Talk Shows

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Introduction

The talk show is a highly confrontational discursive genre, a widely influential media phenomenon, as well as a politically and morally controversial form of entertainment. Few discursive practices of popular broadcast culture have been more contentious and subject to cultural and scholarly examination in recent years than the talk show, particularly the television talk show.

The very notion of talk show raises issues concerning the boundaries between talk (prototypically dialogical) and show (prototypically monological), between public and private, between collective and personal experience, between expertise and experience, between interpersonal and mass communication, between information and entertainment, between discrete and overlapping identities ('me,' 'you,' 'us,' 'them'). According to Munson (1993), the term 'talk show' combines two different, often contradictory, rhetorical paradigms by associating interpersonal conversation (belonging to the pre-modern oral tradition) with the mass-mediated spectacle (emerging in modernity). As a result, a public-colloquial language (Leech, 1966) has developed, which is modeled in varying ways upon the practices of conversational speech, through a process of 'conversationalization' of public discourse (Fairclough, 1995).

Brief Historical Survey

The talk show is a modern Anglo-Saxon institution that may be seen to echo certain pre-modern sociocultural practices of purposeful conversation. According to Burke (1993: 114–115) 16th century Italy had the academy, a discussion group for intellectuals, with fixed membership and fixed days for meetings. The 17th 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 18th century in the form of the more informal coffee-house, the assembly, and the club.

The origin of talk shows was tracked down by Munson as early as the 1930s when interactive talk radio started to emerge in the United States and listeners were invited to phone in. Two particular formats developed in the 1960s, namely all-talk and all-news radio programs, which were intended as services to the listening community rather than stations in the traditional sense. Since the listeners were potential customers, controversial and sensationalized talk soon developed to attract them. 'Confrontalk' (Hutchby, 1996) became a syndicated television talk genre in the 1960s.

Phil Donahue was the first to adapt the audience participation talk show (also termed "audience discussion program" and "studio debate program") from radio to television in 1967. His show initiated what is known today as daytime talk show or tabloid talk show. This format was consolidated by Oprah Winfrey from 1984 as a sort of modern update of women's service magazines in the late 19th century in that it often tackles women's issues and targets mainly an audience of housewives. American talk shows such as *Oprah Winfrey, Ricki Lake,* and *Montel Williams* have been gradually exported to the U.K., to several European countries, and to most countries in South America. As a result of an increasing decentralization of the media, a transition from debate programs to talk shows occurred in Europe in the 1980s.

Defining Talk Shows

There are three main reasons why it is a very challenging task to define talk shows: they represent rapidly changing hybrid media phenomena, they display intertextuality through overlaps with other mediatized forms of talk, and they endlessly reconstruct themselves by violating and transgressing their own discursive conventions. The talk show displays a hybrid broadcast discourse in which patterns of communicative and social behavior can be associated with more than one discourse type, through overlaps with other mediatized forms of talk, such as interviews, debates, sitcoms, game shows, and quiz shows. To capture its distinctive features it is essential to explore the sociocultural environment and the contextual factors that generated it and that continue to shape it. The latter are principally the television show format, setting, time frame, and goal; the show host's personal profile, agenda, and general orientation; the participants' backgrounds, goals, and their relations.

In talk shows the interpersonal talk is geared to public debate using partly conversational, partly institutional discursive conventions and strategies, which involves blurring the boundaries between traditional dichotomies, such as public vs. private, collective vs. personal experience, expertise vs. experience. This is why the talk show discourse was

labeled quasi-conversational by Gregori-Signes (2000b), and semi-institutional by Ilie (1999, 2001). Talk shows display a certain gradation of discursive features in terms of 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 show participants combine spontaneous and purposeful talk, non-institutional and institutional roles, non-controlled and host-controlled talk, interlocutor-oriented, message-oriented, and multiple audience-oriented talk (Ilie, 2001).

Characteristic Features of Talk Shows

Characteristically, talk shows bring together, through the mediation of a host, a guest panel (experts and lay participants), a studio audience and occasionally an audience of 'callers.' The following are some of the key features of talk shows:

1. As audience-oriented mediatized events, talk shows target simultaneously a multiple audience made up of the directly addressed audience of interlocutors, the on-looking studio audience, and the overhearing audience of TV-viewers.
2. Both experts and lay people are often present as show guests. Much of the program's focus has to do with the interchange between them.
3. The show host, usually a media personality, is monitoring most of the discussion by stimulating, guiding, and facilitating the participants' roles and contributions to the program (for information exchange, confrontation, and entertainment).
4. Each episode of the program focuses on a particular topic of social, political, or personal concern. Confrontation and conflicting opinions are usually guaranteed by the selection of topics and of participants.
5. Personal experience and common sense have considerable status and increasingly appear as forms of knowledge that are opposed to expertise and to dominant discourses (of power, race, gender, etc.).
6. The discursive strategies of talk shows are: interview, narrative, debate, game, confession, testimony.
7. These programs are usually inexpensive to produce, particularly because they are not part of prime-time broadcasting.
8. Most programs are either broadcast live or recorded in real time with little editing.

A systematic account has been given by Ilie (2001) of the correlation between the discursive and linguistic features that single out talk shows as a broadcaster-controlled, host-monitored, participant-shaped, and audience-evaluated speech event. 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 predetermined 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.

The hybrid nature of the talk show can profitably be examined by adopting a comparative perspective since they exhibit 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 debates), as indicated in Table 1. 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.

In strictly linguistic terms, talk shows exhibit specific features with regard to the discursive organization of talk, the sequence of adjacency pairs and turns, and 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.

Typology of Talk Shows

Five major criteria have been used in varying ways by talk show scholars to identify and distinguish between various talk show formats: (i) discussion topics (from contemporary political issues to social or moral problems); (ii) categories of participants, particularly in terms of social and popularity status (celebrities or ordinary members of the public); (iii) broadcasting time (early morning, daytime, or late night); (iv) organizational and interactional frameworks (staging conventions and seating configurations for show guests and audience); and (v) ethical considerations (the producers' and hosts' moral concerns).

Table 1 Discursive Features of Talk Shows as Semi-institutional Discourse

Conversational features	Institutional features
Private setting (pre-filmed scenes in show guests' homes)	Public/institutional setting (TV studio)
Relatively homogeneous form of talk	Non-homogeneous form of talk
Spontaneous talk (less topic-centered)	Purposeful talk (more topic-centered and goal-oriented)
Lower topic control and predictability	Higher topic control and predictability
Communicative and interactional goals	Communicative, interactional, and institutional goals
No particular talk-related restrictions (flexible turn-taking, topic and subtopic shifts)	Particular talk-related restrictions (time-limitation, speaker-selection, and turn-taking design)
Non-institutional/real-life roles (parent, child, etc.)	Institutional roles (panelist, expert, etc.) and non-institutional roles (parent, child, etc.)
Spontaneous role-switching (initiated by the show guests)	Monitored role-switching (controlled by the show host)
Equal participant status	Unequal participant status
Equal speaking rights	Unequal speaking rights
Interlocutor as both addressee and addressor	Multiple audience as addressee (onlooking audience and overhearing audience)
Interlocutor-oriented talk	Message- and multiple audience-oriented talk
Non-hierarchical role-distribution	Hierarchical role-distribution
Symmetrical power relations	Asymmetrical power relations
Relatively weak talk/topic control	Strong talk/topic control

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Table 2 Linguistic Features of Talk Shows as Semi-institutional Discourse

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

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According to the first criterion, Krause and Goering (1995) distinguish three categories of talk shows in the United States: the news/political analysis talk show (*Meet the Press*), the entertainment talk show (*The Tonight Show*). and the social issue talk show (*Sally Jesse Raphael*, *Oprah*). By applying the first two criteria, Carbaugh (1988) distinguishes between personality-type and issue-type

talk shows. Other authors, like Charaudeau and Ghiglione (1997), resort mostly to the first criterion to distinguish between monothematic and polythematic talk shows. The third criterion is widely used by scholars to distinguish between early morning talk shows (*Ricki Lake*), daytime talk shows (*Oprah Winfrey, Geraldo Rivera*), and late night talk shows (*David Letterman*). By applying the first three criteria, Haarman (1999: ix) distinguishes three broad categories of talk shows: the evening celebrity format (*Jay Leno's Tonight*), the issue-oriented format (*Oprah*), and the audience discussion format (*Kilroy*). In respect of the fifth criterion, namely ethical considerations, talk shows fall into two subtypes according to Richardson and Meinhof (1999: 125): exploitative, like *Jerry Springer*, which sacrifice human dignity to media entertainment requirements, and non-exploitative, like *Kilroy*.

Taking into account the changing talk show formats over the last fifteen years, Soulages (2002: 319–320) uses a combination of the first, second, and fourth criteria to distinguish three categories: 'first generation' talk shows (of the 1980s, discussing public issues), reality shows (of the early 1990s, probing into the private sphere), and 'second generation' talk shows (of the late 1990s, confession and confrontation-based).

It is important to note that, although the fundamental characteristics of talk shows are easily recognizable across cultures, it seems possible to identify cultural nuances that distinguish talk shows according to their country of origin. The situational contexts of the British, American, Italian, and French talk shows, for example, differ widely. The parodically conceived British *The Dame Edna Experience* (Tolson, 1991), the American *Tonight Show*, and the Italian *Maurizio Costanzo Show* (Mininni, 1990; Mininni and Annese, 1999) represent quite different realizations of the same, or similar, basic formulas. Intracultural differences are equally important to examine as intercultural ones. The interaction in French cultural talk-shows, such as *Apostrophes*, *Bouillon de culture,* and *Bibliothèque Médicis* follows the tradition of the French *conversation de salon* (Charaudeau, 1991; Charaudeau and Ghiglione, 1999), whereas a typically French hybrid talk show such as *Ciel mon mardi* is a mixture of serious *débat* (political discussions), *reality-show* (accounts of true life experience), and *variétés* (musical performances and jokes) (Mazdon, 1999). To some extent these stylistic differences can be accounted for by deliberate choices operated by the respective broadcasting producers. However, deliberate or not, such choices also concern audience preference and expectations, and thus constitute a revealing perspective on the culture itself.

Methodological Approaches to the Study of Talk Show Discourse

Talk shows have been examined from a variety of perspectives, including cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural approaches. They have recently become the focus of attention in media and cultural studies, as well as feminist studies. A growing number of discourse and conversation analysts are using social interactional perspectives in their studies of talk show interaction.

Scholars such as Mininni (1990), Mininni and Annese (1999), Montgomery (1991), Calsamiglia *et al.*, (1995), Hutchby (1996, 1997), Thornborrow (1997, 2001), Ilie (1998, 1999, 2001), Gregori-Signes (2000a, 2000b), Simon-Vandenbergen (2000), Myers (2001), Honda (2002), and Rama-Martínez (2003) make use of (empirical and/or theoretical) discourse and/or conversation analytical approaches to describe the mediated participant interaction in the co-construction of stories and identity roles, turn-taking strategies, closings, interruptions, personal deixis, non-verbal communication, argumentative functions of question-response sequences, management of disagreement and conflict, and male–female discursive behavior. Tolson (1991, 2001) uses Halliday's (1978) sociolinguistic theory to examine the relationship between talk as performance and the production of identities in broadcasting.

Scholars from the fields of media and cultural studies, as well as feminist studies, such as Carbaugh (1988), Masciarotte (1991), Munson (1993), Abt and Seesholtz (1994), Livingstone and Lunt (1994), Peck (1994, 1996), Krause and Goering (1995), Shattuc (1997, 1999), Mazdon (1999), and Mittell (2003) have often concentrated on the analysis and/or critique of the talk show as a media genre, as a political phenomenon, and on its impact on ordinary viewers. Carbaugh (1988) and Munson (1993) use performance theories as their underlying theoretical framework.

A number of media scholars, such as Priest (1995) and Shattuc (1997) on the one hand, and White (1992, 2002) and Peck (1996) on the other, are particularly concerned with two complementary strategies of the talk show, namely confessional framing and therapeutic framing respectively. Peck's (1994) approach focuses on racism as an important issue in the discourse of many talk shows. Keyes (1999) provides an ethnographic perspective on the theatrically staged role of the studio audience on *Shirley*, a Canadian talk show.

Psychologists, such as Nabi and Hendriks (2003), have concentrated particularly on audience response and reception of talk show messages. Guzman (1996) makes a qualitative analysis of the role of the studio audience in daytime talk shows by applying a theoretical model derived from Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social construction of reality.

See also: Context, Communicative; Gesture: Sociocultural Analysis; Interactional Sociolinguistics; Interjections; Planning Strategies and Production of Spoken Discourse; Register: Overview; Understanding Spoken Discourse.

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Tamambo

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Introduction

Tamabo [*tamᵐbo*] (Malo) is the predominant dialect of the language of the island of Malo (previously known as St. Bartholomew) in northern Vanuatu, in the southwest Pacific (**Figure 1**). It is spoken by at least 3000 people including those living on Malo, and those who have settled on the nearby 'big' island of Espiritu Santo and in Port Vila. It is learned as a first language by most children on the island, although Bislama (Vanuatu pidgin) is strengthening in almost all social contexts. Tamabo was originally the dialect of the western side of Malo; the dialect of the east [*tamapo*] is now used by no more than a handful of older speakers, although some words from that dialect are heard in several old dance songs. There is no written literature in the language, except for some copies of Presbyterian mission publications dating from the 1890s. Nevertheless, a strong oral tradition of storytelling has been maintained, and activities reflecting *Kastom* (traditional custom) such as dances, and 'fighting sticks' contests [*maⁿja*] are enjoying renewed interest and participation.

Grammatical Overview

The language is Oceanic (Austronesian); it belongs to the Northern Vanuatu linkage, and appears similar to languages of nearby Tangoa, Araki, and south Santo. Tamabo can be regarded as conservative in that it shares many of the same structural characteristics widely distributed among Oceanic languages, and many of which are posited for Proto-Oceanic (POc).

Tamabo is a nominative-accusative language, and the unmarked word order of the clause is Agent-Verb-Object or Subject-Verb. Sentence types other than the declarative are based on the unmarked declarative form. Basic clauses are most commonly verbal clauses that indicate a non-future/future contrast. There are also verbless clauses where the predicate is a noun phrase, a numeral, or a prepositional phrase. Basic noun phrase structure is similar to that outlined for POc (Lynch *et al.,* 2002: 75) with the noun as head, preceded by an article (retained only in some syntactic environments in Tamabo), and an optional premodifier such as a quantifier, and followed by an optional modifier or demonstrative. It is an agglutinating language with considerable derivational morphology and valency-changing affixes.

Lexically, many words in the language are reflexes of words posited for POc. Other characteristics common to many Oceanic languages are reflected in