Semi-institutional discourse: The case of talk shows

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Abstract

This paper explores the nature of the talk show as a particular instance of broadcast discourse, which is envisaged both as a media product and as an ongoing talk-oriented process. The analysis focuses on the discursive features of the talk show, regarded as a host-controlled, participant-shaped and audience-evaluated speech event. The approach taken here draws on recent research in conversation- and discourse-analysis, pragmatics, critical linguistics, philosophy of language, and media and cultural studies.

By focusing on excerpts taken from two American talk shows (the Oprah Winfrey show and the Geraldo Rivera show), this study is intended to capture the distinguishing features of the talk show by comparing it with casual conversation, on the one hand, and with institutional interaction, on the other. It is proposed that one of the major distinguishing features of talk shows is their semi-institutional nature, i.e. they exhibit a mixture of characteristics pertaining to both casual conversation and institutional discourse in terms of discursive configuration and goal, participant role assignment and role switching, talk and topic control. © 2001 Elsevier Science B.V. All rights reserved.

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‘How’s this for a job description? ... Most every day you meet some of the most famous people in the country. You usually dine for free, or at least have the best table in the restaurant. And if they gave away the title of hometown favorite, you would surely win. And by the way, you make big bucks. And the bulk of your work is done in an hour, with a break every five minutes. Just about now you’re probably asking yourself where do I apply. Well, my guests
today applied, got the job, and have made a huge success of it. They are some of the number-one talk-show hosts in the country, and today we’re going to turn the tables and get the chance to get a little personal with them. We ask the questions.’ (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Talk-show hosts’, 22 January, 1987)

1. Introduction

This study is intended to provide a pragmatic framework of analysis for the description and interpretation of the discursive and linguistic features of talk-show interaction as a mixed type of discourse in the context of media communication. Although a number of scholars, both linguists and non-linguists, have lately devoted their attention to this particular type of media communication (Carbaugh, 1988; Scannell, 1991; Livingstone and Lunt, 1994; Fairclough, 1995b; Hutchby, 1995, 1996), no systematic account has been yet given of the correlation between the discursive and linguistic features that distinguish talk shows from other types of dialogic institutional discourse. On the one hand, this situation may be partly due to the fact that the characteristic features of a talk show as a mixed type of media discourse are less easily definable in strictly linguistic terms and therefore insights from an interdisciplinary approach may be required. On the other, it may also be due to the fact that there is a very wide range of talk shows (not to mention the unique nature of each individual instance of one and the same talk-show programme), which adds to the difficulty of identifying their distinctive features.1

The present analysis focuses on the salient aspects of the talk show as a mixed type of broadcast discourse, with specific reference to two American talk shows. The ensuing discussion, however, will concentrate on those findings which are representative for talk-show programmes in general. The type of talk show which is primarily the subject of this investigation is the one where celebrities and/or experts, as well as ordinary people are invited as show guests to discuss a topic on current issues of social and/or personal interest.2 The guests’ contributions represent a range of varying, sometimes even opposing perspectives, which are usually discussed argumentatively.

The talk show displays patterns of communicative and social behaviour which can be associated with more than one discourse type. For instance, judging by its intro-

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1 For example, unlike the three talk show programmes I examined, CNN’s Larry King live is conceived more like an entertaining and probing type of interview, on a one-to-one or one-to-two interactional pattern, with no studio audience and following a more regular questioning sequence.

2 Intra- and inter-cultural variations are worth examining in order to find further distinctions, but such an endeavour would go beyond the scope of the present analysis. British talk shows, such as Dame Edna and Kilroy, for example, exhibit certain features which may not necessarily be found in American talk shows, and vice versa. Most French counterparts of the talk show, such as Pivot’s Bouillon de culture, d’Arvor’s Ex-libris and Le cercle de minuit have a more intellectual bias and are appropriately called débats culturels télévisés, ‘broadcast cultural debates’. Above all, their goals are cultural, since these programmes do not only cover subjects and explore personalities, but evaluate texts and other cultural productions.
ductory and closing parts, a talk show can be regarded as a sort of entertainment programme, designed to be funny and easy-going. At the same time, judging by the recurring goal-oriented question–response sequences, a talk show may equally be considered to belong to the category of news interviews, insofar as it is expected to provide information concerning current social, political or moral issues, or of debate programmes, insofar as it encourages the exchange and confrontation of opinions. Because of their different ingredients, talk shows have often been referred to as a subcategory of 'infotainment'. However, when the talk show is seen to focus on topics concerning people's physical and mental health, it has more similarities with a doctor–patient dialogue and sometimes with a therapeutic dialogue. Moreover, judging by the considerable time devoted to casual and spontaneous dialogue, a considerable part of the talk show could very well fit in the frame of conversation. Whereas each of these types of discourse appears to share certain features with talk shows, it can hardly be said that any of them is more representative than the rest.

The distribution and sequential occurrence of moves and turn-takings, the functions of questions and responses occurring in the same turn or in separate turns, also reflect the mixed nature of this particular discourse type. For example, the question–response adjacency pairs, the feedback replies, the pronoun shifts, and the metalinguistic utterances that occur in talk shows acquire different discursive functions and varying degrees of argumentative values, depending on the discursive roles assigned to the speakers, on the discursive roles assumed by the speakers themselves in relation to the other participants, on the relevance of the topic to the individual participants, on their assumptions and expectations, as well as on the more or less controlling role of the show host, and on the reactions of the by-standing audience.³

The specific structure of the interactive patterns can be seen to reinforce the role-distribution in talk shows, although the latter appears less institutionalized than is the case in news interviews (Jucker, 1986; Greatbatch, 1986, 1988, 1992; Clayman, 1993; Heritage and Roth, 1995), doctor–patient dialogue (Mishler, 1975, 1984; Labov and Fanshel, 1977; Fisher and Todd, 1983; Frankel, 1990; Maynard, 1991; Fairclough, 1998; Ainsworth-Vaughn, 1994) and courtroom examinations (Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Woodbury, 1984; Harris, 1989; Watson, 1990; Drew, 1992; Ilie, 1994, 1995a). Although the show host is generally supposed to have control over the question-asking, the show guests are also entitled to ask questions and make non-elicited comments; in this way they are able to challenge the pre-established asymmetrical power relations. As a result, the relations between the hosts (presenters) and the guests (participants), on the one hand, and between the hosts and the audience, on the other, are constructed and re-constructed so as to involve new and unpredictable, sometimes even provoking, forms of interaction.

Is the talk show a modern revival of the classical art of conversation? How is the talk show related to everyday conversation? To what extent does talk–show dialogue reproduce current conversational patterns and to what extent does it create a new 'mediaspeak', i.e. a communication hybrid which exhibits certain characteristics of

³ In this article the newly introduced terms and emphasized phrases are italicized.
casual conversation, while gradually and inevitably affecting and influencing every-
day conversation? These are some of the preliminary questions, the answers to which
will help to account for some of the more specific aspects of this type of discourse.

2. Corpus

The corpus I have examined is made up of transcripts of several programmes of
two American talk shows: twenty programmes of the Oprah Winfrey show (broad-
casted by WLS-TV, Chicago, Illinois) and twenty programmes of the Geraldo Rivera
show (broadcasted by The Investigative News Group, New York). The transcripts
(from 1986, 1987 and 1988) were made available by Journal Graphics Inc. in New
York. The reason why I chose these particular talk shows is that, according to both
TV-viewers and media analysts, they seem to correspond to a generally held notion
about what the average talk show is like, rather than qualifying for the far end of the
scale, like the Ricki Lake show, or Jerry Springer show, for example, which are noto-
rious for the choice of controversial or taboo topics and the provoking or offensive
behaviour of certain show guests. An important criterion for the selection of the talk
shows has been the wide range of the topics discussed. The transcripts included in
my corpus exhibit some of the more common discursive features of a talk show ident-
tified below by the recurrence of certain interaction and behaviour patterns, the dis-
tribution of participant roles, broadcasting strategies and intended goals.

3. Aim and method of analysis

The talk show as an institutional practice can have endless forms of manifestation,
while it generally follows the same or similar communication and behaviour pat-
terns. As a broadcast discourse, it is analyzed in this study both as a media product
and as an ongoing talk-oriented process. My analysis is intended to highlight the
nature and functions of this increasingly popular type of programme. As we will see
below, the talk show is institutionally-defined, host-controlled, participant-shaped
and audience-evaluated.

The approach taken here draws on research in conversation analysis and discourse
analysis (Sacks et al., 1974; Tannen, 1984, 1992; Greatbatch, 1986, 1988; Schiffrin,
1994; Schegloff, 1995), pragmatics (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Lakoff, 1990; Ilie,
1994, 1998), critical linguistics (Garton et al., 1991; Fairclough, 1995a,b), philoso-
phy of language (Grice, 1975; Searle, 1995), anthropology and sociology/sociolin-
guistics (Goffman, 1974; Gumperz, 1982; Hymes, 1974; Trudgill, 1983), as well as
media and cultural studies (Hutchby, 1991; Scannel, 1991; Tolson, 1991; Living-
stone and Lunt, 1994). An exhaustive analysis of talk shows in terms of genre

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4 An extensive discussion of genre analysis of written texts as a multi-disciplinary activity is provided
by Bhatia (1993), who outlines an approach to the analysis of professional and academic discourse. He
also offers interesting observations concerning the cross-cultural variation in many genres, which he
would go beyond the scope of the present paper, since it would have to explore both Anglo-Saxon (British, American, etc.) and other cultural types of talk shows in an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural perspective. The same holds for the discussion of gender distinctions, which are reflected in various manifestations in different cultures and in different social groups.

In order to reveal the parallelism and overlap between the discursive and the linguistic constraints that a talk show has to comply with, the present study resorts to an analysis of global, or macrolevel structures, and local, or microlevel constituents. This analysis intends to show in what ways and to what extent discursive and linguistic features can mark ongoing talk conversationally and/or institutionally.

4. Conversation, discourse and institutional talk

Since conversation is the primary form of socialized human interaction, it pervades all the spheres and levels of communication, playing a major role in the activities performed in human communities. Conversation, in the sense of naturally occurring talk, has been analyzed not only empirically through formal description, but also theoretically with regard to the speakers’ commonly shared knowledge that underlies conversational competence through linguistic and social rules and conventions. Conversation analysis (CA) has been concerned with the various ways in which talk is structured and socially organized through the interactants’ joint coordination. Whereas at the beginning CA focused almost exclusively on ordinary conversation, it has gradually moved away towards other kinds of conversational environment. As has been pointed out by Drew and Heritage, “CA begins from a consideration of the interactional accomplishment of particular social activities” (1992: 17). The view taken in this study is that conversation should be regarded as one of the essential ingredients of any kind of talk-in-interaction.

According to current usage, the concept of ‘discourse’ without an article refers to language use, viz. seen simultaneously as “a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice” (Fairclough, 1998: 4). By contrast, the term ‘a discourse’ with an article refers to a “relatively discrete subset of a whole language used for specific social or institutional purposes” (McHoul, 1998: 225). In other words, discourse is regarded as interaction and action in society, as well as “a practical, social and cultural, phenomenon” (van Dijk, 1997: 2), since speakers interact as individuals, as members of social categories, groups, professions, societies and/or cultures.

Discourse in institutional encounters amounts to more than just the ongoing dialogue occurring in a certain institutional setting. It is important to emphasize that “through various details of their language use, participants orient to their respective institutional identities, roles and tasks in that setting” and that “participants’ institu-

claims can be used for a number of applied linguistic purposes. Oral forms of institutional discourse, such as talk shows, could be fruitfully examined by means of an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approach.
tional identities and roles are procedurally relevant for their talk” (Drew and Sorjonen, 1997: 111). Even informal, conversational patterns may become embedded in institutional discourse. According to Fairclough (1995a), institutional discourse is increasingly being conversationalized as a means for maintaining strategically the power differential between social groups.

This study proposes an interdisciplinary approach to the talk show discourse viewed as a particular instance of public spoken interaction, as a media event, and as a social practice. The subsequent analysis explores several discursive and linguistic aspects of the talk show as a co-constructed conversational and institutional activity, both shaping and being shaped by the social and cultural environment.

5. The socio-historical background of talk shows

Talk shows can be regarded as a particular kind of face-to-face conversation. Historically, the art of conversation has been the topic of prescriptive manuals on how to speak on particular occasions; however, as communication scholars have repeatedly shown, there are no universally and eternally valid rules for conducting a conversation: different cultures envisage and develop different speaking norms and ideals; also, different social groups within the same society may follow different rules for communication.

During the past few centuries, there emerged certain new types of socio-cultural settings for conversational interaction. These settings exhibit both public and private features and are manifested differently in different societies. According to Burke (1993: 114–115) sixteenth century Italy had the academy, a kind of discussion group for intellectuals, with fixed membership and fixed days for meetings. The seventeenth century saw the emergence of its French counterpart, the salon, a semi-formal social occasion organized by a hostess, normally once a week, for a mixture of ladies and men of letters. In England, the equivalent social institutions flourished in the eighteenth century in the form of the more informal coffee-house, the assembly and the club.

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5 Cf. Schegloff (1995): “whereas for many linguists and other students of language, conversation is one type or genre of discourse, for me discourse is, in the first instance, one kind of product of conversation, or of talk-in-interaction more generally. It can be a contingent product of participants in ordinary conversation, or it can be the designed product of a form of talk-in-interaction that is some systematic variant or transformation of ordinary conversation, like the interview or the lecture” (1995: 186).

6 According to Burke (1993: 95), the first treatise to use the word ‘conversation’ in its title was Stefano Guazzo’s La civil conversazione, i.e. ‘Civilized Conversation’, published in 1574, which discusses speaking as part of social relations. Long before that, Seneca used conversatio to mean approximately ‘intimacy’.

7 In a book edited by Charaudeau (1991), the interaction in French cultural talk shows, such as Apotrophes is referred to as conversation de salon, which points to a kind of continuity concerning the French salon tradition.

8 In connection with the English socializing institutions, Burke notes that “foreign visitors were surprised at the lack of conversation between ladies and gentlemen in England, and quite amazed at the way in which the sexes were segregated after dinner” (1993: 117).
The *talk show* can be regarded as a modern Anglo-Saxon version of the above types of conversation occurring in semi-institutionalized socio-cultural practices. A caveat is in order: despite its globalization due to satellite technology and the international domination of English-speaking media (resulting in obvious similarities between British and American talk shows, regarded as socially and culturally derived practices), there are also a number of obvious distinctions (even the referring terms are different: the equivalent of the American talk show is the British ‘chat show’). As Scannell points out, “in the British case, there has been a significant shift in the communicative ethos of broadcasting from an earlier authoritarian model to a more populist and democratic manner and style” (1991: 10). Livingstone and Lunt observe that:

“It is probably true that American broadcasting has always been more populist and conversational, having fewer elitist, Reithian restrictions on who is allowed to speak and who, supposedly, is worth hearing.” (1994: 5)9

Furthermore, significant cultural differences between a British show host, such as Kilroy, and an American show host, such as Oprah, as to their role as ‘therapist’ have been identified by Masciarotte (1991) and Livingstone and Lunt (1994):

“Kilroy ... sympathetically puts his arm around people, speaking in a lowered voice and maintaining steady eye contact. He uses a range of therapeutic interventions: asking questions ...; challenging emotions ...; putting interpretations to people ...; restating a story in analytic terms ...; provoking people into helping themselves ... Oprah uses confrontation as a therapeutic technique: supposedly, as at Alcoholics Anonymous, everyone confesses and then feels better. Secrets must come out, hypocrisy must be revealed, putting a brave face on things is emotionally destructive.” (1994: 64–65)

Both British and American talk shows seem to have emerged as a public extension of the private sphere of casual conversation, thus bridging the gap between the public conditions of the media and the private conditions of the consumers. As a result, a ‘public-colloquial’ language (Leech, 1966) has developed, which is modelled in varying ways upon the practices of conversational speech, through a process of ‘conversationalization’ of public discourse (Fairclough, 1995a).

As has been emphasized by Bhatia (1993), the participants in a certain type of interaction must comply with its basic rules and conventions. However, we should bear in mind that there are definitely personal, as well as intra- and inter-cultural variations in the way a talk show is staged, carried out and finally rated. A number of studies on American talk shows have focused to a large extent on the beliefs and conversational practices of American culture (Carbaugh, 1988; Munson, 1993; Peck, 1994; Priest, 1995; Priest and Dominick, 1994).

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9 In addition, the settings of the talk shows appear to differ as well: “First, the guests or experts and lay studio audience sit together (typical of British programmes such as Kilroy, *The time, The place*) and experts are singled out only insofar as they are seated in the front row and are identified by a visual label. Alternatively, the experts and guests are placed on a stage and faced with a studio audience as in the American programmes the *Oprah Winfrey show* and *The Donahue show*” (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 39). A case in point is the *Oprah Winfrey show*, the popularity of which often tends to trigger rather extreme commentaries, either eulogistic (Haag 1993) or condemnatory (Abt and Seesholtz, 1994).
Three major subcategories of talk shows can be distinguished on American television, according to the time of the day when they are broadcast: early morning talk shows, e.g. the Ricki Lake show, daytime talk shows, e.g. the Oprah Winfrey show and the Geraldo Rivera show, and late night talk shows, e.g. the Late night with David Letterman show. The daytime talk shows enjoy tremendous popularity for several reasons. First, the topics discussed are very challenging, trying to come to grips with highly problematic and controversial, but widely shared, concerns about current issues in the public and in the private sphere: social and professional conflicts, marginalization, feminism, homosexuality, etc. Second, the broadcast dialogue triggers self-reflective thoughts in the audience about their own feelings and attitudes, such as anger, hope, fear, inhibition.

Current trends indicate that talk television is growing rapidly and is becoming ever more diversified. The ratings for these shows continue to be impressive, with Oprah Winfrey the acknowledged front runner. After a period during which American show hosts were intensively involved in a race in search of the most outrageous, shocking and taboo topics for talk show which were supposed to signal acceptance for all extreme behaviour, the general tendency at present is to redress the balance by reinforcing long standing ethical values, by highlighting the moral dimensions of the stories discussed, and by openly discarding immoral or socially unacceptable acts and attitudes.

Alongside with this reorientation of talk shows, a totally new concept of broadcast talk has been launched two years ago by Oprah Winfrey, who started a televised Book-of-the-Month Club. Her main aim has been ‘to get the whole country reading again’. The appreciation of this initiative has been overwhelming: “Only Oprah could use television to convince people to turn off the TV set and read. In just six months, Oprah has done more to combat illiteracy in America than Barbara Bush or Hillary Clinton were able to accomplish in four years” (The San Francisco Chronicle, 21 April, 1997). A similar clublike television programme started in Sweden recently. It is called Röda rummet (‘The red room’), which is the title of August Strindberg’s famous autobiographical novel. Doesn’t this look like a glorious time travel back to the historical origins of the talk show, namely the academy or the salon, the goal of which was mainly the enlightenment-cum-entertainment of the participants?

6. The institutional vs. non-institutional/conversational nature of talk shows

The fact that the talk show does not represent a homogeneous discourse type is also reflected in the different and, sometimes, contradictory expectations, responses and interpretations of the audience and of the analysts alike. The controversial aspects of talk shows are closely related to their non-homogeneous nature. They are often intended as instantiations of several discourse types at the same time, i.e. information and entertainment (‘infotainment’, see below), news interview, debate, therapy session, classroom dialogue, celebrity interviews, as well as casual conversation. Within the discourse types mentioned above, talk shows exhibit varying degrees of similarities and differences.
Even though the talk show does not pretend to be mainly or exclusively *entertainment oriented*, it does intend, on the one hand, to be fun and trigger laughter, just like a surrogate comedy or sitcom, while on the other, it is expected to provide excitement and a sense of real-life drama. The hilarious, melodramatic, embarrassing or implausible situations that are the source of laughter and emotional involvement in talk shows are definitely expected, even though many of them are probably not pre-scheduled, but tend to occur spontaneously and are not inserted in specially reserved time-slots. The members of the audience are expected both to commiserate with the sad or regrettable experiences of victimized people, and to condemn, or take a critical attitude towards, cases of morally questionable or antisocial behaviour. And no matter how improbable or absurd, the cases and issues discussed in talk shows are somehow taken more seriously than the plots of fictional TV stories, such as soap operas, for example.

To the extent to which they provide entertainment and information, talk shows can very well be regarded as examples of *infotainment*. As a rule, information is provided either directly, simply by breaking the news or by advertising a product, event, etc., or indirectly, by means of the interviewing technique. Like *news interviews*, talk shows exhibit more often than not question-answer sequences, the interviewer being the show host, while the interviewee or respondent is usually a show guest, a member of the studio audience or a calling-in TV-viewer. But, unlike interviews proper, talk shows are not strictly information-focused and do not claim maximum objectivity and impartiality either, since they do not rule out the personal and even emotional involvement of both the questioner and the respondent. Moreover, the questioning process is sometimes interrupted in talk shows by evaluations of answers or by side-comments made by the show host or even by the participants. In such instances, the talk shows display a discursive frame which is similar to *debate programmes*.

The talk show has also occasionally been compared to a *therapy session* because it provides an opportunity for some participants to give an account of their personal problems, physical, mental or social, and to be subsequently confronted with reactions and suggestions. However, unlike therapy sessions, which are confidential, one-to-one conversations between the patient and the therapist, talk shows are not concerned with individual therapeutic counselling, as they basically consist of audience-oriented talk.

Since a major purpose of talk shows is to get people to speak out and to create public awareness about current problems, the show host can often be seen to act as a therapist, by listening, as well as asking for and offering advice. What is perhaps less obvious is whether the therapy-like procedure of a talk show targets the person(s) undergoing the questioning or the wider audience of TV-viewers, or even – why not? – the show host him/herself.

Due to the highly authoritative role of the show host and the asymmetrical distribution of power between the host and the other participants, the talk show can also be compared to *classroom dialogue* (Blum-Kulka, personal communication). Like a teacher, the show host is partly expected to fulfil an educational function too, insofar as the life stories elicited and the individual cases presented during the show are supposed to represent instructive examples (good or bad) to be discussed. The show
host feels entitled to provide the bottom line of every story, and in doing so, to give a moral evaluation. However, unlike what is the case in classroom interaction, the talk show has no ambition to systematically check or grade the participants' knowledge or competence; rather, it provides some general guidelines. What talk shows do share with classroom dialogue is the fact that both the show host's and the teacher's authority may occasionally be called into question.

Like casual conversation, the talk show dialogue sometimes takes place in a private setting, as in the case of certain pre-filmed scenes in show guests' homes. However, even when it takes place in a TV studio, the talk show dialogue can be occasionally less topic-centred and more unpredictable when it occurs between participants well acquainted with each other, e.g. friends, relatives, etc. At the same time, such instances of dialogue are based on more symmetrical relations between the participants and on non-hierarchical role distribution.

Conversation, which was defined by Schegloff as a 'minimally two-party' activity (1972: 379), is often associated with a clearly stated rule for conversation, i.e. one party at a time:

"The strength of this rule can be seen in the fact that in a multi-party setting (more precisely, where there are four or more), if more than one person is talking, it can be claimed not that the rule has been violated, but that more than one conversation is going on." (Schegloff, 1972: 350)

Emphasizing the private nature of the conversational interaction, Edmondson (1981) contrasts it with oratory or 'public speaking', to which he refers as 'purposeful talk'. It is nevertheless difficult to draw a clearcut line between the public and the private sphere in certain contexts. Wilson (1989) suggests that conversation may be delimited by considering the relative distribution of speaking rights within particular contexts and that the various types of verbal interaction should be considered in relation to their deviation from conversational norms. However, as he shows later on, no clearcut boundaries can be established, since "conversation, like many other sociolinguistic concepts, is not a discrete phenomenon" (1989: 4). Hence, Wilson's discussion is mainly based on some commonly acknowledged characteristics of conversational and institutional discourse, and their similarities and differences.

To a certain extent, the talk show exhibits several similarities with casual conversation and can therefore be regarded as a subtype of conversational discourse. However, since at the same time it is obviously rule-governed and delimited by specific constraints, the talk show can be equally regarded as a subtype of institutional discourse. It seems therefore reasonable to consider the talk show as a mixed discourse which integrates non-institutional, i.e. conversational, characteristics into a hybrid type of institutional discourse. Consequently, I propose the term semi-institutional discourse as appropriate to refer to the talk show as a socio-cultural practice marked by a particular participant configuration and well-established conventions, as well as by spontaneous interventions and unpredictable outcomes.

Institutional discourse represents a continuum including a range of varieties, some of which are more, some less institutionalized. Thus, the news interview can be regarded as a more institutionalized discourse type than the talk show, because it appears to be more constrained by institutional role-distribution and turn pre-alloca-
tion and less prone to spontaneous interventions. Unlike the talk-show host, who, alongside his/her role as a moderator, is often expected to play the roles of entertainer, moralizer, adviser, therapist, arbiter and interlocutor, thereby revealing, deliberately or non-deliberately, certain sides of his/her personality, preferences, etc., the news interviewer is supposed to assume a strictly institutional role, i.e. to be detached and objective, and to keep his/her personal opinions and preferences out of the institutional interaction. This partly explains why talk shows (in contrast to most interviews) are always marked by the personal touch of the show host.

7. Conversationally vs. institutionally shaped features of talk shows

The dialogue in a talk show exhibits the features of semi-institutional discourse in that it may acquire a more institutional or a more conversational character depending on the contextual interaction between discursive and linguistic factors, embodied respectively in features that shape a talk show globally, and features that shape a talk show locally. In the following sections, this dual nature of the talk show will be discussed in terms of these two categories of features: discursive and linguistic. In general, it is not possible to draw a sharp dividing line between the conversational and institutional aspects of talk shows: conversational talk often acquires certain institutional characteristics, while conversely, institutional talk may exhibit a more conversational character. As far as the discursive vs. linguistic features are concerned, linguistic constraints that are normally respected in conversational discourse are often violated in talk shows in order to allow for particular discursive practices to develop in an institutional setting; conversely, linguistic constraints that are normally complied with in institutional discourse are violated in order to make room for conversational practices. Nevertheless, there are a number of features shared by both conversational and institutional discourses in talk shows; for instance, the length of one's speaking turn and the turn-taking slot are not fixed in advance and may be negotiated during the interaction process.

The following subsections are devoted to some of the most salient common features of the talk show, seen as a semi-institutional discourse, oscillating between the poles of conversation and institutional dialogue: spontaneous vs. purposeful talk (7.1), negotiated vs. monitored topic and turn-taking (7.2), real-life roles vs. institutional roles (7.3), and finally interlocutor-oriented talk vs. message-oriented talk and

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10 The data analyzed by Heritage and Roth (1995) support the view that interviewers have precise goal-oriented interactional and institutional tasks charged to modern interviews:

"First, and most centrally, interviewers are obliged to elicit interviewees' information and opinions for the benefit of overhearers .... Second, in most Western societies, interviewers are specifically not authorized to argue with, debate, or criticize the interviewee's point of view, nor, conversely, to agree with, support, or defend it." (1995:1)

In view of the strict delimitation of its institutional goals and of the interviewer's strictly neutral role, a news interview can be seen as more constrained than a talk show, not only by the time-limit; the institutional norms and requirements concerning objectivity, truth and evidence make it less suitable for personal observations and spontaneous interventions.
multiple audience-oriented talk (7.4). Each of these subsections will deal with the characteristics of a particular discursive feature and its pragma-linguistic realizations. A brief summary of the whole section is presented in 7.5.

7.1. Spontaneous vs. purposeful talk

Conversation is typically *spontaneous*, whereas institutional discourse is commonly defined in terms of *purposeful* talk. Also, as has already been pointed out, casual conversation normally belongs to a private setting, and takes place between minimally two persons who do not act primarily in any official or public role. However, spontaneous talk may occur on and off in semi-institutional discourse too, its length and significance depending on the host’s personality and strategy, as well as on the personality, status and involvement of the guests (see further details in section 8). Thus, a conversation-like dialogue may occasionally take place between the show host and one of the show guests, as in (1) below:

(1) Nordine: But did you ever notice that from the school’s perspective there ain’t no such thing as bad teachers, there’s only lousy parents? And when they can’t do their job in the schools, then they call mom and daddy and say, ‘What are you going to do to make this kid learn?’

Oprah: But a lot of times the reason why they cannot do their jobs in the schools is because the parents are not doing their jobs at home.

Nordine: *Not true. I don’t believe that*. Oprah, I don’t believe that.

Oprah: ... But in some cases, discipline, in knowing how to discipline – I’m certainly not advocating beating your children; please don’t think I’m doing that – but in some cases some children need stronger discipline than others. (The *Oprah Winfrey show*, ‘Parents of problem children’, 24 December, 1986)

Whereas Oprah temporarily steps out of her institutional role as show host in (1) above and starts arguing in favour of her personal viewpoint in (1) above, the guest treats Oprah as if she were an interlocutor with equal speaking rights, as when she disagrees with Oprah’s claims, without feeling compelled to provide any counter-arguments for an overhearing audience. Such instances of conversational exchange occur with no planning whatsoever. Moreover, this conversational pattern clearly deviates from a typically institutional host-monitored discussion in that there are no purposeful question-response pairs, as illustrated in (2) below:

(2) Geraldo: Andy, ever steal from your parents?

Andy G.: Yeah.

Geraldo: What’d you steal?

Andy G.: Money.

Geraldo: How old are you?

Andy G.: Sixteen.

Geraldo: How old were you when you started?
Andy G.: Twelve.
Geraldo: What’d you start on?
Andy G.: I started on marijuana and alcohol and I ... (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘An anatomy of an addict’, 5 May, 1988)

Worth noting in (2) is that Geraldo ‘asks all the questions’, due to the fact that, by convention, the show host is endowed with the institutional authority to control the interaction, whereas Andy acts in his real-life, i.e. non-institutional, role. Following a question–answer turn-taking pattern, the questions in (2) above comply with the information-eliciting requirements of institutional interrogation, since they trigger, for the benefit of the audience, relevant information about the guest. By contrast, Nordine’s first questions in (1) do not appear to elicit either information or answers. They are meant to supply or recycle information assumed to be known, and to highlight specific viewpoints that are relevant to the ongoing talk. These questions function rhetorically in that they convey an indirect statement rather than elicit an answer.

On account of their institutional functions, questions such as Geraldo’s in (2) above can be looked upon as institutionally framed questions, whereas questions such as Nordine’s in (1) can be regarded as conversationally framed questions. While conversationally framed questions are not necessarily followed by answers, institutionally framed questions represent more often than not the first element of question–answer adjacency pairs. The fact that Oprah does not attempt to answer Nordine’s questions provides further evidence that the guest’s questions are not perceived as information-eliciting, but rather as argument-eliciting, i.e. prompting an argumentative discussion (Ilie, 1999). The addressee is expected to recognize and agree with, or else reject, the challenge of the question rather than to supply an answer.

By their utterances, the participants in a conversation try to achieve jointly not only communicative goals, but also certain interactional goals. A speaker wants the interlocutor to align him/herself with the interactional goal(s) proposed; the same goes, mutatis mutandis, for the interlocutor. By the mutual alignment of their contributions, the conversationalists try to arrive at a result that is as acceptable as possible to all those concerned; this interactional goal is a characteristic that institutional dialogue shares with conversational dialogue. At the same time, unlike conversational dialogue, institutional dialogue is also intended to achieve certain institutional goals, for example, by means of consistent question–answer sequences. These goals presuppose generally that the dialogue itself and its result(s) concern not only the interactants involved: they are of general interest and are meant to have an effect on the outside world. Whereas interactional goals tend to be internal to the dialogue, institutional goals can be regarded as external to the dialogue. The institutional goals of talk shows are meant to accomplish a deliberate socializing and an educational function, by influencing, reinforcing or challenging opinions, by addressing social groups, professional groups, age groups, etc, in order to bring about an increased awareness about current issues. Such goals are often expressed explicitly, as in (3) and (4) below:
(3) Oprah:  ... Well, today we’re going to find out what both men and women are doing to turn off potential relationships; if sex too soon is going to ruin your chances for another date, and how you should get on the first encounter to ensure a second encounter. For all of you here and out there going through dating agony – in our office we call it dating hell – we are going to get some answers on how to get out of dating hell today. (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘The dating hell’, 2 February, 1987)

(4) Geraldo:  ... In this program’s continuing effort to understand and to fight the national drug epidemic, an anatomy of an addict is our focus on this edition of Geraldo. (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘An anatomy of an addict’, 5 May, 1988)

Prototypical examples of institutional goal-oriented discourse are news interviews, courtroom interrogations and public debates, all of which represent question-fueled types of interaction. Their institutional goals can often be seen to influence the linguistic behaviour of the participants in institutional discourse: they have to act in specific roles, to follow well-defined rules, and to use mostly conventional language, as illustrated in the following example (5), selected from the transcripts of the debates in the House of Commons:

(5) Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. It is time for our next debate: Wildlife

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): I am pleased to have the opportunity to raise the issue of wildlife protection and in particular the current state of many of our sites of special scientific interest – SSSIs. The debate is most relevant to my constituency. I have received a number of letters from constituents as a number of extremely important Cornish SSSIs are under threat. (Hansard Debates, 14 April, 1999, 11 am, Column 161)

The institutional prerequisites of the talk show itself underpin its situational, as well as discursive constraints. Situationally, the talk show is expected to take place in a particular setting (monitored by a whole team of professional people with the help of technical devices) while addressing a multiple audience, and discursively to comply with several talk-related restrictions: time restrictions (the discussion is monitored and periodically interrupted by the host for commercial breaks), speaker selection restrictions, and turn-taking restrictions (the host is primarily responsible for selecting the next speaker and for orchestrating the turn-taking sequences). Such situational and discursive demarcations do not apply to conversational interaction, which may take place in any situation, non-institutional or institutional.

Since it is the show hosts that have the institutional authority to control the show, it is up to them to announce the start of the programme, as illustrated in (6) and (7) below, or the end of the programme, as illustrated in (8) below, as well as preface the commercial breaks, as illustrated in (9) and (10) below:
(6) Geraldo: Meet Roberta Rolfe. The good people of Wichita know her best as Broadway Bobbie, that city's most famous prostitute. ... People who have survived X-rated pasts, they're the focus of this edition of Geraldo. (The Geraldo Rivera show, 'People who have survived X-rated pasts', 15 June, 1988)

(7) Oprah: Hi, everybody. I'm Oprah Winfrey. What do you do when your husband decides you're getting too old, and he needs a younger, prettier little thing? How do you cope if your husband leaves you for someone who is your daughter's age, and how can you deal with a man who is obsessed with younger women? Later in the show we're going to meet women whose husbands have left them for younger women, and talk to an expert who's going to tell you how to hopefully keep your man - tie him down. (The Oprah Winfrey show, 'Men obsessed with younger women', 25 March, 1988)

(8) Geraldo: Before I say goodnight, I want to quickly thank our guests. ... Unlike most other killer diseases, cancer for example, AIDS is almost totally avoidable. If you abstain from sex, as the Reverend Falwell suggests, if you're in a monogamous relationship with someone you are sure of, or if you practice safe sex, then forget about AIDS. Your chances of catching it are about the same as your hitting the lottery or getting hit by lightning. ... So, what's modern love? It's part passion and pleasure, as always, consideration and condoms, moderation and morality. I'm Geraldo Rivera. We'll see you next time. Pop, I love you. Good night, everybody. (The Geraldo Rivera show, Modern love, 1 December, 1987)

A wide range of institutional strategies are generally used by hosts to mark the beginning of the show. The most common and straightforward way is to greet the audience and introduce oneself, as Oprah does in (7) above. An alternative way is to introduce a keynote guest by means of whom to preface the announcement of the show topic, as Geraldo does in (6) above. The most usual way to end a talk show is to thank the guests and the audience, sometimes also to sum up the major points of the preceding discussion, as in (8) above. The speech acts used, such as the ones in (6), (7) and (8), bring about the very institutional facts that they verbalize, as has been shown by Searle (1969).

As mentioned above, the timing constraints imposed on the talk show are reflected not only in the precisely timed beginnings and closings, but also in the recurring breaks due to the institutionally managed commercials. Show hosts use a non-standardized, but limited range of specific performative utterances when introducing the commercial breaks and resuming the show, as illustrated by Oprah's and Geraldo's pre- and post-commercial address to the audience in (9) and (10) below:

(9) Oprah: Yes, thank you. So, we'll be back in a moment, back in a moment. [Commercial break]
Oprah: We’re talking today about why older men prefer younger women. I understand you’re 75, sir? (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Men obsessed with younger women’, 25 March, 1988)

(10) Geraldo: Your business. Okay. You can tell us about your business and some of your clients specifically. We have to take this break, then we’ll be right back.

[Commercial break]

Geraldo: Welcome back. Our focus, female private eyes. … (The Geraldo Rivera show, Female private eyes, 19 July, 1988)

Fairclough’s ‘principle of interdiscursivity’ has proved useful when analyzing and comparing the conversational and the institutional features of talk shows. His definition of the term stipulates that “interdiscursivity is a matter of how a discourse type is constituted through a combination of elements of orders of discourse” (1998: 118). In his discussion of heterogeneous texts, Fairclough distinguishes between three types of intertextuality: the alternation of texts or discourse types within a text/discourse, i.e. ‘sequential intertextuality’; the containment of one text or discourse type within the matrix of another, i.e. ‘embedded intertextuality’; and the merging of texts or discourse types into a more complex and less easily separable way, i.e. ‘mixed intertextuality’. As to talk shows, they typically display embedded and mixed interdiscursivity between conversational and institutional discourse. Their semi-institutional nature is largely based on embedding conversational discourse into institutional discourse. Instances of mixed interdiscursivity between conversational/interactional goals, on the one hand, and institutional goals, on the other, are particularly apparent in those talk shows where the show host is better acquainted with the show guest with whom s/he then can engage in casual conversation. In such cases, the conversational interaction can be casual and purposeful at the same time, as illustrated below in the dialogue between Oprah Winfrey and the actor Tom Selleck:

(11) Oprah: A lot of women are still wearing black armbands since you married, yeah. And you say ‘Tough, tough’.  
T Selleck: Well, it was time.  
Oprah: I’ll talk – when you – we’re going to take a break and let you have some tea, and  
T Selleck: With honey and lemon.  
Oprah: And honey and lemon, and clear your voice, and I want to know why you married.  
T Selleck: You do, huh?  
Oprah: I want to know. And he’s going to tell us, in a moment. We’ll be right back. Hmm-mmm. (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Celebrity sit around – Tom Selleck and Ted Danson’, 23 November, 1987)

In the dialogue in (11) above it is difficult to draw a line between the strictly institutional and the strictly conversational elements in Oprah’s and Selleck’s turns,
respectively. This typical instance of mixed interdiscursivity is one of the major characteristics of the talk show as semi-institutional discourse.

The interactional and linguistic features illustrated in this section serve to set apart the talk show from other types of conversational discourse, institutional or non-institutional, with respect to talk spontaneity, on the one hand, and purposefulness, on the other. Through their recurring conversational exchanges talk shows pursue non-institutional goals, namely communicative and interactional goals. At the same time, due to their high proportion of institutional interaction, talk shows display a number of institutional goals, which are meant to accomplish a deliberate socializing and educational function, by influencing, reinforcing or challenging opinions. The institutional goals are pursued mainly by means of institutionally framed questions, while the conversational goals are pursued mainly by means of conversationally framed questions.

The institutional prerequisites of the talk show itself underpin its situational, as well as discursive constraints. The discursive constraints imposed on the talk show are reflected not only in the precisely timed beginnings and closings, but also in the recurring breaks. Situationally, the talk show participants have to comply with several talk-related restrictions, which do not apply to casual conversation: time restrictions (due to the insertion of commercial breaks, for example), speaker selection restrictions (host monitored speaking slots) and turn-taking restrictions (host monitored length of speaking turns, for example). Apart from the partially consistent sequences of question–answer adjacency pairs with host controlled turn-taking, talk shows also display unplanned, but not unexpected, contributions to the discussion by members of the audience.

A wide range of institutional strategies are generally used by hosts to mark the beginning and the end of the show. The topic/goal announcements are made institutionally explicit by means of direct or indirect introductory host-presentations.

Summing up, we can say that the semi-institutional nature of talk shows is discursively manifested by instances of embedded and mixed interdiscursivity between conversational and institutional discourse.

7.2. Negotiated vs. monitored topic and turn-taking

In general, casual conversation does not follow a pre-established direction and its topics and subtopics have to be negotiated by the interactants as the talk progresses. Conversational topic shifts follow a more or less predetermined, but not exactly timed, topic schedule. As an institutionally structured speech event and media product, the talk show appears to be slightly more predictable than casual conversation. Since the talk show is a time-limited speech event, the major discussion topics are pre-established, introduced and controlled by the show host. The active participants are assigned beforehand, the talk is simultaneously intended for the onlooking studio audience and for the overhearing audience, i.e. the TV-viewers. However, although a talk show exhibits a high degree of topic predictability with a high degree of talk control, there is also a certain unpredictability about the ensuing subtopics, as in
casual conversation, where talk control is relatively weak. In talk shows, as compared to casual conversation, topic shifts may either exhibit a higher or a lower degree of predictability. From this point of view, conversational talk and broadcast talk have a lot more in common than may be apparent at first sight. This aspect was first pointed out by Goffman (1974):

"Actual informal face-to-face conversation (‘natural talk’) would seem to provide a sharp contrast both to dramatic scriptings and fabrications, yet here, too, the concealment channel plays a part. Participants will almost always be obliged to exert some tact, and this work, of course, relies on an evidential boundary – in this case whatever it is that ‘real’ thoughts and feelings are hidden behind … even ordinary talk is something of a construction." (1974: 217)

Although conversation may often be regarded as lacking a specific agenda, it can very well be topic-oriented, as pointed out by Ervin-Tripp:

"When conversations have an explicit message with informational content, they can be said to have a topic. ‘What are you talking about?’ ‘Nothing.’ ‘Gossip.’ ‘Shop talk.’ ‘The weather.’ ‘The war.’" (1972: 243)

In other words, spontaneity in conversation is compatible with certain contextually justified expectations and topic predictability, as in ritual exchanges within culture-bound frames, such as extending an invitation, offering a drink, etc.

Like institutional discourse in general, talk shows typically take place under the control of a moderator, the show host, who is monitoring most of the conversation by asking questions and by making comments. This control is motivated by institutional agenda constraints and is manifested by explicitly conveyed topic/subtopic selection, as illustrated in (12), below, and by host-controlled topic/subtopic shift, as illustrated in (13) below:

(12) Oprah: Let’s start by talking about these things that I mentioned earlier. First I want to talk about telephones. Some of the Gleason family are represented here. What was life like in your house with the telephones? Go to the mikes, please. (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Large families’, 11 March, 1988)

(13) Geraldo: So, is weight loss the goal then, or is it just kind of molding what you have? I mean, tell me.
Aud.memb: No, it’s not really weight loss, but it’s maintaining a weight that you are known at …
Geraldo: Is it a big business?
Aud.memb: Very big. Now, yeah … Yeah, because – I don’t know if it’s an offshoot from the women’s movement, but women are starting to feel that … they should still feel good about themselves. They are doing a fantastic thing and they should deserve beautiful clothes and to be able to look good and feel good about themselves. So, it’s kind of a reinforcement of that idea.
Geraldo: Terrific. It looks great on you. I want to get back to Walter just a second before we go to the commercial. Walter, the last time you got out of your house, what were you doing?


Like in casual conversation, the communicative interaction in a talk show can sometimes exhibit unpredictability in terms of turn-taking, topic initiation and discursive role-assumption. One aspect which has been less highlighted in the literature so far is the fact that the authority of the show host is not absolute; the show guests themselves may also initiate a turn without necessarily being prompted by the host, as in (14) below:

(14) Dr. Allen: ... See, kids need to hear two things. “no” a lot more often, and they also need to hear, ‘I believe you, and I care enough to say no’.

Nordine: Oprah, you may remember, I went through a not real pleasant childhood, of poverty, [...] (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Parents of problem children’, 24 December, 1986)

Another aspect of control in institutional discourse involves imposing systematic restrictions, both on the topics and on the range of options that normally operate in casual conversation. Focusing on the distinctive features of institutional interaction, Heritage observes:

“These narrowings and respecifications [of institutional discourse] are conventional in character: they are culturally variable, they are sometimes subject to legal constraints, they are discursively justifiable and justified by reference to considerations of task, equity, efficiency, etc., in ways that mundane conversational practices manifestly are not. Associated with these conventions are differing participation frameworks (Goffman, 1974), with their associated rights and obligations, different footings and differential patterns of opportunity and power.” (1989: 34)

Insights obtained in an investigation of argumentative questioning in political speeches and courtroom cross-examinations (Ilie, 1994, 1995a), as well as in parliamentary debates (Ilie, 1995b) show several ways in which rule-governed types of interaction are seen to exhibit instances of talk-control. These findings can provide a frame of reference for the assessment of the social structuring performed by means of semi-institutional discourse, such as talk shows, since “in institutional facts language is not only descriptive but constitutive of reality” (Searle, 1995: 120).

Linguistically, interruptions and repetitions are recurring features of oral interaction and they may acquire different functions in conversational and in institutional dialogue. As we know from everyday experience, a speaker engaged in ordinary conversation may interrupt his/her interlocutor in order to convey an objection to, but sometimes also to acknowledge or support the latter’s statement. These two types of interruptions may occur in talk shows too, as illustrated in (15) below:

(15) Selleck: Oh, I had – I’ve known Jilly four years, and you think about it, and things evolve, and I felt it was time, and I thought she felt it was
time. And we decided that it'd be better sooner than later, because we were talking about it anyway. And we did it kind of impromptu and quietly, because that –

Oprah: Yeah, quietly, it’s on the cover of every –
T.Selleck: No, no, no, we did it quietly where we lasted five weeks without anybody knowing about it.
Oprah: Oh, really? That’s great.
T.Selleck: And we did that because we feel that what’s between two people is between two people, and we wanted some sort of privacy [...] But in relation to being in the public eye and getting married, it was the best way I wanted to do it.
Oprah: Because you didn’t want helicopters and press and –
T.Selleck: I didn’t want helicopters … (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Celebrity sit around – Tom Selleck and Ted Danson’, 23 November, 1987)

Oprah’s first interruption in (15) above signals her disagreement with Selleck’s statement, namely that his wedding did not exactly pass unnoticed, since it was reported on the cover of every magazine. Her second interruption, however, signals her alignment and underlying agreement, with Selleck’s preceding statement, which is confirmed by his repetition of her words.

In talk shows it is generally more frequent for the host to interrupt the guests than the other way round, as illustrated in (16) below.

(16) Nelson: That’s why we have so many problems. See, I think that the best way to –
Oprah: Wait, wait. Suppose you just decide, just you, just up and decide you want to have a little rumble tussle game on the floor, and you don’t want to plan that. So when the game is over do you have to reason with a six-year-old and a three-year-old, or do you say, ‘The game is over. Go to bed’?

The show host’s interruptions may fulfil both conversational and institutional functions. Their typically institutional function is to mark topic/subtopic shifts, as in (16) above. Oprah, like other show hosts, sometimes interrupts the show guests due to time and/or agenda constraints, but also for argumentative purposes. In pursuing the institutional goals of the talk show, the host has to take into consideration the guests’ digressions as well as interruptions. Certain guests can be seen to conversationally interrupt other participants, including the host, as illustrated in (17) and (18) below.

(17) Taki: That’s how it starts.
Pfeifer: Yeah, that’s how it – that’s how it starts, absolutely.
Taki: Oprah, if you go – if I may interrupt, if you go to the south of France, the Riviera, as you call it, in the summer, you’ll see com-
pletely the opposite side. You’ll see a hell of a lot of older women with young men. (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Men obsessed with younger women’, 25 March, 1988)

(18) Oprah: So, wait a minute, what you are telling me is, you don’t want a woman who’s smart, who’s –
Taki: Have you ever noticed, you’ve noticed a hell of a lot of smart –
Pfeifer: No, I like them dumb.
Taki: No, wait a minute, wait, hang on, Oprah, Oprah, hang on. Have you noticed – Oprah –
Oprah: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. What did you say, what did you say, what did you say?
Aud. mem.: Unbelievable.

In (17) above, Taki prefaces his interruption metadiscursively, with ‘if I may interrupt’. Interruptions can also be discursively signalled by repetitions, as in Taki’s turn in (18) above. Taki first interrupts Oprah, who is addressing Pfeifer. Since this intervention is not acknowledged, Taki makes a second attempt at interrupting the interaction between Oprah and Pfeifer, which is equally unsuccessful. Oprah, on the other hand, succeeds in interrupting Taki by means of the repetitive ‘yeah’ in order to give the floor to a member of the audience.

Forms of repetitions in spoken interaction can be identified according to several criteria. Particularly relevant to the study of talk monitoring is the distinction in terms of the source of repetition, namely between self-repetition (repetition of one’s own words) and allo-repetition (repetition of the interlocutor’s words). Several functions of allo-repetitions in conversation have been discussed by Tannen (1992). Some of these functions can be attributed to the repetitions that occur in my own corpus. Consider again example (18) above. Oprah’s allo-repetition of the audience member’s word ‘unbelievable’ is obviously intended not to interrupt, but to express ‘participatory listenership’ (showing acknowledgement and acceptance of the interlocutor’s phrase), on the one hand, and ‘ratifying listenership’ (incorporating the interlocutor’s phrase in one’s own discourse), on the other (cf. Tannen, 1992). In the context of the talk show, this kind of repetition accommodates a conversational strategy to an institutional framework. Even self-repetitions, like Oprah’s ‘yeah’ in (18) above, may acquire institutional functions. In this case, they are meant to interrupt the interlocutor in order to signal the host’s turn-taking.

As illustrated above, there are particular discursive and linguistic features that distinguish the talk show from other types of conversational discourse, institutional or non-institutional, with respect to topic negotiation and topic control. The major discussion topics are institutionally pre-established, introduced and controlled by the show host. However, in spite of the high topic predictability of talk shows, there is also a certain conversation-like unpredictability in terms of turn-taking and subtopic initiation, as in casual conversation, where talk control is relatively weak. As a rule,
conversational topic shifts follow a less predetermined and not exactly timed, topic schedule.

To sum up, explicit metalinguistic and referential frames, such as question asking and informative or evaluative comments, are used by the show host for the management of institutional topic selection and topic shift. The show host makes sometimes use of implicit strategies to mark topic shifts and next speaker selection, often due to time and agenda constraints. For example, interruptions and repetitions are recurring conversational and institutional features in talk shows and they acquire different discursive functions. Interruptions can be discursively or metadiscursively signalled. The show host’s repetitions can be self-repetitions or allo-repetitions. The allo-repetitions are particularly significant in that they are meant to institutionalize conversational strategies, such as ‘participatory listenership’ or ‘ratifying listenership’ (cf. Tannen, 1992).

7.3. Real-life roles vs. institutional roles

Unlike institutional discourse proper, the semi-institutional discourse in talk shows allows for a more flexible institutional role frame. While it is rather difficult to step out of the role as a defendant or counsel in the courtroom, it is possible for a former drug addict, for example, to be treated as an expert on drug addiction during a talk show debate. Some talk show participants, such as guests and experts, may preserve their non-institutional roles, or real-life roles, side by side with their institutional roles. The extent and the recurrence of these role shifts depend primarily on the show host’s institutional agenda. It is, after all, the host’s responsibility to monitor the participants’ roles and contributions to the discussion. The asymmetrical role distribution in talk shows is noticeable at several discursive levels. Institutionally, the show host role is at the top of the hierarchy. Even guests or experts whose expertise in a particular field is invaluable to the ongoing discussion have to accommodate their contributions according to the institutional role assigned to them. Audience members have a more subordinated position in the talk show hierarchy, since they belong to the less involved category of participants. However, they may also exhibit a certain amount of talk initiative by asking questions or making comments, but always with the host’s endorsement.

A predictable and frequently occurring feature of talk shows is the hosts’ consistent attempt to involve the audience’s active participation by applauding, for example, as illustrated in (19) below. In so doing, they reinforce the distinction between the hosts’ and the guests’ institutional roles as entertainers/co-entertainers and the audience members’ institutional roles as the ones to be entertained, or entertainees.

(19) Geraldo: My guests today are not celebrities and they have not been pillars of society and religion, politics or entertainment either. They are everyday people whose lives took an extraordinary turn ... Welcome them, please. (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘People who have survived X-rated pasts’, 15 June, 1988)
Apart from institutional roles, the participants may also exhibit non-institutional roles. Like casual conversational dialogues (and unlike, for example, news interviews), the conversation-like exchanges that occur during a talk show are meant to provide (directly or indirectly) insight into the participants' real-life, or social roles. These roles include their socio-cultural identities, status, beliefs, etc., and they are distinct from their institutional roles as show host, show guest, audience member, etc., even if the two role categories can never be kept completely separate. The show host him/herself may sometimes express personal opinions and preferences, take sides or become critical, thereby exhibiting a more real-life role, while generally keeping within the boundaries of an institutional role frame; the same can be said of the members of the audience.\(^1\) Due to this role-focused dynamics, the talk show becomes the setting for the deconstruction and reconstruction of the participants' complex identities as social individuals, as representatives of a certain profession, and – not least – as show protagonists.

Establishing to what extent a show guest is perceived to act in what role, is a difficult if not impossible task. While institutional roles are assigned and assumed in keeping with more or less obvious criteria, it is hardly possible to apply such criteria when these roles overlap with non-institutional roles. This dilemma is appropriately conveyed by Searle's query:

\[\text{"Does the assignment of the label carry with it the assignment of some new functions, for example, in the form of rights and responsibilities, which can be performed only if there is collective acceptance of the function? By this criterion, 'husband', 'leader', and 'teacher' all name status-functions; but 'drunk', 'nerd', 'intellectual', and 'celebrity' do not .... it should be obvious that there is no sharp dividing line."} (1995: 88-89)\]

In other words, "there is a gradual transition between social facts in general and the special subclass of institutional facts" (Searle, 1995: 88). Talk shows too, display such a continuum between institutional and non-institutional roles, as can be observed in the case of the experts.

Unlike the experts who are being questioned and consulted in news interviews and political interviews and who are expected to act almost exclusively in their institutional roles as professionals, the guests and experts who contribute to talk shows usually assume a somehow different institutional role, acting partly in their professional roles, and partly in their social/personal (non-institutional) roles as ordinary individuals, as illustrated in (20) and (21) below:

(20) Geraldo: Thank you. Welcome back. Great American heroes of 1987. Anyone who has ever taken a train or ridden a subway knows the awful fear

\(^1\) Fairclough (1995b) emphasizes the shift away from institutional roles towards a foregrounding of personality as one of the contemporary media trends. He also notes: "This is often perceived and portrayed in a way which harmonizes with the core contemporary cultural value of individualism, in terms of foregrounding of the unique and individual personalities of, especially, different presenters" (1995b: 147).
of falling onto the tracks as the train is pulling into the station. You know, all that noise, that vibration, that great big thing rumbling past. That's exactly what happened here in New York to a man named Alex Cumba. He would have been crushed, except for the courage of our next guest. Please welcome the subway saviour, 30-year-old Edwin Ortiz. Tell me what happened. (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘1987’s American heroes’, 24 December, 1987)

(21) Geraldo: ... Welcome our lady investigators. Female private eyes ... (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘Female private eyes’, 19 July, 1988)

In (20) above, one of the key participants in the show is introduced in a multitude of co-occurring roles: in his semi-institutional capacity as ‘our next guest’, in his acquired role as ‘the subway saviour’ (what he did), and in his real role as ‘30-year-old Edwin Ortiz’ (who he is). In such cases, the show guests’ institutional roles are sometimes expected to overlap with their non-institutional roles, in order for the audience to get an insight into different sides of the real-life personalities. (This is further discussed below in connection with the addicts treated by the show host as ‘experts’ in example 23.) The shift between the institutional and the non-institutional roles of the participants in a talk show depends on their positions on the hierarchical scale of institutional roles and on the host’s preferences and priorities. The fact that both the professional and the social/personal roles of the show guests become alternatively activated reinforces the semi-institutional nature of talk shows, in contrast to news interviews and political interviews, which are almost exclusively focused on the professional roles of the interviewees.

As to the show host, s/he may switch over to the role as a show guest, which sometimes overlaps with the role as an audience member. It is common practice for the host to speak for the public at large, or the man/woman in the street, thus crossing the boundaries of the TV-studio, as in (22) and (23) below:

(22) Fried: ... And throughout the dating time, I really don’t want to hear that ... And I’d just like to let things flow.
Oprah: So, okay, okay, let’s start here. What was the first turnoff, because, you know, I know all of us, we get signals on a date, and you say, I mean, you know, we’re talking – friends and I were talking last night, I mean, a guy can come and have on the wrong sweater ... (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘The dating hell’, 2 February, 1987)

(23) Geraldo: You’ve all been to hell and back. You’re the experts. Talk to the country. What can we do?
Pierce: We have to educate our young people. We have to treat people, and we have to make people learn how to feel good about themselves.
Geraldo: Eddie.
Eddie S: You have to start going out there to the schools ... (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘An anatomy of an addict’, 5 May, 1988)
Alongside with their occasional self-projection as ordinary participants as in (22) and (23), show hosts preserve nevertheless their prerogatives as monitors of the talk. They are ultimately responsible for orchestrating their own, as well as the participants' role shifts, often by means of changing the referential focus of deictic elements, such as *personal pronouns* and *pragmatic expressions*. This is particularly apparent in (22), where Oprah's first use of the pronoun *we* is inclusive in that it involves both participants and viewers, while her second use of *we* can be perceived as exclusive, referring specifically to herself and a friend. In comparing the uses of the pronoun *you* in (22) and (23), it is interesting to note that Oprah's use of *you* in the pragmatic expressions *you know* in (22) instantiates an impersonal *you*, while Geraldo's uses of *you* in (23) are typically hearer-targeted. Eddie's use of *you* in (23) is intended as a generic pronoun, equivalent to the impersonal pronoun *one*, since he intends to give general advice to the public at large.

When addressing the addicts who are his show guests, Geraldo assigns to them, with a tinge of irony, the role of ‘experts’ (not necessarily the term unanimously chosen by everybody in this particular situation). Geraldo’s question *What can we do?* in (23) is multifunctional, since it may be interpreted as a genuine answer-eliciting question, as an expository question introducing a topic for discussion, or/and as an invitation for one of the guests to take the floor. This is further reinforced by Geraldo’s next turn, in which he calls upon the next speaker to join in the discussion. This particular example helps to reveal further intricacies regarding the sociolinguistic practice of identifying and assigning/assuming different social and institutional roles.

A deeper-going analysis shows that while it is relatively easy to distinguish between strictly professional roles (teacher, lawyer, president, etc.) and social roles (spouse, widow/er, tenant, landlord, neighbour, housewife, baby-sitter, expert, celebrity, etc.), it appears to be infinitely more difficult to draw the line between such social roles as illustrated by *experts* and *the country* in (23), and the individual roles illustrated by *friends* in (22), *people* and *young people* in (23). In this way, the talk show also functions as a platform for *negotiating the degree of acceptability and the range of applicability* of certain fuzzy role concepts, such as ‘expert’, or ‘celebrity’ (see example 19 above in this subsection). As to the role switches themselves, consider the following examples:

(24) Oprah: Isn’t it usually a case, if we may generalize here, where parents are not being consistent? Because I know that growing up, I acted differently when being raised by my mother than being raised with my father. I would break curfew, I would stay out, I’d go out on the streets, because I knew I could get away with it …

Nordine: … But the other side of that is, you turned out okay and your mother wasn’t consistent.

(25) Geraldo: You absolutely could not get out of there.
    Dolari: No, I was pinned from just above my knee on down.
    Geraldo: I spent some time in the Dakotas and it gets pretty chilly in the daylight. And at night, 20 below, what must the wind chill have been? I can't imagine. (The Geraldo Rivera show, '1987's American heroes', 24 December, 1987)

In (24) above, Oprah switches, like Geraldo in (25) above, to the role of show guest, i.e. of co-participant in the talk. Such a switch is usually signalled linguistically by the use of what is called an A-event statement, i.e. a statement about matters to which the speaker, but not the hearer, has primary access (Labov and Fanshel, 1977: 100). In contrast, most of the show host's utterances tend to be B-event statements, i.e. utterances by a speaker on matters to which the hearer has primary access; in the case of the talk show, they reflect the standpoint of the addresser (the host) acting in an institutional role.12 Whereas the guests, experts, etc., assume the roles that are institutionally assigned to them, the hosts assume roles that are not institutionally assigned to them, such as expert or audience member.

The examples above illustrate certain discursive and linguistic features that distinguish the talk show from other types of discourse, institutional or non-institutional, with respect to the interplay between institutional roles and real-life roles. As institutional events, talk shows display an asymmetrical role distribution: unlike the show hosts, who can temporarily assume any other role pertaining to the talk show, while at the same time preserving their primary role as talk monitors, the other participants in the talk show are not allowed to switch over to the role of moderator (except, possibly, as a joke). This demonstrates once again how "the structure of institutional facts is a structure of power relations" (Searle, 1995: 94).

The show host is institutionally empowered with a role that s/he self-assumes, while the other participants are expected to assume institutional roles that have been assigned to them. On examining the talk show as an entertainment programme, it is apparent that the hosts and the guests share the institutional role as entertainers/co-entertainers, whereas the audience members are institutionally regarded as entertainees.

The difficulty of separating the conversational from the institutional features of the talk show interaction (shown in 7.2 above) is indirectly reflected in the difficulty of separating the participants' institutional from their non-institutional roles, on the one hand, and between their different institutional roles, on the other. Unlike institutional discourse proper, where the participants are expected to act exclusively in

12 In a prototypical institutional discourse, such as the news interview, A-event statements are generally absent from the turns of institutional-role addressers, whereas B-event statements are frequently used, especially by interviewers (Heritage and Roth, 1995). Such B-event utterances are used to address subjective feelings of the interviewee, to invoke the interviewee's opinion or earlier remarks, to formulate or to trigger specific experiences of the interviewee, and so on (Heritage and Roth, 1995: 11-12). Similarly, A-event statements uttered by Oprah and Geraldo are symptomatic of their attempt to foster a more personalized, identity-focused talk, similar to what is the case in casual conversational patterns.
their institutional roles, in semi-institutional discourse like the talk show, some of the participants, notably the guests and the experts, are expected to display semi-institutional roles consisting partly of their professional roles, and partly of their social roles. The timing and the extent of their role shift is largely monitored by the show host, but also negotiated between the host and the guest. It is hardly possible to draw a line between the various types of participant roles, which represent a continuum, rather than discrete entities.

Whereas the occurrences of institutional role shifts are rather few (except in the case of the show host), the shifts and overlaps between the institutional and non-institutional roles of the participants are quite frequent. The guests’ and experts’ institutional roles are generally associated with their professional roles. However, the host’s question asking may also highlight their social and individual roles, either interacting, overlapping or alternating with their professional roles. Discursively, the hosts’, and the other participants’ role shifts are signalled by changing the focus of the referential focus of deictic elements, such as personal pronouns and pragmatic expressions, as well as by alternating A- and B-event statements.

7.4. Interlocutor-oriented talk vs. message-oriented and multiple audience-oriented talk

Unlike casual conversations, talk shows take place in an institutional setting, viz., a TV-studio. Like institutional discourse types, talk shows are audience-oriented events; they target simultaneously a multiple audience made up of three different audiences: the directly addressed audience (i.e. show guests and experts), the onlooking audience (i.e. in the studio), and an overhearing audience (i.e. the TV-viewers), as illustrated in (26) below:

(26) Oprah: Well, in our studio today, we have people who say that some of these stereotypes are absolutely true and people should face the good as well as the negative aspects of their groups. And on our panel we have people who belong to several different ethnic groups. First, we welcome back ABC’s White Correspondent, Sam Donaldson ... So, as I said in the introduction, primarily one of the reasons we’re doing this show is because of Sam’s comment. We’ve been hearing about it here in Chicago for a long time ... So, you want to clear it up, Sam? (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Ethnic stereotypes’, 5 May, 1988)

In casual conversation, the audience is normally made up of the directly targeted addressee(s). In talk shows the ongoing talk is on display, its purpose is to reach and make an impact on a broad and heterogeneous audience. The members of the studio audience represent the present audience, but they are not the ones exclusively targeted; they form part of the multiple audience that includes the non-present audience, viz. the TV-viewers. Both the present and the non-present audiences are primarily intended as recipients of the speakers’ messages. Some members of the present audience, however, may become co-participants by volunteering to ask
questions or make comments, just like those members of the TV-viewers who call in
to ask questions. The nature and extent of their contribution to the show is adjusted
to the type of guests and experts that are on the panel, as well as to the host’s instruc-
tions. Since there are several categories of audience, the target of the talk show
changes in the course of the discussion; and it is the task of the host to manage these
audience-targeting shifts. Consider (27), below:

(27) Aud. memb: ... And you know, I’ll tell you right now, women don’t know
what they want.
Oprah: Okay. We’re here to find out, we’re going to learn something
today. He says women do not know what they want, so – (The

In the example above Oprah acts as a go-between, switching from interlocutor-
oriented talk, instantiated by okay, to audience-oriented talk, instantiated by We’re
here to find out, we’re going to learn something today. Oprah’s last sentence, as a
repetition of the statement uttered by the audience member, is multi-functional:
conversationally, it can be interpreted as an expression of ‘participatory listener-
ship’, to use the term coined by Tannen (1992); institutionally, it is meant as a chal-
lenge eliciting the multiple audience’s reactions. Unlike the types of repetition dis-
cussed in 7.1 and 7.2 above, where the repetition was mostly interlocutor-oriented,
Oprah’s repetition in (27) above marks the transition from her interlocutor-oriented
response Okay to her audience-oriented message referring to him in the 3rd person
singular: He says women do not know what they want. Its use marks a shift in
addressee-targetting, from addressing a particular interlocutor, in this case an audi-
ence member, to addressing the whole audience of the talk show by reporting the
interlocutor’s utterance. I propose to call this type of repetition an addressee-shift-
ing repetition. Whereas the other participants in the talk show often address the
audience through the mediation of an authority, viz. the show host, the latter is enti-
tled to switch over from addressing individual interlocutors to addressing the audi-
ence as a whole.

Moreover, show hosts also resort to repetition in order to retarget messages
addressed to them as intermediaries between audience members and guests. This
often applies to questions, as illustrated in (28) below:

(28) Aud. memb: Will the ballerina [Natasha] be able to dance any more?
Geraldo: I’m sorry?
Aud. memb: The ballerina, will she be able to dance any more?
Geraldo: Natasha, will you be able to dance any more?
Natasha: My doctors have told me that I will have full use of my leg ...
(The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘Innocent victims of the drug wars’, 9
June, 1988)

Although audience members, like other show participants, tend to put questions
directly to the panelist, there are instances, such as the one in (28) above, in which
they address their questions indirectly, via the show host. I propose to refer to such types of repetitions as message-retargeting repetitions, whereby the talk monitor, in this case the show host, receives a question that actually concerns another interlocutor, in this case a show guest, and chooses to repeat the question by addressing it to the originally intended addressee.

When discussing with a show guest, the show host often acts as the representative of the members of the wider audience and as such, can be seen to ask general questions on their behalf. The inclusive use of the 1st person plural pronoun we or us, as in (29) below, is meant to signal the fact that the question may have been asked by any audience member:

(29) Geraldo: Do you recall how many people lost their lives in that crash?
    Johnson: There were 16. There were about 175 injured.
    Geraldo: Can you tell us what happened to the impaired engineer?
    Johnson: Well, he has been the subject of trial by the state of Maryland ...


Interlocutor-oriented talk also exhibits instances of host-initiated questions, signalled by the use of the 1st person singular pronoun and of metadiscursive prefaces, as illustrated below:

(30) Oprah: I want to ask, when I heard you were doing this across the country, how is the view? (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘American heroes’, 29 December, 1986)

(31) Geraldo: … Let me start with this question. Were you proud when your son followed in your footsteps and got the uniform and badge of a New York City policeman? (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘Innocent victims of the drug wars’, 9 June, 1988)

The types of questions asked by the show host reflect to a large extent a particular discursive orientation. For example, Oprah’s and Geraldo’s metadiscursively prefaced questions in (30) and (31) above are information- and answer-eliciting, and, like most answer-eliciting questions, they are interlocutor-oriented. An answer-eliciting questions like the one asked by Geraldo in (31) above, may be primarily interlocutor-oriented, but it is also multiple audience-focused, since the question is shown to target the interlocutor on behalf of a wider audience.

Answer-eliciting questions represent one of the most ostensive categories of questions in institutional discourse and occur most frequently in question-answer adjacency pairs. There are, however, non-answer-eliciting questions which also fulfil institutional functions. Such are, for example, the questions used by show hosts at the beginning of the show to introduce the topic for discussion. These are called expository questions, also mentioned in 7.3 above, and previously described in Ilie (1999):
"Like rhetorical questions, expository questions do not normally elicit a verbalized response from the interlocutor, because their function is to address the audience and foreshadow information about the topic to be discussed, rather than elicit information." (1999: 980)

An important feature that distinguishes expository questions from other types of non-answer-eliciting questions is their institutional status: they are normally posed by the talk monitors, in our case the show hosts, rather than by other participants. When the show guests or the audience members pose non-answer eliciting questions, these tend to be not expository questions, but rhetorical questions, since the latter convey strong personal commitment. The examples below illustrate two sequences of expository questions uttered by Geraldo and Oprah, respectively:

(32) Geraldo: ... This is Gina Clark, the fantasy phone sex girl one high school principle just had to call every single morning for his sexual thrills before he could go off to school. The 18-year-old is now a crusader against pornography. What's it like to be a sexual outlaw? How does it affect the people you love, the people who love you? And what are the turning points that changed their lives around? People who have survived X-rated pasts, they're the focus of this edition of Geraldo. (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘People who have survived ×-rated pasts’, 15 June, 1988)

(33) Oprah: Why in an era when therapy is ever ready to help a man have satisfying relations with a wife who loves him, when divorce is so easy that nobody need stay locked in a hopeless marriage, when every city is brimming with interesting and interested singles, would a husband choose sex with a woman who regards him only as a trick, good for quick cash? And what happens to a marriage when a man is unfaithful in this desperate kind of way? Why do so many married men still pay for sex? Well, later in the show you will meet a prostitute who will tell what her customers, some of your husbands, really want from sex. (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Men who pay for sex’, 14 May, 1987)

After introducing one of the show guests in (32) above, Geraldo poses three questions which at this point are not addressed to any participant in particular, but are meant to further specify the topic of the show. While the target of each question might potentially be a person with Gina Clark’s background, the host’s intention here is not to elicit appropriate answers, but to inform the audience about a few of the subtopics to be discussed on the programme. In (33) above, Oprah also poses three non-interlocutor targeted questions, which problematize the topic to be discussed on the programme. It is symptomatic that Geraldo’s and Oprah’s expository questions above are structured in sets of three, which enhances their challenging power. In both examples, the expository questions are posed for the benefit of the audience, being message-oriented, as well as audience-oriented, rather than interlocutor-oriented.
Two recent studies (Ilie, 1998, 1999) have shown that the functions of rhetorical questions and of their responses in talk shows are often correlated with the conventions of institutional and conversational discourse, respectively. Let us consider the following three examples:

(34) Geraldo: Stand up, stand up. Hold it a second, Charlie. *These are victims?* This guy robbed from his mother, his grandmother, his brothers, his sisters, his neighbors. He would slit your throat, he would cut your heart out, Charlie. (The *Geraldo Rivera show*, ‘An anatomy of an addict’, 5 May, 1988)

(35) Oprah: David?
Dr. Elkind: Yeah. I think, you know, nobody is saying that this music makes kids commit suicide or do anything else. It’s part of a larger picture. *But what I do say is, does anything go? Are there no limits? Aren’t there any – you know, Freud never said that repression was bad, he said too much repression was bad, and a certain amount of repression was healthy for society. You can’t have a society without repression. So if you have everything go, where are the limits? And if we say, look, there are boundaries beyond which you don’t go, that’s healthy for kids.* (The *Oprah Winfrey show*, ‘Raising PG kids in a world of sex’, Violence and AIDS, 3 April, 1987)

(36) Aud. memb: Well, I really think we should stop calling it spanking, giving it a candy coating. What it is, is intimidation and control through pain. *You know, do we want our children to grow up that way? It’s not right. I mean, the prisons are full enough as it is.* (The *Oprah Winfrey show*, ‘Child discipline: Parental debate’, 3 December, 1987)

In each of the examples above, the utterer of the rhetorical question enacts a different participant role: the show host in (34), a show guest in (35), and an audience member in (36). Unlike expository questions, which are almost exclusively asked by show hosts because they have the authority to announce and propose the topics and subtopics for discussion, rhetorical questions are used by any talk show participant, because they are essentially meant to convey strong personal commitments. However, “when uttered by the show host, for example, certain rhetorical questions and responses to previous interlocutors’ rhetorical questions acquire an institutional function of controlling and/or evaluating the ongoing talk” (Ilie, 1998: 133–134). This is indeed the case in (34), where Geraldo’s rhetorical question can be perceived as both *evaluative* (of his interlocutor’s statements) and *argumentative* (supporting Geraldo’s standpoint). While all three speakers in the examples above use rhetorical questions argumentatively, Geraldo’s question is further reinforced by the institutional authority that he is endowed with and which enables him to speak on behalf of a larger public.
Since rhetorical questions are normally meant to "shape arguments and influence public opinion" (Ilie, 1999: 980), their strength is reinforced by the fact that they are message-oriented, audience-oriented and interlocutor-oriented at the same time.

The distinction illustrated earlier between different categories of talk show participants is made in terms of the balance between the participants' contributions as speakers vs. hearers. It is fairly obvious that the multiple audience of the talk show displays an asymmetrical participant configuration in that the members of the studio audience, for example, act extensively as interlocutors, i.e. as both speakers and hearers, while most of the TV-viewers act almost exclusively as recipients, viz. as hearers. The interlocutors, including the host, the guests and the experts, are engaged in and can influence the ongoing discussion monitored by the show host, while the recipients participate mainly as passive observers.

A set of pragmatic factors have been used to characterize talk shows and relate them both to institutional and non-institutional discourse types, namely the general configuration and goal of the interaction, participant institutional and non-institutional status, turn-taking shifts, as well as interlocutor-orientation and audience-orientation. As audience-oriented events, talk shows target simultaneously a multiple audience made up of three different audiences: the directly addressed audience (i.e. show guests and experts), the onlooking audience (i.e. in the studio), and an overhearing audience (i.e. the TV-viewers). While the first two audiences are actual or potential co-participants in the show, the members of the last type of audience are primarily intended as recipients.

Some relevant linguistic features have been discussed that distinguish this semi-institutional interaction, with respect to message-, interlocutor- and/or multiple audience-oriented talk, from other types of conversational discourse, institutional or non-institutional. Unlike the self-repetitions and allo-repetitions involved in monitored and negotiated turn-taking that were discussed in 7.2 above, the present section deals with two types of interlocutor- and audience-oriented repetitions in connection with the host's signalling a shift in speaking turns. By means of addressee-shifting repetitions, the host signals the passing of the speaking turn from one addressee to another, for example from one interlocutor to the members of the audience. These repetitions are often accompanied by pronoun shifts. By means of message retargeting repetitions, the host retargets a message addressed to him/her as an intermediary between audience members and guests. In other words, the show host receives a question that actually concerns another interlocutor, in this case a show guest, and decides to repeat the question while addressing it to the intended addressee.

Apart from answer-eliciting questions, which are basically interlocutor-oriented and largely institutionally framed, a certain number of non-answer eliciting questions occur in talk show interaction and fulfil institutional and/or conversational functions. Two such categories of non-answer eliciting questions are particularly relevant to the semi-institutional nature of talk show interaction, namely expository questions and rhetorical questions. Expository questions are typically posed by show hosts and are message- and audience-oriented, rather than interlocutor-oriented. Rhetorical questions are message-oriented, audience-oriented and interlocutor-oriented to varying extents. When used by show hosts, rhetorical questions tend to be
evaluative and argumentative; when they are used by other show participants, they usually convey strong personal commitment.

7.5. Summary: Distinguishing and contrastive features of talk shows

It is hardly possible to establish any generally valid and prototypical features of talk shows for two main reasons: on the one hand, they represent endlessly and rapidly changing hybrid media phenomena, on the other, they constantly reconstruct and redefine themselves by violating and transgressing their own discursive conventions. However, as has been shown in the preceding subsections, it is possible to identify several major features (both of the discursive and of the linguistic kind) that distinguish talk shows from other types of interactional discourse. (For instance, as we have already seen, the members of the non-present audience, as the talk show’s intended audience, act mainly as recipients and not as interlocutors).

7.5.1. Discursive features

Table 1 sums up the two major categories of discursive features which characterize talk shows to varying degrees. These are both conversational features (belonging to non-institutional discourse, such as ‘regular’ conversation) and institutional features (belonging to institutional discourse, such as news interviews and public

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversational features</th>
<th>Institutional features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Private setting (pre-filmed scenes in show guests’ homes)</td>
<td>Public/institutional setting (TV studio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatively homogeneous form of talk</td>
<td>Non-homogeneous form of talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous talk (less topic-centred)</td>
<td>Purposeful talk (more topic-centred and goal-oriented)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower topic control and predictability</td>
<td>Higher topic control and predictability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative and interactional goals</td>
<td>Communicative, interactional and institutional goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No particular talk-related restrictions (flexible turn-taking, topic and subtopic shifts)</td>
<td>Particular talk-related restrictions (time-limitation, speaker-selection and turn-taking design)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-institutional/real-life roles (parent, child, etc.)</td>
<td>Institutional roles (panelist, expert, etc.) and non-institutional roles (parent, child, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spontaneous role-switching (initiated by the show guests)</td>
<td>Monitored role-switching (controlled by the show host)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal participant status</td>
<td>Unequal participant status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal speaking rights</td>
<td>Unequal speaking rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlocutor as both addressee and addresser</td>
<td>Multiple audience as addressee (onlooking audience and overhearing audience)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlocutor-oriented talk</td>
<td>Message- and multiple audience-oriented talk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-hierarchical role-distribution</td>
<td>Hierarchical role-distribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symmetrical power relations</td>
<td>Asymmetrical power relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatively weak talk/topic control</td>
<td>Strong talk/topic control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
debates). The recurrence and distribution of the two sets of features vary according to the particular framing of each talk show, including the personalities and life-roles of the show guests, the charisma and authority of the show host, and the expectations raised by the particular character of the show in question (see the introductory part of section 7 above for further details).

The features listed above are neither exhaustive (since they cannot possibly cover all aspects of talk shows) nor discrete (since the distinctions they indicate represent varying degrees on a scale of increasing/decreasing values).

7.5.2. Linguistic features

In strictly linguistic terms, talk shows exhibit specific features with regard to the discursive organization of talk, the sequence of adjacency pairs and turns, the participants’ question-asking and question-answering roles. These features pertain partly to conversational, i.e. non-institutional discourse, and partly to institutional discourse, as shown in Table 2; the semi-institutional nature of this double dependency is what characterizes talk show interaction.

8. Personal talk-framing patterns in the Oprah Winfrey and the Geraldo Rivera talk shows

According to van Dijk, “each speaker is as unique as her or his discourse, and apart from the social similarities that define them as group members, we may therefore also expect individual variation, disparity and dissent” (1997: 35). Such individual manifestations occur in all types of discourse, including institutional and semi-institutional discourse. Apart from the commonly shared features discussed in section 7 above, each talk show bears the imprint of its own host’s personality, interests and commitments. On analyzing the British Today programme, Fairclough reported a similar situation: “Even fairly rigid roles allow considerable space for individual style, in addition to the individualizing effects of differences in voice quality and accent” (1995b: 147). The following subsections illustrate a few of Oprah’s and Geraldo’s specific talk-framing patterns as show hosts.

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13 Other (semi-) institutionalized types of discourse will display different features. One difference between talk shows and news interviews is that show hosts may express their own attitudes and opinions with regard to the response or statement of a show guest or a member of the audience, as in the interchange below:

Oprah: Did you all plan different meals every day for the family?
Lach: Yes.
Oprah: That is amazing. That’s amazing. (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Large families’, 11 March, 1988)

By contrast, news interviews are more strictly governed by institutional rules, and feedback moves tend to be absent, as Heritage (1989) observes. He also argues that by avoiding to confirm receipt of information, interviewers assume an objective role as information elicitors and decline the role as information recipients, which they intend to reserve for the overhearing audience.
### Table 2
Linguistic features of talk shows as semi-institutional discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversational features</th>
<th>Institutional features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No particular talk-framing patterns</td>
<td>Particular talk-framing patterns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No particular role-related openings and closings</td>
<td>Role-related openings and closings performed by the show host</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal introductions of and by the participants</td>
<td>Formal and semi-informal introductions of the participants by the show host</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-monitored speaker-selection and turn-taking (unplanned interventions)</td>
<td>Monitored speaker-selection and turn-assignment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No explicit metalinguistic patterns for various stages of the interaction</td>
<td>Explicit metalinguistic patterns for various stages of the talk show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(negotiated turn-taking slots, next speaker selection and topic agenda)</td>
<td>(monitored turn management, next speaker selection, commercial break announcements)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No deliberate use of performative utterances for institutional goals</td>
<td>Deliberate use of performative utterances for institutional goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fairly symmetrical question-asking roles</td>
<td>Asymmetrical question-asking roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conversationally framed questions (primarily interlocutor-oriented)</td>
<td>Institutionally framed questions (primarily audience-oriented)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentatively used non-answer eliciting questions (e.g. rhetorical questions)</td>
<td>Evaluatively used non-answer eliciting questions (e.g. rhetorical questions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e.g. expository questions)</td>
<td>audience-oriented questions (e.g. expository questions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlocutor-oriented repetitions (self-repetitions, allo-repetitions)</td>
<td>Audience-oriented repetitions (addressee-shifting repetitions, message retargeting repetitions)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8.1. Starting the show: Host self-introductions and topic announcements

The show host introductions are usually performed by the hosts themselves. There are certain observable differences between Oprah’s and Geraldo’s shows as to the choice of their personal show ‘logo’. It is often the case that the host introduction is done at the same time with the topic introduction, and this is how each talk show tends to be associated with a specific introductory strategy.

In the transcripts that I examined, Oprah’s opening utterances are almost invariably ‘Hi, everybody. I’m Oprah Winfrey’. This personalized formula contains two distinct messages: the first is a casual greeting, the second counts both as self-identification and as the official start of the programme. The members of the multiple audience are expected to react to this double message. In telling the audience her name, Oprah is actually spelling out the name of the show. The first utterance appears to fulfil a conversational function, while the second acquires a more institutional function in the talk show situation.

Apart from rare cases where the topic announcement precedes Oprah’s self-introduction, her formulaic greeting is followed by the topic announcement, sometimes accompanied by her recalling personal experiences, as in (37) below.

(37) Oprah: *Hi, everybody. I’m Oprah Winfrey*. What do you do when your husband decides you’re getting too old, and he needs a younger, prettier
little thing? ... (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Men obsessed with younger women’, 25 March, 1988)

(38) Oprah: Hi, I’m Oprah Winfrey. Whose fault is it when kids become troubled and act out beyond their parents’ control? ... (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Parents of problem children’, 24 December, 1986)

(39) Oprah: Hi, everybody. I’m Oprah Winfrey. You know, around the country movie theaters are packed with people who are sitting on the edge of their seats, watching the hit movie Fatal Attraction. I saw it last night. Whew! Great. (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Fatal attractions’, 12 April, 1988)

Unlike Oprah’s self-introduction, which is normally in the first person, Geraldo’s self-introduction is almost invariably in the third person. Moreover, Geraldo assumes an institutional role from the very beginning, since he does not refer to himself as a person, but to his programme, viz. ‘this edition of Geraldo’. Whereas Oprah shows a tendency to start with her self-introduction, Geraldo tends to start with the topic announcement, or with a preface to the topic announcement.

(40) Geraldo: Today’s edition of Geraldo is about heroes, champions, in fact. ... (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘The diet all-stars’, 6 October, 1987)

(41) Geraldo: Imagine what it must be like being a Siamese twin, being located in a sometimes life-long embrace with a brother or sister. How do you eat? How do you sleep? How do you feel? We’ll find out right now on this edition of Geraldo. (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘Siamese twins’, 19 April, 1988)

(42) Geraldo: Spies, they’re traitors usually motivated by either politics, women, or money. There have been over two dozen arrests in this country in just the last three years. ... The selling of America’s secrets – Spies – for sex or money, that’s the focus of this edition of Geraldo. (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘Spies selling your country’, 15 October, 1987)

Occasionally, the Geraldo Rivera Show host is introduced by an outsider:

(43) Announcer: Ladies and gentlemen, from Times Square in New York, Geraldo Rivera.

Geraldo: Thank you. A serious topic today ... (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘What about victims’ rights?’, 1 April, 1988)

8.2. Ending the show: Thanking the audience and making final announcements

In conformity with current media practice, Oprah signals the end of her talk show by thanking everybody for participating and sharing. One of the recurrent key words with which Oprah’s closes her programme is ‘share’:
(44) Oprah: *Thank you all for sharing your stories with us today. Thank you very much.* (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Education debate’, 20 January, 1988)

(45) Oprah: *Thank you all for sharing your thoughts.* (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Men who pay for sex’, 14 May, 1987)

When the topic of the show calls for rounding off the discussion, the host provides a summary and a final piece of information/advice at the end of the show. This additional information or advice may be supplied by Oprah herself, as illustrated in (46) and (47) below or by one of the show guests, usually the expert on the topic under consideration, as illustrated in (48) below:

(46) Oprah: *We have an information line, if you want more information: 312-750-7630. Call that number, thank you, in Chicago.* (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Foster care kids’, 15 March, 1988)

(47) Oprah: *I thank all of you wonderful experienced parents, and if you’d like some more experience or lessons in how to do it, Jane Nelsen’s book is called Positive Discipline and Lee Canter’s book is called Assertive Discipline. Both of them are very, very good parenting books. I thank you all for sharing your stories with us on the show today. Thank you very much.* (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Child discipline: parental debate’, 3 December, 1987)

(48) Dr. Ceren: *Could be, could be. Okay, I think it’s really important to accept what’s going on. Is this a relationship you really want? Not to try and change yourself to please him, but to see whether this is really what you want. Do you want this man, and why do you want this man? Examine the reasons why you want him. If it’s the security, financial security, try and understand and work through those kinds of things, because it’s really difficult to stay in love with someone who is rejecting you. I think it’s very, very damaging to your self-esteem.*

Oprah: *Thank you all for being on and sharing your stories. Thank you, Chuck and Taki, for being on earlier and amusing us. And happy anniversary, Phil – happy 20.* (The Oprah Winfrey show, ‘Men obsessed with younger women’, 25 March, 1988)

Unlike Oprah, Geraldo sometimes turns to different audience categories when expressing his thanks at the end of his shows:

(49) Geraldo: *Thank you all for being on the panel. The audience has been very good; thank you. We’ll see you next time.* (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘Prisoners of psychotherapy’, 24 September, 1987)
(50) Geraldo: I want to thank Ellen Dunne in California, all our guests here in New York, and thank you all, folks. Controversial discussion, interesting one. Thank you for watching. We'll see you next time. Bye bye. (The *Geraldo Rivera show*, ‘What about victims’ rights?’, 1 April, 1988)

Like Oprah, Geraldo often urges the experts or the guests to sum up the conclusions of the discussion. The difference between the two hosts, however, lies in the fact that in Oprah's show the guests often start rounding off the discussion without being explicitly prompted, while Geraldo, being more time-conscious, explicitly prompts the guests to sum up their main ideas and also tells them exactly the number of minutes they have at their disposal.

(51) Geraldo: Gina?
Ms. Clark: What I’m able to do now to fight the industry, that makes me feel good.
Ms. Clark: That I’ll never be 18 again, that mentally I’ll always be 40 or older. (The *Geraldo Rivera show*, ‘People who have survived X-rated pasts’, 16 February, 1988)

(52) Geraldo: Quickly, in less than a minute, final thoughts.
Dr. Cushner: Well, what strikes me is ...
Dr. J Garland: I think change will come when ...
Dr. P Garland: I would say this … (The *Geraldo Rivera show*, ‘Crimes of passion’, 25 January, 1988)

8.3. Acknowledging show participants’ contributions

Oprah’s personal verbal style displays certain particular manifestations of empathy with the interlocutor, which are not found in Geraldo’s personal verbal style. In (53) below, Oprah’s guest and interlocutor is Bob Weiland, who ran the New York Marathon on hands. Her burst of admiration is verbalized in her own personal way:

(53) Weiland: Well, the Lord Jesus gave me the strength to be a fourth-time world record holder in the bench press against able-bodied individuals, so I did have a good base and a good foundation to begin with ...
Oprah: *Goodness gracious* … (The *Oprah Winfrey show*, ‘American heroes’, 29 December, 1986)

In the same show, Oprah welcomes another guest, Clara Hale, who helps drug-addicted infants. After hearing the latter’s experiences, Oprah spontaneously expresses her admiration, which she assumes is shared by the audience:
Oprah’s recurrent phrase for expressing thanks and appreciation is *God bless you*, which she sometimes uses to end her programme with:

(55) Oprah:  
*God bless you all*, you are a tribute to the human race. Thank you so much for being here, and sharing your heroism with us today, thank you … (The *Oprah Winfrey show*, ‘American heroes’, 29 December, 1986)

### 8.4. Introducing and addressing show guests: Hierarchy of talk show participants

The particular real-life roles of show guests are usually decisive for the kind of institutional roles they are expected to assume. In other words, the hierarchy of their non-institutional roles is reflected in the talk show hierarchy of institutional roles. This is signalled by the titles and address forms used by show hosts to introduce the show guests, as well as to give them the floor. Consider first the example (57) below, where Oprah introduces her guests:

(56) Oprah:  
*Welcome Mayor Boner* to the show; we’re glad to have you.  
… Please welcome *Senator Richard Codey* from New Jersey. (The *Oprah Winfrey show*, ‘Whistleblowers in fear of their lives’, 13 July, 1988)

When addressing them, Oprah uses either their last names preceded by the same official title or simply the official title:

(57) Oprah:  
*I’ll speak to you first. Mayor Boner*, I remember when you came to East High School …  
Oprah: So I’ll begin with you, *Senator*. When you applied for the job, did you think you were going to get it? (The *Oprah Winfrey show*, ‘Whistleblowers in fear of their lives’, 13 July, 1988)

Different conventions apply to different professional categories. Thus, in the case of an undercover police officer, his name is not preceded by any particular title, while the direct address form is more informal than in the previous two cases, since he is addressed by means of the nickname:

(58) Oprah:  
*My next guest was an undercover police officer* who was hired to go back to high school … Welcome *Phillip Crochet* …  
Oprah: Thank you. *Phil*, when you went into the high school, did you – how did you – first of all, what did you wear? (The *Oprah Winfrey show*, ‘Whistleblowers in fear of their lives’, 13 July, 1988)
Geraldo introduces and addresses his guests in a similar way. For example, the introduction of the notorious Reverend Falwell is both formal and very extensive, unlike the introductions of ordinary show guests:

(59) Geraldo: Celebration or not, our first guest, live from Lynchburg, Virginia, is the Reverend Jerry Falwell, former head of the Moral Majority and author of a new autobiography, 'Strength for the Journey'. Reverend Falwell, welcome this evening.

(60) Geraldo: ... I'm sure you all know Dr. Ruth Westheimer, one of the best known sex therapists and sex advisors in the country. Welcome her ...

(61) Geraldo: Dr. Ruth, you respond to Reverend Falwell. (The Geraldo Rivera show, 'Modern love', 1 December, 1987)

In the case of guests who do not have well-established and highly evaluated professional positions in real life, the forms of address are more informal:

(62) Geraldo: Ladies and gentlemen, we are joined now by the courageous Yolanda Serrano and her volunteers ... (The Geraldo Rivera show, 'Modern love', 1 December, 1987)

It is more unusual for the show guests to be told to introduce themselves, and it occurs only in rather special situations, as the one illustrated in (63) below:

(63) Geraldo: ... Take a look at these guys. The triplets, isn't it? They have a restaurant, the Triplets. Separated at birth. Now, you look in really good shape. Introduce yourselves. I get you all mixed up.

Ed: Well, it's baggy clothes. I'm Ed, he's Dave.
Dave: He's baggy clothes. I'm Dave.
Bob: And I work in the kitchen. I'm Bob. (The Geraldo Rivera show, 'The diet all-stars', 6 October, 1987)

The guests in (63) above introduce themselves first informally, by spelling out their nicknames, and then formally, by specifying their first names.

(64) Geraldo: Were you a prisoner of your psychotherapist?
Gail, therapy victim: Yes. He told me that sex would be good for the therapy, and I believed him.
Geraldo: How long did this go on?
Gail: Six years.
Geraldo: Were you a prisoner of your shrink?
Janet Gotkin, therapy victim: Yes, I was in a very real sense. I was so dependent on this man that for 10 years I did whatever
Geraldo: he wanted me to do and I felt that I literally couldn’t live without him …

Let me more formally introduce our guests today. Gail is now an administrative assistant, but a few years ago she won a landmark lawsuit for half a million dollars against her therapist, alleging sexual abuse and drug addiction. Next to her we have Janet Gotkin – is that pronounced right? Good. She’s the author of ‘Too Much Anger, Too Many Tears’. She lived in a nine-year numbness when her psychiatrist made her psychologically and drug dependent on him – you allege … (The Geraldo Rivera show, ‘Prisoners of psychotherapy’, 24 September, 1987)

9. Concluding remarks

By focusing on transcripts taken from two American talk shows, the Oprah Winfrey show and the Geraldo Rivera show, this study tries to capture the distinguishing features of the talk show by establishing systematic parallels between several of its discursive and linguistic characteristics and those of related discourse types.

It is suggested that a major distinguishing feature of talk shows is their semi-institutional nature, in that they exhibit discursive features characteristic of both casual conversation and institutional discourse. The show host can normally be seen as a conversation monitor, but sometimes also as a co-participant. A certain gradation of discursive features can be noticed in terms of discourse institutionalization, with conversational features at the informal end of the speech continuum, and institutional features at the formal end. Depending on the personality of the show host, the nature of the topic, the general background and views of the participants, as well as the type of audience, talk shows can be seen to display deviations from conversational and institutional norms to varying degrees, by combining spontaneous and purposeful talk, non-institutional and institutional roles, non-controlled and host-controlled talk, interlocutor-oriented, message-oriented, and multiple audience-oriented talk. The interplay between the real-life roles (such as parent, wife, etc., or psychologist, actor, etc.) and the institutional roles of the participants in a talk show (such as show host, show guests, members of the audience) may vary according to their shifting positions on the hierarchical scale of institutional role priorities.

Institutional dialogue shares with conversational dialogue the pursuit of interactional goals. At the same time, unlike conversational dialogue, institutional dialogue is intended to achieve particular institutional goals. In view of their institutional goals, talk shows are meant to accomplish a socializing and an educational function, namely influencing/reinforcing/challenging opinions, addressing different social groups, professional groups, age groups, etc. Institutional goals are typically pursued
by means of institutionally framed questions, while conversational goals are pursued mainly by means of conversationally framed questions.

The institutional prerequisites of the talk show underpin its situational and discursive constraints. The situational constraints concern talk-related restrictions, such as time restrictions and agenda restrictions, speaker-selection restrictions and turn-taking restrictions. The discursive constraints are reflected in talk-framing patterns, such as the predermined topic schedule, conventionalized beginnings and closings, as well as recurrent breaks. The semi-institutional aspect of talk shows is manifested in less predictable topic and subtopic shifts, interruptions, unprompted participant interventions, audience-oriented repetitions and audience-oriented questions.

As institutional events, talk shows display an asymmetrical role distribution: the host has a role that s/he self-assumes, whereas the other participants assume roles that have been assigned to them. On examining the talk show as an entertaining programme, it is apparent that the host and the guests share the institutional role as entertainers/co-entertainers, whereas the audience members are institutionally regarded as entertainees. Unlike institutional discourse proper, where the participants are expected to act exclusively in their institutional roles, in semi-institutional discourse like the talk show, some of the participants, notably the guests and the experts, are expected to display semi-institutional roles consisting partly of their professional roles, and partly of their social roles. The timing and the extent of their role shifts is largely monitored by the show host, but also negotiated between the host and the guest. It is hardly possible to draw a line between the institutional and non-institutional roles of the participants, which represent a continuum, rather than discrete entities.

As audience-oriented events, talk shows target simultaneously a multiple audience made up of three different audiences: the directly addressed audience (i.e. show guests and experts), the onlooking audience (i.e. in the studio), and an overhearing audience (i.e. the TV-viewers). While the first two audiences are actual or potential co-participants in the show, the members of the last type of audience are primarily intended as recipients. Linguistically, this complex configuration is signalled by half-institutional, half-conversational uses of repetitions and non-answer eliciting questions. While self-repetitions and allo-repetitions are typically conversational, some allo-repetitions may be used to institutionalize conversational strategies, such as participatory listenership and ratifying listenership. Two other types of repetitions, namely addressee-shifting repetitions and message-retargeting repetitions, are used by the show host to monitor the speaker selection and the turn-taking process. Comparable distinctions have been noticed between the use of non-answer eliciting questions by hosts and by the other participants. Questions can be seen as particularly effective in probing both the addressee's personality and the relation between the addressee and the addresser. Thus, expository questions are typically posed by show hosts and are message- and audience-oriented, rather than interlocutor-oriented. As far as rhetorical questions are concerned, the show participants use them argumentatively to convey strong personal commitment, while the show host uses them both argumentatively and evaluatively.
The findings presented in this paper with regard to the distinctive properties of talk shows as semi-institutional discourse types provide evidence for the fact that similar discursive and institutional strategies tend to acquire different functions depending on whether they are used by show hosts or by show guests, due to the participants' unequal status, unequal speaking rights, and asymmetrical role distributions. Since it is a semi-institutional interaction, the talk show exhibits a wide range of talk-framing patterns, from the strictly informative and news-oriented, to the entertaining, therapeutic, or simply ritualistic. By occasionally violating the institution-based linguistic constraints and discursive norms, talk shows can be seen to increasingly challenge institutional conventions and to reassert their own status as semi-institutional discourse types.

References


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