transformation, that of media education:** "We hope to provide everyone with tools to put the information that is available online into perspective" (10).

II. Self-legitimising enunciation: naturalizing a counter-argumentation

I will now focus on the mechanisms that trigger a self-legitimising enunciation; the point is thus to identify the marks of a discourse which, in its act of enunciation, seeks to institutionalize itself, that is, to assert its own codes. My suggestion is that this phenomenon is embodied in an enunciative architecture that has been conceptualised by Patrick Charaudeau as '**propagandist discourse**'—which is not the discourse of propaganda, but which has an incitive aim (11).

According to the features determined by Charaudeau, the propagandist discourse involves three collective instances:

- first an enunciator who has a right to persuade on the basis of a social norm;
- second, an addressee who is involved in the discourse by a benefit (namely here: having access to verified information, seeing her critical mind satisfied or being able to exercise her critical abilities freely, increasing her critical skills);
- And third, and this is what I'm most interested in, an opponent, who can generally be identified without difficulty in the phenomenon of 'fake news'.

Indeed, the propagandist discourse features a confrontation between Good and Bad that requires an "ethical stance of morality "from both the enunciator and the addressee.

This fight against disinformation supports a process of self-legitimation which, in my opinion, is achieved in several ways.

1. First of all, we can mention the creation of an emotion in the text. This emotion corresponds to the indignation that is expressed through the highlighting of an unfairly imposed wrong - namely, the blurring of the line between what is true and what is false, between the legitimate and the illegitimate - which thus calls for reparation by the previously identified enunciator.
2. The second and main scheme is that of a narrative line that more or less implicitly establishes the fact-checking device as the legitimate response to a societal need. This transfers part of the responsibility to the public portrayed as the source of a request.

This last mechanism is achieved first of all by portraying a sense of distress and the battle that must be fought to overcome it, a fight that is often supported by high-stakes justifications.

Here are two examples: "a tool that aims to combat the viral spread of false information and to help Internet users find their way through the jungle of sites that produce or relay information"; "Certain widely disseminated fake news have, for example, been accused of destabilising democracy during elections" (12). This is therefore associated with a feeling of overwhelming submersion; it is spoken of as a 'viral spread', a 'jungle', a 'flow', a 'wave'.

This narrative line naturally calls for the figure of order. This is how the escort discourse multiplies representations and interpretations following a reassuring binary: It can be found in the names of the fact-checking sections (« Vrai ou Fake », « Le vrai du faux », « Désintox », « Contre-faits »), in the rejection of approximation (an "imprecision" thus harvests "a

Pinocchio" from the journal *Le Nouvel Observateur*), in the representation of subjectivity ("a text is objective (facts) or subjective (opinion)") or in the intention that is attributed to false information ("They can be simple, good-natured hoaxes, but they also sometimes have less respectable, more political aims") (12).

But its representation is most concrete in the promise of the evaluation of the verified statements, an evaluation which is formalised in a predefined rating system or a standardised discursive pattern that re-establishes the order; a pattern such as "One declared on a given day in a certain medium, that information... Well, it's true/false/mostly true/mostly false, etc"). By producing these representative systems of routinised evaluation, fact-checking texts also anticipate the effects of its device, partly flattening the discursive, social, and political texture of the discourses it labels.

Almost all the devices studied explain that they exclusively apply to "verifiable information" and thus choose not to verify "statements that are projections into the future or that are subjective, or a matter of feelings" (*Vrai ou Fake*). Public discourse is organised and the exchange of views, the debate, the expression of so-called subjectivity are transferred to another place. This factual basis therefore appears to be a legitimate objective as it must be shared by all, since it is free from what would otherwise be an ideological issue.

3. Finally, a third indication (11) of this self-legitimizing enunciation is the exhibition of transparency. I will not discuss this here because it is one of the topics of the [next presentation](#). I will just mention that the demonstration of transparency is still based on the same narrative system underlying the fight against disinformation. In contrast to dishonesty and secrecy, the fact-checker journalist assumes a responsibility to reveal.

Operating within the regime of proof, transparency is tacitly deployed as a way of restoring citizens' trust in media organisations as well as in their legitimacy. This transparency discourse on the method and sources gives a consistency to the approach which ends up in reaffirming its own deontological codes.

Final words

All things considered, the discursive setting of a conflict is what allows us to understand that the disclosure register, despite its intentions, cannot be objectivized but only naturalized. By taking on the posture of counter-argumentation through the verification of facts, the escort discourse forces itself into an enunciative logic that works 'in the name of such and such value'. This enunciative logic remains latent, although it tends to disappear behind the consensus around the principles that support it. In this discursive mechanism, we find a variation of the "tour de force" identified by Oswald Ducrot (13) and which Roselyne Koren describes as resulting from a difficulty that is related to the enunciator's ethos. The oppositional narrative framework compels the enunciator to take responsibility for the enunciation while he considers his intervention to be obvious, legitimate and necessary. This tension would be resolved by the use of linguistic practices that naturalize the symbolic framing underlying the approach, allowing it, as Koren says, "to display the valorizing and legitimizing appearances of the impartial speaker", and to satisfy this "ideal judge" that would be here "the internalized voice of an objectivist and rationalist doxa"(13).

The discursive tension that arises from the meeting of enunciative registers that are, at first glance, not compatible (moral indignation, an incentive aim and the duty of disclosure to be combined with the ideal of objectivity and the idealization of a method as a guarantee for accessing the truth), this tension is neutralized by a series of discursive strategies and by the imaginaries attached to them. These have the effect of sanctioning some socio-moral values by using them as ready-made ways of thinking. With the aim of making the fact-checking device and its productions a functional tool, these discourses ignore a series of essential mediations linked to the social, technical, institutional, semiotic, and symbolic features of the device. Lastly, they distance themselves from questionings about what the use of the device means for its users and in terms of the context in which it is used.

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Palermo, June 7-13, 2021 » NECS Conference

Panel: Transfer, Transparency and Emancipation: Towards a
New Paradigm of Media Education

**From education to the promises of its objects:
discursive migration of a symbolic framing
The case of fact-checking**

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Introduction : discourse about media

▶ **Media meta-categories**

independence, impartiality, transparency, emancipation, participation,
explanation/vulgarization, critical thinking, reflexivity

▶ **Preconceived delimitations**

true / false

legitimate / illegitimate

scholar / uninitiated

truth / lie

transparency / secrecy

passive reception / critical activity

manipulated and naive subject / emancipated and lucid subject


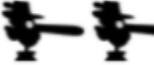

Introduction : discourse about media

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- ▶ À vrai dire, *TV5 Monde*.
- ▶ CheckNews, *Libération*.
- ▶ Les Décodeurs, *Le Monde*.
- ▶ Service Désintox, *Libération*.
- ▶ Faky beta, *Faky (RTBF)*.
- ▶ « Les Pinocchios de l'Obs », *L'Obs*.
- ▶ Le Scan politique, *Le Figaro*
- ▶ « Vrai ou Fake », *francetvinfo*.



Le principe des Pinocchios de l'Obs :

-  Un Pinocchio = Une simple erreur, une imprécision.
-  Deux Pinocchios = Une erreur manifeste, un mensonge par omission
-  Trois Pinocchios = le mensonge prémédité, avec intention de nuire.

Désintox: Qui sommes-nous?

[Pour comprendre](#)

[En un graphique](#)

[Vérification](#)

[Les enquêtes des Décodeurs](#)

[Datavisualis](#)



Qui sont les candidats déclarés et pressentis pour l'élection présidentielle de 2022 ?



Tests sur les animaux, risques d'AVC, apparition de variants : le tour des nouvelles rumeurs sur les vaccins

Vaccination contre le Covid-19 : le tableau de bord en France et dans le monde

Les décodeurs mode d'emploi

[La charte](#) | [Découvrir l'équipe](#)



À propos de Faky
[Quelles sont nos sources ?](#)
[Comment ça fonctionne ?](#)
[Images: Mode d'emploi](#)
[Contactez-nous](#)

[Mentions légales](#)

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Comment ça marche, CheckNews?

Introduction : discourse about media

▶ « escort discourse »

- Editorial ambition

- Structuring discourse

Jeanneret & Souchier 2002 : accompanies, orients and prefigures uses (« *accompagne, oriente et prefigure les usages* »)

Renaud 2019 : **structuring discourse for practices** (« *discours structurant pour les pratiques* ») in that it sets a **symbolic framework** (« *pose un cadre symbolique de reference* »)

I. Promises and figurations of the device

6



Rendez-vous

La rubrique "Vrai ou fake" accueille tous les rendez-vous des acteurs de l'audiovisuel public, parmi lesquels : - "Le vrai du faux" d'Antoine Krempf, produit par Radio France et diffusé sur franceinfo, qui **part chaque jour à la chasse** aux approximations et aux contre-vérités. - **"L'instant détox"** de Julien Pain, produit par France Télévisions et diffusé sur franceinfo, qui descend dans la rue pour tester en direct des intox et des idées reçues. - **"L'Oeil du 20 heures"**, produit par France Télévisions et diffusé sur France 2, qui enquête sur les pouvoirs publics et démonte les coups de com' des politiques.

- "Faux et usage de faux", diffusé dans le 20 heures de France 2, qui combat les rumeurs, manipulations ou **intox** qui circulent sur Internet et les réseaux sociaux. - "Vrai ou fake, **l'envers de l'info**", un magazine présenté par Adrien Rohard, qui chaque semaine sur franceinfo **passé au crible** une information, une intox, une rumeur, qui circule - **"Les Observateurs"**, une émission produite par France 24, qui vérifie des images, des vidéos diffusées sur le Web partout dans le monde. - **"Contre-faits"**, un programme produit par France 24 et conduit par Caroline de Camaret, qui décrypte les fausses nouvelles et rumeurs concernant l'Union européenne dans l'émission "Ici l'Europe". - "Data culte" et **"Retour vers l'Info"**, des modules **vidéos** produits par l'INA, qui éclairent le présent avec le passé, analysent des mensonges et propagandes historiques, confrontent les idées reçues à la réalité des chiffres, des paroles et des images d'archives. - **"Désintox"**, produit par Arte, Libération et 2P2L, qui décrypte l'actualité dans des vidéos d'animation diffusées chaque soir dans "28 minutes"

▶ Collective ethos

- professionals who keep a watchful eye on public discourse
- against the deviant information available online
- meticulous and implacable
- eager not to let false news, rumours or political communication strategies circulate

I. Promises and figurations of the device

7

➤ An intermediary process

Les Décodeurs : “How we check”

« Comment nous vérifions »

Faky : “How it works”

« Comment ça fonctionne »

Vrai ou fake : “According to which method do journalists proceed?”

« Selon quelle méthode les journalistes procèdent-ils ? »

➤ Naturalising the process

- **Finally**, they confront the **initial** assertion with the reality of facts, data, figures, laws, etc. (Vrai ou Fake)

« Enfin, ils confrontent l'affirmation de départ à la réalité des faits, données, chiffres, lois, etc. »

- **The approach** aims to respond **with facts** to accusations or information that that may have no factual basis. (Faky)

« La démarche vise à répondre par des faits à des accusations ou informations parfois sans fondements factuels »

- **At the end**, we give a form of evaluation of the **initial** claim, **according to the reality of the facts.**
(Les Décodeurs)

« À l'arrivée, nous donnons une forme d'évaluation de l'affirmation de départ, en fonction de la réalité des faits. »

I. Promises and figurations of the device

► Discursive tensions

Les Décodeurs: « Venons-en aux faits »

❖ Participation

“It is an evolving work, which takes into account the remarks made to us” (Les Décodeurs)

« Il s'agit d'un travail évolutif, qui tient compte des remarques qui nous sont faites »

“The CheckNews site is yours”

« Le site CheckNews est le vôtre »

“We are also counting on you to send us information” (Le Scan politique)

« nous comptons aussi sur vous pour nous faire remonter des infos »

“Their comments are taken into account and can lead to changes in the content” (Les Décodeurs)

« Leurs remarques sont prises en compte et peuvent donner lieu à des modifications dans les contenus »

I. Promises and figurations of the device

► Discursive tensions

❖ Vugarisation

e.g.

- “a tool that aims to [...] help Internet users find their way through the jungle of sites that produce or relay information”
- “to help our readers find their way”
- “we believe that it will provide everyone with the means to discern the most obvious of them, and to be warned when consulting a site that is known to disseminate false information” (Les Décodeurs)
- “to help you dissect” (Faky)

« un outil qui vise à [...] aider les internautes à se repérer dans la jungle des sites producteurs ou relayeurs d'informations »

« aider nos lecteurs à se repérer »

« nous pensons qu'il offrira à chacun les moyens de discerner les plus évidentes d'entre elles, et d'être averti lors de la consultation d'un site connu pour diffuser de fausses informations »

« vous aider à décortiquer »

► Another promise : critical thinking

Faky: "awaken critical thinking"

"a platform that helps you fight against disinformation by giving you the keys to exercise your critical thinking and evaluate the information you consult online"

« éveiller l'esprit critique »

« une plateforme qui vous aide à lutter contre la désinformation en vous donnant les clés vous permettant d'exercer votre esprit critique et d'évaluer l'information que vous consultez en ligne »

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❖ Filling the gap

Madelon 2008:

"metadiscursive mediacritique"

"declared vocation" = "modify the status of its audience in order to transform them into meta-users"

"critique that must make critical"

« médiacritique métadiscursive »

« vocation affichée » : « modifier le statut de son destinataire pour le transformer en méta-utilisateur »

« critique devant rendre critique »

Les Décodeurs : "We hope to provide tools for everyone to take a step back from the information that is available online"

« nous espérons donner des moyens accessibles à tous pour prendre du recul sur les informations qui circulent en ligne »

II. Self-legitimising enunciation: naturalising a counter-argumentation

11

▶ Patrick Charaudeau (2009)

“**propagandist discourse**”

-> incentive aim

-> a confrontation between Good and Bad that requires an "ethical stance of morality"

“discours propagandiste”

-> *“Visée Incitative”*

-> *“positionnement éthique de moralité”*

▶ **Supporting self-legitimation**

1. Indignation
2. Narrative line : fact-checking as a legitimate response to a societal need
3. Transparency

➤ Narrative line : a societal need

e.g.,

“a tool that aims to combat the **viral spread** of false information and to help Internet users find their way through the **jungle** of sites that produce or relay information”

“Certain **widely disseminated** fake news have, for example, been accused of destabilising democracy during elections”

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« un outil qui vise à lutter contre la diffusion **virale** de fausses informations et à aider les internautes à se repérer dans la jungle des sites producteurs ou relayeurs d'informations » (Les Décodeurs)

« Certaines fausses nouvelles largement diffusées ont par exemple été accusées de déstabiliser la démocratie à l'occasion d'élections » (À vrai dire)

❖ Reintroducing order : reassuring binary

« Vrai ou Fake », « Le vrai du faux », « Désintox »,
« Contre-faits »

"a text is objective (facts) or subjective (opinion)"

"They can be simple, good-natured hoaxes, but they also sometimes have less open, more political aims"

"statements that are projections into the future or that are subjective, or a matter of feelings"

« un texte est objectif (faits) ou subjectif (opinion) »
(Faky)

« Elles peuvent être de simples canulars bon enfant mais elles ont aussi parfois des visées moins avouables, plus politiques » (À vrai dire)

« des déclarations qui sont des projections dans l'avenir ou qui relèvent du subjectif, du ressenti »
(Vrai ou Fake)

Final words

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► « **tour de force** » (Ducrot)

Koren 2006 :

"to display the valorising and legitimising appearances of the impartial speaker"

"ideal judge" = "the internalised voice of an objectivist and rationalist doxa"

d'afficher les apparences valorisantes et légitimantes du locuteur impartial »

« arbitre idéal » = « la voix intériorisée d'une doxa rationaliste objectiviste »

► **Neutralising enunciative registers**

Indignation, incentive aim, disclosure

&

objectivity, guarantee for accessing the truth

Thank you for your
attention

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