

# Discourse Analysis: Personal Pronouns in Oprah Winfrey Hosting Queen Rania of Jordan

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**Abstract**—The aim of this article is to explore the use of subjects in Oprah Winfrey hosting Queen Rania of Jordan. Subjects were examined from critical discourse analysis approach, focusing on speech function. The transcript of the episode was analyzed to investigate the personal pronouns used by Oprah and her guest throughout the conversation. The results suggest that by using pronouns, Oprah Winfrey copes to represent herself and others, proving that the choice of words specifically pronouns is one of the main factors in maintaining a good interchange in a conversation activity.

**Index Terms**—Oprah winfrey, queen rania of jordan, discourse analysis, speech function, pronoun system.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Discourses refers to “sets of ready-made and pre-constituted ‘experiencing’ displayed and arranged primarily through language [1] or “a group of statements which provide a language for talking about –a way of representing– the knowledge about a particular topic at particular moment” [2].

According to [3], discourse is a way of representing aspects of world, processes, relations, and structures of material world, mental world of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and social world. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) studies real, and often extended, instances of social interaction, which take (partially) linguistic form? The critical approach is distinctive in its view of (a) the relationship between language and society, and (b) the relationship between analysis and the practices analysed [4].

The undeniable power of the media has inspired many critical studies in many disciplines: linguistics, semiotics, pragmatics, and discourse studies. Early studies of media language focused on easily observable surface structures, such as the biased or partisan use of words in the description of Us and Them (and Our/Their actions and characteristics) [5]. Critical discourse analysts, up to now, have focused mainly on the media (news reports, popular books, advertisements, TV shows, and speeches).

Both linguists and anthropologists recognize the importance of pronouns in anchoring language to specific speakers in specific contexts and in signalling the reciprocal changes in the roles of interactants through their performance of, and engagement in, communicative acts.

Given the importance of pronouns in discourse analysis this study aims to examine the pronouns individually as they

occur in the episode of Oprah Winfrey talk show hosting Queen Rania of Jordan.

“The purpose of a talk show is to give useful information on topics dealing with interpersonal and psychological matters, mainly to women” [6].

“Conversations that take place on television, influence the way in which people speak and interact with each other in daily life” While analysing the features of television conversation, it is important to take into consideration “the cultural aspects of interaction because they have an effect on interpretation of interaction” [7].

This kind of television conversation could be found in Oprah Winfrey Show, which has been very popular all around the world as a creative talk show program, providing lots of variation in terms of forms and functions of spoken English.

A study of talk shows from a discourse analytical perspective is offered by Linke in 1985, whose main aim is to find out whether there is a talk specific to television and how talk on television differs from every day conversation [8]. In addition, she applies discourse analytical tools and ethno methodological approach to analyze whether television talk show categorized as discussion can be differentiated from talk in talk shows. Linke’s findings show that openings and closings of discussions on television and talk shows reveal more similarities than differences.

Finally, she concludes that there may be sequencing rules specific to media talk. Turn-Taking also seems to work very similarly in the two genres, with the host being different to the rest of the participants. Linke’s investigation showed that more questions are asked in talk shows than in discussions, whereas the talk show host uses more paraphrasing or other types of turn allocation in discussions.

Another richly eclectic approach to the study of talk shows is found in the work of Garcia Gomez [13], [14] who draws on conversation analysis, discourse analysis, pragmatics (politeness theory), systemic functional linguistics and cognitive psychology (schema theory, social identity theory and auto-categorization theory).

His work looks at conflict talk in British, American and Spanish talk shows. He argues that by looking at the talk show turn taking system the different mechanisms that operate in turn-taking distribution in the interaction make it possible to identify institutional, conversational and confrontational sequences. Gomez [15], [16] used a sample of data from 20 programs of a popular American Late-night show hosted by Bill Maher, attempts to sketch the relations between the attitudinal meaning and what terms the consequent construction of the social identity of American guests and the hosts. He argues that the appraisal system of

interpersonal semantics gives us an insight into how people share their perception framework. He adds that this is a useful device for constructing guests' speaker identity and that the distinct attitudinal meanings of words used by British, American and Spanish speakers are due to cultural-relativistic ways of reasoning.

Relating to interpersonal function, the functional approach to language developed by M.A.K. Halliday [17] has been influential in a diversity of discourse analytic approaches to modality. The best known of these is the 'critical linguistics' group that has developed Halliday's theory of modalities in a sociologically relevant direction [18], [19]. Hodge and Kress have applied Halliday's theory to media studies in a method they call social semiotics [18]. Halliday looks at language from the point of view of the functions it serves, and he explains its structure on this basis. The three functional components he has distinguished in the development of his theory are "ideational, interpersonal, and textual" [17].

The ideational function, which is a mental representation of what the producer intends to communicate and it is within this component that the relationship between language and thought is explored in considerable detail; the interpersonal describes how meaning is exchanged through the selection of language reflecting the relationship between the participants: the addressor and the addressee; the textual is the message that is actually produced through the channel and mode demanded by the situation. The experiential is the 'content' function of the language: 'it is language as the expression of the processes and other phenomena of the external world, including the speaker's own consciousness.' [17].

The interpersonal function is to express 'relations among participants in the situation and the speaker's own intrusion into it, it deals with the social and power relations among language users, it relates participant's situational roles to the discourse produced [17].

Halliday states that mood is composed of functional elements of subject and finite in which subject approves or disapproves argument. In clauses, pronouns may be used as subject [9].

Something that is judged to be already "on stage" and uniquely identifiable may be referred to with personal pronouns [10].

## II. METHODOLOGY

This paper analyses selected materials to explore the use of subjects in Oprah Winfrey's interview hosting Queen Rania of Jordan. Concerned with linguistics functions and cultural dimensions of Oprah and Queen Rania's conversations.

The approach adopted in this research is critical discourse analysis, which is under impact of M.A.K Halliday perspective, along with another cross-cultural approach based on Hofstede.

### A. Materials

In this research, an interview of Oprah Winfrey hosting Queen Rania of Jordan dated on May, 16, 2006. The interview is selected from the following website: [www.queenrania.jo/media/interviews/Oprah-Winfrey-show](http://www.queenrania.jo/media/interviews/Oprah-Winfrey-show).

### B. Procedure

The interview is analyzed according to the Hallidayan Systemic functional Grammar mostly paying attention to the pronoun system, which operates as indicator enabling its interpretation. Additionally, the personal pronouns in the chosen interview are analyzed in terms of cultural differences, introduced by Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions theory, to study the implication of personal pronouns representing cultures.

## III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The analysis of pronoun system is shown in the table below, which illustrates the frequency of personal pronouns used by Oprah Winfrey interview.

Noticing that the subjects "You" and "I" are the most frequently personal pronouns used in Oprah's utterances. Personal pronouns are words that are used to refer to participants that are judged by a speaker to be already present or active in the mind of audience. Something that is judged to be already "on stage" and uniquely identifiable may be referred to with personal pronouns [10]. The pronouns *I* and *You*, in their different modifications, stand immediately for persons that are, in general, sufficiently known without being named, *I* meaning the speaker, and *You*, the hearer, their antecedents, or nouns are therefore generally understood .

TABLE I: THE FREQUENCY OF PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Personal pronouns	I	You	Your	We	Us
Frequency	22	46	5	12	4

This use of subjects shows that there is a collaborative relationship between one speaker with another. Oprah and her guest the Queen Rania have successfully built a warm relationship by using such an interchange as in the utterance repeated frequently by Oprah "you know", where Oprah constructs intimacy with her guest. Sharing life stories and personal information builds intimacy in female relationships, and Oprah's continued self-disclosure makes both guests and viewers feel closer to her [12].

In addition, Oprah uses the pronoun *I*, which was used 22 times it mainly falls into the following categories:

- 1) To describe the specific deeds "I feel that, you know, coming from my background, being raised poor and poor Negro child and all that, to have risen to where I am in life, sometimes I look around at my life and I go, Lordy! You know, and I feel--I do feel that my life is a fantasy".
- 2) To state her personal point of view about the topic being discussed, for example in as "Well, I heard". The use of *I*, in this sense, is to show her background knowledge of the issue which does not refer to all audiences as a whole because it happens that not all the audiences hear what Oprah heard.
- 3) To present her personal beliefs and comments "You know, I believe in educating girls, too. And I love your—I quote you all the time when you say educating a girl, you educate the future". Oprah expresses clearly her belief in educating girls and she comments that she loves

Queen Rania quotes and she agrees with it. "You" is used 46 times. In some sense, "You" can attract people's attention by involving them in the interaction. The use of "You" refers to the Queen herself in most of the questions asked by Oprah such as "Wow. Are there some days when you wake up and you go, I am queen?", where Oprah is addressing directly to the Queen, the hearer, more precisely the interviewee as in Oprah's utterance "you can meet anybody u want" she meant that because Rania's position as a Queen so she had the chance to meet anyone she wants.

Other subject used is *We*, which is used 12 times. As it is known, this pronoun is used as a collective pronoun which refers to Oprah and her guest and, probably, all her audiences as well as the combination of the pronouns "us" which is less used only 4 times, and "we" have the same indication. The use of pronoun "we", indicates that Oprah manages to involve all existing participants in the program. Besides, the use of this pronoun will also take a role as a representative of audience's perspective. In the expression "yes we do. Yes we do", the pronoun *we* is used to show that most of the American people, including the audience, share the same common attitude concerning the topic discussed. It represents, that the present information is commonly believed by general people, and the use of *we* is also showing how the guest (*you*) is demanding to share the information to all people (*we*), not only to the host (*I*), like in the utterance "So what would be--we be most surprised to see or experience with women if we were to come to your country?"

The personal pronoun in the possessive case "Your" is used only 5 times, also falls into the category of addressing directly to the guest which is Queen Rania personally, asking for personal information, and not addressing to her country or to her nation as in the following expressions "How old are you children? How old are your children?" and "And I love your—I quote you all the time when you say educating a girl, you educate the future."

Due to the cultural difference existing throughout the issue being discussed, the use of *YOU* and *WE* will show how different cultures are shared in the episode. In the conversation, *you* (the guest), which is the Queen of Jordan and Muslim, have different culture with the host and the audiences (*we*), which are Americans. This indicates that there is the opposition between *you* (the guest) and *we* (the host and the audience) regarding the culture. This could imply that the use of these two pronouns is influenced by cultural beliefs and social rules. Therefore, pronouns could represent cultures.

Another perspective in analyzing personal pronouns through American and cultural lenses based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions [11], particularly the *Individualism/collectivism* (IDV) dimension yields to following analysis. Comparing the use of pronouns throughout *WE/US/OUR* in the whole conversation, we find the Queen (who is an Arab), used *WE* 25 times. According to Hofstede [11], the Queen belongs to the high collectivist culture, where people use the group as the unit of analysis, and they think of themselves as interdependent with their in-group (family, co-workers, tribe, country), as the Queen Rania who gives priority to her family, her people and

country, such as giving priority in her country to educated women and empowering them. The Queen used *WE* in two different references. The first is to refer to herself and to her family (The kind, the children) as in the utterance "So it's one of the things we do to relax on the weekends and just to connect and just to feel grounded." The second usage refers to her county population, her group. Example: "Thank God in Jordan, we have a very high level of education". Same as for the pronoun *OUR*, which occurred 6 times, activates as collective orientation.

As for Oprah who belongs to the individualist culture, we can notice that during questioning Oprah used *WE* only 12 times. In the latter people uses individuals as the unit of analysis. They see themselves as autonomous individuals who are independent of their groups. *WE* refer to Oprah herself, the audiences in the studio and her viewers such as: "This is dispelling all the royal myths we knew". What is interesting is that Oprah did not use the personal pronoun *OUR* not even once. The interpretation of the pronoun "I" is analyzed above and it's not shown in this part despite that people in an individualist country think in terms of *I*. The majority of questions the host asks are direct and personal, and the interlocutor provided personal direct information.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

It could probably be inferred that knowledge on pronoun does not simply know what they replace (*I* to replace first person singular and *we* to replace first person plural) but also know their other functions with certain cultural implications that will influence our way of using it. Critical discourse analysis therefore examines the form, structure, and content of discourse, from the grammar and wording employed in its creation to its reception and interpretation by a wider audience. In Oprah Winfrey case, an interesting fact has been revealed; by using personal pronouns, Oprah manages to represent herself and others. This proves that the choice of words including personal pronouns is one of the main factors in maintaining a good interchange in a conversation activity, which brings the dialogue into a dynamic interchange during the progress of the dialogue itself.

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