

THE PRINCIPLE OF LEAST EFFORT IN TELEVISION DISCOURSE

The article deals with discursive characteristics of such mass media genre as the television interview. The research based on "Larry King Live" talk show proves similarity of television and everyday discourses. The special attention is given to the economy of speech effort in the talk show genre. Semiotic (lexical, lexical stylistic and syntactic) and communicative devices allowing to spare speech effort are analysed. The article is illustrated with relevant examples.

Key words: compression, everyday discourse, institutional discourse, least effort, mass media, speech economy, television discourse.

Статтю присвячено характеристикам такого жанру мас-медійного дискурсу як телевізійне інтерв'ю. Дослідження, що ґрунтується на аналізі ток-шоу "Larry King Live", встановлює подібність телевізійного дискурсу до побутового. Значна увага приділяється економії мовленнєвих зусиль у жанрі ток-шоу. Розглядаються семіотичні (лексичні, лексико-стилістичні, синтаксичні) та комунікативні засоби, що використовуються для економії мовленнєвих зусиль. Матеріал статті проілюстровано відповідними прикладами.

Ключові слова: економія мовлення, інституційний дискурс, компресія, мас медіа, найменше зусилля, побутовий дискурс, телевізійний дискурс.

Статья посвящена характеристикам такого жанра масс-медийного дискурса как телевизионное интервью. Работа, основанная на анализе ток-шоу "Larry King Live", указывает на схожесть телевизионного и бытового дискурсов. Значительное внимание уделяется экономии речевых усилий в жанре ток-шоу. Рассматриваются семиотические (лексические, лексико-стилистические, синтаксические) и коммуникативные средства, используемые для экономии речевых усилий. Материал статьи проиллюстрирован соответствующими примерами.

Ключевые слова: бытовой дискурс, институциональный дискурс, компрессия, масс медиа, наименьшее усилие, телевизионный дискурс, экономия речи.

Mass communication is one topic among many for the social sciences and only one part of a wider field of research into human communication. Scholars state that "the study of communication has to be interdisciplinary and must adopt varied approaches and methods" [13, p. 16]. Mass communication is "the process by which a person, group of people, or large organization creates a message and transmits it through some type of medium to a large, anonymous, heterogenous audience" [14, p. 624]. The media through which this process takes place are usually referred to as mass media.

The mass media are all the people and organizations that provide information and news for the public, including television, radio, and newspapers [10]. Media refer to those organized means of dissemination of fact, opinion, entertainment, and other information, such as newspapers, magazines, outdoor advertising, film, radio, television, the World Wide Web, books, CDs, DVDs, videocassettes, computer games, and other forms of publishing. The technologies providing mass communication vary. Thus printing creates such media as books, newspapers and magazines, electronic transmission generates broadcast media as radio, film and television as well as the Internet.

It stands to mention that "everyday social life is strongly patterned by the routines of media use and infused by its contents through the way leisure time is spent, life-styles are influenced, conversation is given its topics and models of behaviour are offered for all contingencies" [13, p. 4]. Mass media have become a significant force in modern society reflecting and creating its culture.

Television appears to be one of the most accessible and therefore popular media genres. Its widespread availability and exposure makes television the primary focus of most mass-media studies. Researchers mention that "in more developed societies virtually every household possesses at least one television, with ownership of a set per member becoming increasingly commonplace" [16]. Statistics provides data that "television viewing has become the dominant leisure activity for the majority of the population, ... each individual in the UK watches television, on average, for nearly three hours a day, while in the US research has suggested that sets may be on for an average of seven hours [11, p. 711]. Beyond these numbers, though, television plays a central role in most people's everyday lives. In the public sphere it has become the venue for political debate, religious evangelism and the exchange of "news", as well as the major medium for entertainment [11, p. 622]. In view of the above "it seems appropriate and unarguable, then, that television as the major, global, contemporary mass medium should be subject to academic investigation [16]. Mass media have become the centre of research for the number of human sciences: sociology, psychology, cultural studies, linguistics, etc. analysing different aspects of media activities and their effects.

Media discourse constitutes special interest for linguistic studies. It is obvious that "media discourse is non-homogenous from the standpoint of mode: radio discourse is oral, newspaper one is written. Discourses that appear in mass media context are even more non-homogenous from the standpoint of genre: a variety of genres are employed and they do not belong exclusively to that context" [4]. But still the scholar comes to the conclusion that separate media genres may possess characteristics which distinguish them from discourses of other types. One of the vivid examples of such discourse is a television interview [4].

Television discourse is subject to "two major external constraints that impinge on it from opposite directions" [6, p. 189]. On the one hand, it is the requirement of due impartiality in the management of all kinds of broadcast political news, talk and discussion. On the other hand, it is the audience which, in various ways, must be taken into account in the design of any television broadcast. "Consideration of these two factors – the absent audience and the requirement of institutional impartiality – combine to constitute the distinctive characteristics of the political interview" [6, p. 189]. The institutional nature of the broadcast interview is achieved in various ways, starting from its structure (beginning, turn-taking and closing). But the key element of the institutional features is the issue of power. Institutional control is exercised through "first-speaker hegemony" [9] which grants control over the interaction to the interviewer or programme host. In consideration of the foregoing premises our research is based on the scripts of the CNN most watched (over one million nightly) and longest-running (25 years) programme "Larry King Live" [<http://transcripts.cnn>].

com/TRANSCRIPTS/lkl. html], the anchor of which gained world-wide popularity and is recognised as an outstanding journalist.

Media researchers point out that "television, as a medium for communication, occupies a cultural space which straddles both the public and private spheres in social life. It brings public discourses into the private domain and private discourses into the public domain; that is, it mediates between the two spheres. In doing so, television has effectively reconfigured ... the boundaries between the public and private spheres" [16, p. 48]. Academics indicate two tendencies affecting contemporary media language: "the tendency of public affairs media to become increasingly conversationalised" and "its tendency to move increasingly in the direction of entertainment" [7, p. 10]. The study of political talk focuses on its informative and conflict dimensions. But not all talk on television is political. Much of it has "a rational, sociable character, in which the object of the talk is no more than the pleasure of talk itself" [15, p. 191]. According to V. Karasik the analysed talk show can be regarded as the combination of the status-oriented (the anchor of the show is a representative of the definite social institution) and personality-oriented (much of the talk resembles everyday communication, participants of which are acquainted) discourses [3, p. 199].

Academicians advance "time pressure" mark, significantly affecting characteristics of an oral or written discourse, as one of the text formation parameters [5, p. 79]. Such parameter is particularly relevant for the television discourse, where broadcast time of a programme is limited (KING: Thank you all very much. We're sorry we didn't have more time. We'll do more on this as well). The host of the talk show controls the time pointing out how much of it is left (KING: Our remaining moments with the great Stevie Wonder. I – boy. It's – it's so unbelievable to have had – to be able to sit with people like you and to experience you firsthand, for a little kid from Brooklyn; KING: When do you call the FBI, John? We only have 30 seconds; KING: Let's get an overall view. We have such a short time left; KING: We're running close in time. Because we've got a big finale coming up), defining the duration of the talk (KING: Can you stay a couple of more minutes? LEWINSKY: Actually, I've got a run, I'm sorry. KING: All right, let me get in one more call; KING: On that note, we'll take a break) or insisting on the necessity to be laconic (KING: All right, that's a very good question. Can you briefly answer that? What did they say you did? GATES: Well, they. KING: Briefly).

Any language stands against clutter, excessiveness, redundant physiological effort and any kind of discomfort in oral speech or in writing. It evokes native speakers' intention to spare speech resource. A. Martinet, famous French linguist, emphasized that the term economy comprises everything: both elimination of unproductive differences and emergence of new ones as well as maintenance of the present state. "In order to understand how and why a language changes, the linguist must keep in mind two ever-present and antinomic factors: first, the requirements of communication, the need for the speaker to convey his message, and second, the principle of least effort, which makes him restrict his output of energy, both mental and physical, to the minimum compatible with achieving his ends" [12, p. 139].

Least effort is intuitively self-explanatory since the idea behind the principle is simple: all effort should be least. Human beings are governed in their choices and behaviour by a universal tendency to reduce effort. G. K. Zipf explained the tendency as follows: "each individual will adopt a course of action that will involve the expenditure of the probably least average of his work (by definition, least effort)" [17, p. 543]. The principle of least effort seems to be universal for it has always been intuitively employed in various fields of science.

In the process of speech production, a native speaker tries to get his message across in a certain period of time and has to structure his speaking to fulfil this purpose. Consequently least effort principle is more often observed in oral speech. During a talk people are less concerned with the form of expressing their thoughts, more attention is devoted to the topic of the conversation and not to the speech composition. The principle of least effort apparently reflects maxims of conversation put forward by H. P. Grice in the demand to avoid information overload simultaneously making contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange [8, p. 26].

Scholars define the law of least effort as the tendency to spare speech effort and state that this tendency configures speech activity and determines pursuit of expressive means economy. Numerous facts in modern speech testify to the power of this law. The principle of least effort has played an important part in the development of any language. It is considered that there are two types of "economy": 1) "economy" on the level of separate words, collocations and sentences in different languages; 2) "economy" as a general notion, with the help of which the most important language development and functioning processes are being explained [1].

The principle of least effort is closely related to the "information compression". The latter is realised with the help of two types of means: semiotic (such as lexical and syntactic compression, speech stereotypes formation) and communicative (information reduction and secondary naming) [2].

Economy on the lexical level in the analysed talk show is achieved with the help of:

1) lexical devices, among which one can find:

- word formation:

- abbreviations and acronyms: KING: Does it bother you that DNA has already gotten over 50 people out of prison who are on death row, meaning they didn't do what they were there for? They might have died; KING: What a guest to begin it all here ... Bill Gates, the founder, chairman and CEO of Microsoft; KING: You mean, they'll do it with lasers or genes;

- back formation: KING: She's ape for it, right? Yes, she's wacko (extended form wacko < wack (n.) "crazy person" back-formation from < wacky (adj.) "crazy, eccentric");

- clipping of different types such as apocope: KING: You and Ted are out to end polio in the world? You're going to vaccinate everybody?; KING: ... I know he spoke to his doc...; GATES: ... You didn't think, OK, my electronic mail is the way I stay in touch with my relatives and sending photos around, sending music

around...; KING: Tonight, Mike Tyson. The former heavyweight champ on life at the top and the bottom; KING: By the way, tomorrow night's complete prom is on crime and punishment in America; syncope: KING: Ma'am, what prompts the call? or combination of apocope and aphaeresis: KING: Does that mean people didn't take their flu shots?;

– compounding: KING: ... The Cirque de Soleil's production of the Beatles is a unique entertainment experience, but behind the mind-blowing onstage magic is a lot of dedicated creative energy; KING: ...Is this a how-to book, Ed. Are you telling...; KING: But he's not an active day-to-day kind of guy?; KING: Was the public, Jeffrey, ahead of the pundits, the doomsavers and the attackers?; KING: And the law is colorblind?;

– incorporation: KING: How many can you do? How many bypasses can you do?; KING: California wants to ban it outright; KING: And Jan, what do you make of the uproar?;

– combination of different means such as compounding with clipping: KING: You wrote an op-ed piece in "The Washington Post" when you left... or conversion with blending of a word and an acronym: KING: They're also bringing in, I understand, another show from England, with brighter questions, a kind of brainiac show (brain (n.) + ENIAC, acronym from "electronic numeral integrator and computer");

• phraseological units: KING: Marion, will the welcome wagon come visit?; KING: This might all be called "go figure"; KING: So Hillary's moving into the city doesn't annoy you as some sort of stepping stone?; KING: ...All right, maybe it's difficult, in a nutshell, but you obviously write about it in the book, and there's lots to talk about;

2) lexical stylistic devices:

• metaphor: KING: It's a gem of a book; KING: What is this secret? What's the key to what they do at Weight Watchers that works? Obviously, not just eat less. What's the key?; KING: What's "yo-yoing" like, by the way? What is that up and down thing like for a person going through it?; KING: How do you react to those – some in the press knocking the fact that you are doing this? Knocking Jenny Craig, knocking you for doing a commercial, for endorsing a product; KING: Congressman, you do not sound like you're ringingly endorsing the mayor tonight. Are you kind of itching to get in this?; KING: ...However, if someone has a sincere belief that Christ is the answer and wants to share that with you, why are you hanging the Holocaust around his neck? He wants to share a belief with you;

• metonymy: KING: Did Weight Watchers contact you, or you them?; KING: Let's bring together our entire panel.

Speech economy on the level of syntax consists in compression of sign structure with the help of:

1) ellipsis:

• omission of the auxiliary verb *to do* in questions: KING: How did it happen? Did they call you? You call them?; KING: They still follow you?; KING: They want their money?;

- omission of the structural part in compound predicates: KING: Many negatives as positives in this race; KING: Father and stepfather, mother and stepmother all supportive?; KING: Jokes, snide remarks, nothing?; KING: You optimistic, Jan?;

- omission of the subject: KING: Spoke to your mother the other day.

- omission of the subject and the structural part of compound predicates: KING: Not easy; KING: Optimistic?; KING: That close?; KING: Anxious to get out of here and go there?; KING: Ever turned down something you regretted?

2) grammatically incomplete sentences: KING: Then you went on to Harvard, right? GATES: That's right. KING: To major in?; KING: How's the new show going? Are you enjoying it? O'BRIEN: It's amazing. It's – KING: In what way?; KING: How did you name this company? GATES: Well, Paul and I talked about a lot of crazy names. KING: Like?; DEPP: We got along like a house on fire. You know. Instantly. There's a dangerous element. You never know what to expect from him. Such sentences are situational conversational moves and appear to be functional units only in the connection with the previous moves;

3) asyndeton:

KING: No, she's saying he'll be dogged by the right?; KING: Did he know you were going to do it?; KING: Letterman viewers are more likely to be divorced, watch CNN, drive a Toyota; KING: One of the reasons I love Conan – there are many – is my wife sang on his show once;

4) syntactic asymmetry (logical links of utterance omission): KING: David Brokaw represents you, an old friend; KING: Is the genius that he can – let's say – I remember one of his short stories, "The History of the Mafia," which was hysterical. That he surprises you, who think comedically?

It has been mentioned that the principle of least effort should also be analysed from the standpoint of communication means used to save speech efforts. The secondary naming, which is a choice of a verbal substitute for already mentioned object or subject, is one of such means. Lexical substitutes are used to avoid repetition of the same words. This function is traditionally performed by pronouns: GATES: Well, my dad is a lawyer. And my parents – they wanted me to moderate my sort of extreme activities of sneaking out at night, going to the computer center. They wanted me... KING: Oh, you did that?; ARNOT: ...What is interesting in terms of lung cancer is these new scans can pick it up so early that it may be curable... KING: Morton Downey Jr., how was yours picked up? However such function can be fulfilled by other language units. For example: KING: And it would fluctuate everyday, right? You would go up and down based on holdings and movements of stock and the like, where noun *the like* performs the function of substitution or KING: We asked your fans to tweet questions for you. "The King's Things." A whole bunch of them involved the beard. O'BRIEN: Yes. KING: A whole bunch. All right. So why and how long will it last? O'BRIEN: OK. First of all – KING: The why. In this example noun *questions* was substituted by the pronoun phrase *a whole bunch of them*, further reduced to *a whole bunch*, then specifying what questions exactly: *why* and *how long* and nominalisation of the adverb *the why*.

The conducted analysis points out that in spite of formally institutional character (participants' roles and communicative moves are appointed: the anchor asks questions and controls the flow of communication; a guest answers the questions), such genre of television discourse as the talk show displays traits of spontaneous oral speech. Unprepared and linear character of communication in the talk show and the tendency of least effort which display themselves in such type of the dialogue testify to the similarity of some genres of television discourse and everyday communication. One of the discursive features of the television interview is time limit, therefore economy of speech effort, which is realised on different language levels with the help of various means, comes to the fore in the talk show.

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