

THE WRITTEN DISCOURSE OF INTERVIEWING STYLE FOR A MAGAZINE INTERVIEW

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Abstract: This paper examines the written discourse of interviewing style for the purpose of print publication. Specifically, this paper sought to describe and explain the phases of interviewing procedures, the typology of the questions, and the transitional strategies executed by Oprah Winfrey during her interviews for *O Magazine*. One hundred and ten (110) response-soliciting statements were subjected to discourse analytic procedure to determine the features of such utterances. The results showed that her interview procedure follows a certain pattern that contributes to her ability to maintain the intimacy, familiarity, and dynamics of conversation. Further, results revealed that the interviewer employs a variety of response-soliciting strategies and transitional strategies that unconsciously put the control and authority in the conversation to the interviewees. Finally, some pedagogical implications were also presented for classroom use.

Keywords: *discourse analysis, interviewing style, interview questions, written discourse*

Abstrak: Makalah ini meneliti wacana tulisan gaya wawancara untuk tujuan penerbitan cetak. Makalah ini khususnya mencoba menggambarkan dan menjelaskan tahapan prosedur wawancara, tipologi pertanyaannya, dan strategi transisi yang dilakukan oleh Oprah Winfrey selama wawancaranya di *O Magazine*. Seratus sepuluh pernyataan yang merupakan respon terhadap pertanyaan wawancara menjadi subjek penelitian melalui prosedur analisis wacana untuk menentukan ciri-ciri ucapan. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa prosedur wawancara mengikuti pola tertentu yang berkontribusi terhadap kemampuan Oprah dalam mempertahankan kedekatan, keakraban, dan dinamika percakapan. Selain itu, terungkap pula bahwa pewawancara menggunakan beragam strategi untuk memperoleh respon dan strategi transisi yang secara tidak sadar memberikan kontrol dan kuasa dalam percakapan terhadap yang diwawancarai. Akhirnya, beberapa implikasi pedagogik juga dihadirkan untuk kepentingan di kelas.

Katakunci: *analisis wacana, gaya wawancara, pertanyaan wawancara, wacana tertulis*

An increasing attention has been given to the concept of genre because of the shifting views that language is shaped by context to achieve social purposes (Hyland, 2007). This paradigm shift has opened the venue to analyze language used in a definite social context and discourse community leading to a research endeavor called discourse analysis. Discourse analysis “emphasizes the

role of language in the construction of social reality” (Talja, 1999, p. 460) and has attracted researchers from various fields, such as linguists, sociologists, translators, advertisers, and communication experts, making it a multi-disciplinary endeavor (Bhatia, 2002). It is concerned with both macrolinguistic elements such as genre, moves, learner interaction with discourse in

a particular field or discipline and microlinguistic ones such as frequency counts (Master, 2005). A recent development in discourse analysis gave birth to the concept of genre analysis, which deals with the higher level of structure and organization of a given text (Xu, 2005). As a study of situated linguistic behavior, genre analysis is a versatile and dynamic activity that essentially describes and explains conventionalized textual artifacts in a specific discipline or fields (Bhatia, 2002).

A form of text and discourse that can be investigated on are interviews performed in a specific social context. Evidently, interview has been one of the key elements for effective academic, business and professional, political, and other social communication. It is a conversation, whether face-to-face or through other media, between or among interlocutors. Interview can serve many functions, one of which is performance evaluation and screening. Interviews can be used to determine whether a candidate is fit for hiring or promotion. Interviews can also function as information-gathering instrument used in surveys and news gathering. Lastly, interviews can be used for academic purposes, such as placement, admission, and pre-graduation (exit interview).

In a professional context, one sector that deals greatly with interviews is mass media acting as a discourse community. Media is defined as “one of society’s key set of institutions, industries, and cultural practices” (Masterman, 2001, p. 16) and the people’s way to connect to their social world (Couldrey, 2003). In these fields, interviews are integral to the gathering and delivery of accurate information, in which interview questions are formulated under the notion that interviewers are impartial conduit for the overhearing audience (Clayman & Heritage, 2002). Interviews are commonly viewed on the television and heard on radio. Three types of broadcast interview exist: the live interview, the phone interview, and the recorded interview. Live interview is a synchronous face-to-face conversation

between the interlocutors. Phone **interview**, on the other hand, is a synchronous non-face-to-face conversation between interlocutors. Unlike phone and live interviews, recorded interviews are not done in real-time. However, they may be face-to-face or not.

As experts suggest, to maintain a good interview, an interviewer requires to be skilled at rapport building and inter-personal communication; he/she must be articulate, persistent, flexible, in character, reflective, witty, and good at listening. He/she must also know how to tailor and sequence questions for a more dynamic conversation. As defined by Heritage (2002, p. 1427), a question is a “form of social action, designed to seek information and accomplished in a turn at talk by means of interrogative syntax.” He further explained that questions can be in interrogative or declarative forms. In declarative questions, the asker raises the intonation.

Several studies have been conducted in analyzing the discourse of interviews in various settings, such as academic (Perkins, 1998; Lazaraton & Saville, 1994), occupation (Vrij, Mann, Kristen, & Fisher, 2007), politics (Bull & Mayer, 1993), and broadcast media (Clayman, 2001; Heritage, 2002; Ilie, 1999).

Perkins (1998) analyzed the teacher interview questions and practices used by middle school principals. The purpose of her study is to examine the category, content, and type of interview questions. She found out that principals used structured interviews and that no significant differences exists in the type of questions asked and practices that the principals used, despite differences in their demographic characteristics. Further, a study on processes and outcomes in oral assessment revealed that, despite the training given to the interviewers, they still vary considerably in the support that they provide (Lazaraton & Saville, 1994).

Vrij, Mann, Kristen, and Fisher (2007) investigated whether the accusatory, information gathering, and behavior analyses reveal verbal cues to deceit. They also

examined the effects of these three interview styles on the ability to detect deception. Results revealed that accusatory style contained the least verbal cues to deceit and that no significant difference was found on the effects of the three interview styles on the ability to identify deception.

Bull and Mayer's (1993) study analyzed eight televised political interviews to assess the amounts of equivocalization, to develop typologies of non-replies, and to compare the interview styles of Margaret Thatcher and Neil Kinnock. They found that the interviewees did not reply to the majority of the posted questions; instead, they made political points followed by attacking the questions.

Very few studies were conducted to examine the dynamics of interview in a broadcast media context, one of which is Clayman's paper titled "Answers and Evasions." This paper tried to investigate the nature of answering and resisting questions in broadcast news interviews. He found that interviewees employ different ways of "damage control." Another study conducted by Heritage (2002) examines the limits of questioning of negative interrogatives using news interviews as a source of data. Results revealed that negative interrogatives appear frequently in news interviews as a vehicle of assertions, but not those interrogatives with attached tags. In the context of talk shows, Ilie (1999) examines the three types of non-standard questions: expository, rhetorical, and echo. Using the transcripts of Oprah Winfrey's talk show, the analysis was carried out through response elicitation and argumentative orientation. Results revealed that the three non-standard questions and their respective responses varied in their degree of elicitation. Further, the findings showed that no discrete categories exist in questions and responses.

As to the present study, to the knowledge of the researcher, no research has been conducted yet on the discourse of interview for the purpose of print publication, more so, research that explores the response-soliciting patterns and styles

during interview of an internationally acclaimed and influential media personality (i.e. Oprah Winfrey). It is in this context that this study was undertaken. Unlike Ilie's (1999) study which focused on four question categories on broadcast mode (i.e. information-eliciting, answer-eliciting, action-eliciting, and mental-response eliciting), the present study focuses on analyzing the written discourse (i.e. printed mode) of the interviewing style of Oprah Winfrey, specifically, the phases of Oprah's interviewing procedures, the typology of the questions she used in her interviews, and the transitional strategies she executed.

METHOD

The present study employed a discourse analytic method, which has the purpose of describing, analyzing, and interpreting data (Talja, 1999). Specifically, interview questions were analyzed at a macro-sociologic level. These questions were based on the written discourse of Oprah Winfrey's interviewing style in "Oprah Talks To" page. As one of the most powerful and influential women in the world according to Forbes, Oprah Winfrey was selected as a viable subject for the study because of her significant influence on modern culture through her charismatic, intimate, and familiar style of communication (Illouz, 2003).

The selected texts, which were the transcripts of Oprah's interview with Sarah Jessica Parker and Stevie Wonder that constitute 49 and 69 response-soliciting statements respectively, were taken from *O, The Oprah Magazine* March 2004 and May 2004 issues, respectively. The said issues were selected because of the abundance of response-soliciting statements. Specifically, the focus of this paper's analysis is on the questioning style of Oprah Winfrey during the interviews, particularly the interview phases, linguistic forms of questions, and transitional strategies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Phases on Oprah Winfrey's interviewing

There are three phases generated in the analysis of the interview conducted by Oprah Winfrey on her "Oprah Talks To" segment. These are the warm-up stage, the probing phase, and the cool-down phase.

Phase I. Warm-up phase (Preparation and Opening)

March 2004 *issue-Interview* with Sarah Jessica Parker:

Oprah: By the time this article is in print, you will have taped your last episode of *Sex and the City*. Is that scary?

SJP: What a hard decision it was to end the show! And as scary as it is to leave – sometimes you have to do what is risky.

Oprah: So you're okay with closing Carrie's wardrobe closet?

SJP: For now yes. But I'm very attached to the crew....

Oprah: I understand – the crew become like family. On my desk, I've got a picture of my stage manager, Dean, right there next to Stedman and the dogs.

May 2004 *Issue-Interview* with Stevie Wonder:

Oprah: When you performed at my 50th birthday party, people were on their feet, singing every song. DO you think the days of your kind of music are finished?

Stevie: What we hear today is real music.

Oprah: Rap is real music?

Stevie: When we were growing up and listening to our music, the older people said, "That's horrible!"

Oprah: So we've become our parents?

Phase II. Probing Phase

From the preparation and the opening phase, starts the period of discussion of the main topics, which begins with the interviewees' family and personal issues, then to their professional life, then back again to their family and personal issues.

March 2004 *issue-Interview* with Sarah Jessica Parker:

Personal Life Questions:

Question No. 4: That's not the same as working every day. But I know you also needed to make this decision for yourself and your family?

Question No. 8: Do you want more children?

Question No. 12: What do you like to cook?

Question No. 20: I'm with you, sister. Who are the women you admire?

Professional Life Questions:

Question No. 21: *Sex and the City* made America feel differently about being single. Was that your intention when you took the role?

Question No. 26: Have there ever been things in the script that just shock you?

Personal Life Questions:

Question No. 30: Yes, so where do you see yourself ten years from now?

Question No. 34: How many shoes do you have?

Question No. 39: As you approach the next chapter of your life, what are the things you're most certain about?

May 2004 *Issue-Interview* with Stevie Wonder:

Personal Life Questions:

Question No. 7: Can you explain how you came to be so smart, sensitive, and connected to the world without being able to see? And do you remember colors at all?

Question No. 8: Weren't you put in an incubator and given too much oxygen?

Question No. 10: I read that when you were 5, you said to your mom, "Don't worry about me being blind because I'm happy." True?

Question No. 19: Once you started playing the piano, did you become known for that in your community?

Professional Life Questions:

Question No. 20: When you signed with Motown, did your life change immediately?

Question No. 25: How did "You are the sunshine of my life" come to you?

Question No. 28: How do you define yourself as a musician?

Personal Life Questions:

Question No. 30: That's why we're here to figure out those things out for ourselves. How do you define yourself as a man?

Question No. 31: Why do you say you aren't a normal man?

Phase III. Cool-down Phase

During the cool-down phase, both the interviews dealt with a personal question. In the case of interview with Stevie Wonder, a question regarding the vision for the interviewee's professional activity (i.e. album) was posted.

March 2004 issue-Interview with Sarah

Jessica Parker:

Oprah: Do your best ideas come in the shower? Mine come in the tub.

SJP: It's the only time when you're really, really alone. For people who live in cities where you have to drive a lot, ideas come in the car. For me the shower is the one place where all the world's spinning stops.

Oprah: It might have something to do with the water.

SJP: It's the quietest place. Standing in the shower that day, I didn't dream that in a million years we'd ever get Mikhail on the show.

Oprah: Really?

SJP: No. But it's a great lesson. Even when the odds are stacked against you, have a crazy-big dream—and then proceed.

May 2004 Issue-Interview with Stevie

Wonder:

Oprah: There's always a song inside you.

Stevie: Yes. But it has taken me ten years to feel there's enough of this and that. You're the first person I'll tell the title of the album. It's called *A Time to Love*. We've had all sorts of time to talk about the war, but when will there be a time to love? It's now.

Oprah: What's your vision for this album?

Stevie: I hope people will say, "We've got to make a difference. We've got to have more respect for one another. We've got to find a better way of expressing ourselves without belittling each other. We've got to remember that the way we came to this planet was through love." I'm hoping people will understand that we cannot be a United States until we are a united people.

Typology of the questions employed

In the context of the present study, typology form refers to the structure used by the interviewer to signal a question and solicit response from the interviewees. Such forms include declarative, imperative, interrogative, ellipsis, and response forms. The following table shows the distribution of ways on soliciting response from the interviewees.

Form of Response Solicitation	Interview 1		Interview 2		Overall Distribution	
	F	P (%)	F	P (%)	F	P (%)
QFP	8	16.33	10	16.39	18	16.36
QF	12	24.49	29	47.54	41	37.27
DF	21	42.86	19	31.15	40	36.36
RF	3	6.12	1	1.64	4	3.64
IF	1	2.04	0	0	1	0.91
E	3	6.12	1	1.64	4	3.64
EP	1	2.04	1	1.64	2	1.82
Total	49	100	61	100	110	100

Legend:

QFP = Interrogative form with prestatement

QF = Interrogative form without prestatement

DF = Declarative form

RF = Response form

IF = Imperative form

E = Ellipses without prestatement (in question form)

EP = Ellipses with prestatement

For Interview 1, results show that most of the linguistic form used to solicit responses during the course of the interview was in declarative form orthographically (DF) with a frequency percentage of 42.86, followed by interrogative form without prestatement (QF) with a frequency percentage of 24.49; interrogative form with prestatement (QFP) with a frequency percentage of 16.33; both the ellipses without prestatement (E) and response form (RF) had a frequency percentage of 6.12

while both the ellipses with prestatement (EP) and imperative form (IF) obtained a frequency percentage of 2.04; and imperative form (IF) with a frequency percentage of 0.91.

The results for Interview 2 somewhat differed from those of Interview 1. QF obtained the highest frequency percentage of 47.54 compared to DF with frequency percentage of 31.15. These two are followed by QFP (16.39), RF (1.64), E (1.64), and EP (1.64). IF obtained zero frequency.

Overall, QF obtained the highest frequency percentage of 37.27. Close to second is DF with 36.36. Despite some differences in the results of Interview 1 and Interview 2, the results obtained a correlation value of 0.81, which can be interpreted as strongly correlated. Below are some of the exemplars of the response-soliciting statements.

March 2004 Issue

QFP = Interrogative form with prestatement
By the time this article is in print, you will have taped your last episode of <i>Sex and the City</i> . Is that scary? It is. You were in your early 30s when you married, and you're approaching 40 now. What kind of woman do you want to become? I'm with you, sister. Who are the women you admire? I've always wanted to ask you something: Do you get all your Manolos for free?
QF = Interrogative form without prestatement
Have you gotten any sleep since he arrived? Do you want more children? What do you like to cook? How many shoes do you have?
DF = Declarative form
I understand—the crew become like family. On my desk, I've got a picture of my stage manager, Dean, right there next to Stedman and the dogs. That's not the same as working every day. But I know you also needed to make this decision for yourself and your family. You light up when you talk about him. You like talking about food, but you must not eat a lot. I'm lookin' at ya! So I'm talking to a sleep-deprived woman right now.
RF = Response form
Yes. I'm not.

IF = Imperative form
Explain that to us.
E = Ellipses without prestatement (in question form)
Weighty? Really?
EP = Ellipses with prestatement
Speaking of love, you said on one of the biography shows that it's been a honeymoon ever since you and Matthew married. True?

May 2004 Issue

QFP = Interrogative form with prestatement
We also didn't grow up with videos. What happens to a generation bombarded with images of mansions and diamonds, Rolls-Royces, and scantily clad girls—and the idea of life as one big party? Over the years, your music has challenged complacency. Was it always your intention to use music as a vehicle for reaching the world, or were you just writing songs you liked? That's why we're here—to figure those things out for ourselves. How do you define yourself as a man? When you performed at my 50th birthday party, people were on their feet, singing every word to every song. Do you think the days of your kind of music—music that touches our soul and creates memories—are finished?
QF = Interrogative form without prestatement
Can you explain how you came to be so smart, sensitive, and connected to the world without being able to see? And do you remember colors at all? Weren't you put in an incubator and given too much oxygen? Have you ever felt bitter because of the doctor's mistake? What are the biggest lessons she passed on to you? What did you feel the first time you touched the keys?
DF = Declarative form
So we've become our parents. You would also prefer a breast to gratuitous violence. The same thing happened to Quincy Jones when he was around 11. He was a little hoodlum in Seattle, and he broke into a warehouse to steal pies. He found a piano, and when he touched the keys for the first time, he said he knew he'd come home. In 2000 there were reports that you were planning to get some kind of chip to regain your sight.
RF = Response form
Period.
E = Ellipses without prestatement (in question form)
Really?
EP = Ellipses with prestatement
I read that when you were 5, you said to your mom, “Don't worry about me being blind, because I'm happy.” True?

Transitional Strategies Employed during Interview

With close examination on the written text's transition from one question to another, there were three ways on how to make transition. The following table shows the frequency of questions based on last previous response

(RQ), questions that are not directly related to the last previous response but with transition markers (NRQT), and questions that are not directly related to the last previous response and without transitional markers (NRQ).

Transition	Interview 1		Interview 2		Overall Distribution	
	F	P (%)	F	P (%)	F	P (%)
RQ	41	83.67	50	81.97	91	82.73
NRQT	5	10.21	7	11.48	12	10.91
NRQ	3	6.12	4	6.55	7	6.36
Total	49	100	61	100	110	100

Among the three techniques used in both interviews, RQ is the most dominating strategy for question transition, which covers 91 or 82.73 percent. Moreover, 12 or 10.91 percent of all the questions use NRQT. NRQ got a frequency of 7 or 6.36 percent. With a correlation value of 0.999, it can be surmised that the two interviews are highly consistent with the transitional strategies employed during the interviews.

According to Robbins and Hunsaker's (1996) model, an interview follows four stages: the preparation, the opening, the period of questioning and discussion, and the conclusion. In connection with this, Oprah's interview seems to have similarities with the stated model. Oprah performed the warm-up phase (i.e. preparation stage) by relating the issue to her. During this phase, the interview started by asking the interviewees on the latest project that they have just completed. Oprah then relates the responses of the interviewees to her own personal experience. During the probing phase, a pattern of development was also observed. Both Interviews 1 and 2 followed the personal-professional-personal pattern. Such pattern seemed to be a strategy to smoothen the transition from warm-up phase to probing phase and probing phase to cool down phase. As Ilie (1999) pointed out, question framing is fundamental to probing personal and professional life of the guest while maintaining the personality of the inter-

viewer. This phenomenon was ascertained during the conversation in the two interviews. The majority of the response-soliciting statements deal with personal and professional issues because such type of interview has two major functions, which is to inform and to entertain. Further, several feedback moves were present during the probing phase particularly in a form of a *follow-up* (involves the explicit confirmation of the interviewer) and *evaluation* (whether or not the interlocutors subscribe with the other person's statement) on the response of the interviewees; however, these feedback moves are more prominent in Oprah's interview with Sarah and not with her interview with Stevie. An example of such move is shown below:

Follow-up

SJP: *Right. I think we have a good marriage. We'll see. We've been together for 12 years. That's a long time.*

Oprah: *It is. You were in your early 30s when you married, and you're approaching 40 now. What kind of woman do you want to become?*

Evaluative

SJP: *I just gave away a stack the other day. Now I have about 70 or 80 pairs.*

Oprah: *I consider that normal.*

Lastly, the cool-down phase primarily focuses on personal questions coupled with questions regarding their career plans and visions.

Generally, the interviewer begins and ends the interview process (Bull & Mayer, 1993). However, what makes Oprah's interview different is that both her interviews ended with statements from the interviewees. This can be a strategy to emphasize the authority and control that reside on the interviewees.

As to the typology of questions employed by the interviewer, QF and DF were the most frequent forms of soliciting response, which sustain the conversation. These results, particularly in Interview 2, partially support the arguments forwarded by Thornbury and Slade (2006, p.86) that "a coherent conversation that consisted solely of declarative statements is difficult to imagine." However, such claim was contradicted by the results of the first interview (which are coherent), wherein DF is the most frequently used response-soliciting form. The use of DF may have been influenced by the interviewer's presupposition of an affirmative answer from the interviewee. This claim was supported by Vander Brook, Schlue, and Campbell (1980) and Williams (1990) claiming that native speakers of English generally use non-inverted questions when there is a presupposition of a "yes" answer.

Thornbury and Slade (2006) further claim that ellipsis occurs frequently at the beginning of the utterances. However, in both the response-soliciting forms that use ellipsis, such form is placed after a complete utterance (e.g. Oprah: *I read that when you were 5, you said to your mom, "Don't worry about me being blind, because I'm happy." True?* and Oprah: *Speaking of love, you said on one of the biography shows that it's been a honeymoon ever since you and Matthew married. True?*)

Moreover, all statements used by Oprah are in active voice. As explained by Strunk (2000), active voice shows more impact in conversation. It will make the interaction

livelier. Similarly, response form and pre-statements used by Oprah are related to her personal experience. One way to earn respect is telling something about the interviewer's story (Toropov, 1997).

With regard to the transitional strategies, it is hypothesized that the reason for using RQ during interview is to show that the interviewee has the control over the conversation and not the interviewer. The frequent use of RQ also proves that the interviewer wanted to make the interviewee a collaborator of the whole interview process. Such transitional strategy can also be a factor that contributes to the rapport building skills and charisma exemplified by Oprah Winfrey's that makes her interviewees more engaged in the conversation. Aside from unconsciously making the control reside on the interviewer, another function of RQ is to improve cohesion in conversation, which adds dynamics to the flow of conversation and promotes topic consistency (Thornbury & Slade, 2006).

In the case of NRQT, it generally functions differently from RQ by acting as topic-introducing questions. An example is shown below:

SJP: *Well, I leave a mess and then I feel crappy about it. Before I left home today, I left a note saying, "I apologize for the state of the closet. Don't touch a thing in there! I'll clean it all up when I get back."*

Oprah: *As you approach the next chapter of your life, what are the things you're most certain about?*

SJP: *I'm most certain of my utter and undistractable devotion to my son. I'm not a religious or spiritual person, but I'm extraordinarily grateful for my good fortune. At least twice a day, I'm reminded of how lucky I am. Sometimes I walk by a newsstand and my picture will be on a magazine cover—and somebody else is actually curious enough to buy it. I can't believe this is my life.*

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that the interviewer (i.e. Oprah Winfrey) employs the warm-up, probing, and cool-down phase consistently. This is true to her use of response-soliciting and transitional strategies during both interviews which contribute to the intimacy, familiarity, and dynamics of the conversation. Pedagogically, it is recommended that students be taught of the different strategies employed by Oprah when conducting an interview, be it a real task or a pedagogical task. Teachers must also

undergo training on how to perform behavioral interviews, which can be helpful when interviewing students about their classroom performance or about personal problems that have impact on their academic performance. Furthermore, a more extensive study should be conducted on analyzing the oral discourse of Oprah's interview style, which also involve the nonverbal and paralinguistic features. A study on the influence of gender on the structuring of the questions can also be examined to determine whether an interrogative form is more frequent between male-female/ female-male interview discourse.

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