
Conversational Strategies in Same-Sex Talk: An Interview Article of O' The Oprah Magazine

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Abstract

Conversational strategies are strategies that consist of linguistic strategy used to get purpose either creating domination or establishing connection. Noting the importance of women's language use in same-sex talk, this study was conducted to identify the use of conversational strategies and its functions produced by female speakers in interview article on O' The Oprah magazine. Qualitative method is used as an approach by focusing on written text of an interview article. Coates' theory (2004) is applied in order to identify the conversational strategies used by female speakers in term same-sex talk. Seven typical conversational strategies were investigated; those are minimal responses, hedges, tag question, question, command and directives, swearing and taboo language, and compliments. Each of these conversational strategies serves different functions in same-sex conversation. The result of the study is described in detail in relation to how the participants use conversational strategies and its function in same-sex conversation. Female speakers in same-sex conversation on interview article more frequently use minimal responses, hedges, questions, and command and directives terms.

Keywords: Conversational Strategies; Interview Article; Same-Sex Talk; O' The Oprah Magazine.

1. Introduction

Women magazine is a magazine published for female's readers. It contains of some article in the form of news, tips, and stories that provide some information that are aimed for female readers. One of the main types of articles is interview articles. According to McKay (2000), interview article is one of the journalistic writings allocated to interview of a prominent person, which is merely to recount an encounter, which took place for the purpose of the feature. The form of interview article is a conversation transcript which has been edited for length. Based on the initial observation of the writers upon interview articles, women are more talkative when they describe the answers of the questions uttered by an interviewer. Meanwhile, men answer more directly and clearly go to the point of the context of interview. In this case, it shows that men and women use different strategies in the way they speak.

Many studies have shown that men and women differ in their language use. In terms of conversation, they have different linguistic behavior. Assumed gender role is constructive, men are often thought as dominant speakers meanwhile women are placed in a subordinate position during the interaction (Wardhaugh, 2002). Moreover, the norm for women's talk may be the norms for small group interaction in private context, where the purpose of the interaction is solidarity stressing that is good for maintaining the social relationship (Holmes, 2008). Meanwhile, men's language is concerned with status and independence. For this reason, Maltz and Borker (1982) propose that there will be misunderstanding and misinterpreting which often occur during mix-sex conversation.

Many researchers have suggested that women and men differ in using conversational strategies. A conversational strategy is the linguistic strategy used by the participants during a conversation (Tannen, 1991). It shows that men and women's behaviors in conversation suggest that they have different specific linguistic features in their speech. Therefore, in this study, the writers analyze the characteristic conversation strategies used by women based on the interview articles in O' The Oprah women's magazine. This magazine was chosen because O' magazine has been recognized for its

outstanding content with 11 nominations for Excellence from the American Society of Magazine Editors (ASME) and was a National Magazine Award winner in 2007 in the Leisure Interests category (www.hearst.com). In addition, the interview article for magazine was conducted based on live interview conversation showed in the Oprah's TV network (OWN). For *O' magazine*, the transcript of their conversation has been edited in a form of article magazine. Therefore, it could be proved that the interview transcript published in the magazine is based on the real conversation.

Based on the explanation above, Coates (2004) declares that women tend to be cooperative conversationalist. Hence, women tend to acknowledge and build the conversation. Therefore, women tend to use the conversational strategies based on solidarity and supports among them in conversation. They use conversational strategies in their speech to keep the flow of interaction going (cited in Coates, 2004).

Previous study of conversational strategies is conducted by Anindyawati (2012). In her study, she uses Coates' theory (2004) to analyze the different strategies used in the mixed-gender conversation. The result of the study shows that there are different hedges and their functions produced by male and female students during mix-sex conversation. The gap with this study, in this study, the writers analyze the conversational strategies used by female speakers in the same-sex conversation.

Pridham (2001) states in her book entitled *The Language of Conversation* that the written text can be analyzed based on spoken language features since the text contains of spoken language. Therefore, an interview article can be said containing spoken language features since its source is based on the recording and transcription, where transcription is an attempt to represent, in a written form, the sounds and words of the spoken language. Therefore, the form of conversation in the interview article on women's magazine can be valid data to show that there are special strategies used by women in the way they speak.

In this study, the writers analyze conversational strategies found in interview articles using the theory proposed by Coates (2004). Coates classifies seven strategies of communication. Those are minimal responses, hedges, question, tag questions, command and directives, swearing and taboo language, and compliments. Further, each of those strategies has its own function. After analyzing how the speakers of the interview use the strategies, the writers identify the function of the conversational strategies used by women in *O' The Oprah Magazine*. However, this study only focuses on analyzing minimal responses; hedges; questions; and; command and directives since those strategies were the most frequent strategies used than the other strategies in the interview article of *O' The Oprah magazine*.

2. Method of the Study

In this study, the writers took some data from an interview article in women's magazine *O' The Oprah magazine*. It is an American monthly women's interest magazine, published by Hearst Cooperation and Oprah Winfrey. It was firstly published on April 19, 2000 in the United States. This magazine gives some information for women's lives and lifestyle, advice, and tools focusing on self-empowerments. The readers of this magazine are women over the age of 20. This magazine does not only contain some attractive articles, but also specially designed to reach up certain target readers. It can be said that *O' The Oprah magazine* can represent the description of women's language accurately since it is designed to be read by female readers.

In analyzing the conversational strategies used by women in *O' The Oprah magazine*. The writers took an online article as the data that was taken from the official website of *O' The Oprah magazine* (www.oprah.com/omagazine). For the data, the writers used the online version of *O' The Oprah magazine* interview article published in May 2013 containing a conversation between Oprah as the interviewer and Maya Angelo as the interviewee. In analyzing the data, firstly, the writers classified utterances spoken by both speakers which contain the conversational strategies proposed by Coates (2004). Then, she identified how female speakers in the interview articles used the conversational strategies. Subsequently, she examined the functions of the strategies. After that, the writers interpreted the use of hedges and their functions by applying Macaulay's (2005) theory. The last step was making conclusion.

3. Uses of Conversational Strategies and their functions

3.1 Minimal responses

In the analysis of minimal responses, the writers did not analyze all minimal responses found. She only analyzed several minimal responses and their functions which are considered as interesting to be discussed further such as the use of minimal response *mmm-Hmm* and *yes*. Furthermore, the functions of minimal responses can be seen through the following examples.

Excerpt 1:

M: I had to get a place where I could forgive the man who raped me when I was 7 years old. And that was a matter of incredible of mental gymnastics. I had to think of what I had done to other people and how I'd been forgiven. Whatever I've done. I've been forgiven.

O: **Mmm-hmm**

M: I won't -- I won't -- forget. And I will not put myself in a situation where that can be done to me again. But I understand.

Maya was talking about her life experiences as a victim of rape when she was 7 years old. She told when she had to forgive someone who has raped her. She declared that forgiving others' mistakes became an incredible moment in her life. Afterward, Oprah used minimal response in the form of utterances to elicit the next story from Maya. It showed that Oprah wanted to know more about it. Therefore, Maya continued her statement and stated that she never forgot that incident and she would not do the same again in her life.

From the dialogue above, it can be noted that Oprah and Maya were talking about more personal topic. It is about Maya's bad incident that happened in the past and what she felt about that incident right now. In this case, the use of minimal response indicated that Oprah required to know the follow-up the story and had Maya to continue her story. Moreover, Oprah used the response "mmm-hmm" after Maya finished her statement. It can be noted that Oprah placed a minimal response is neither overlapping nor interrupting the flow of Maya's Talk.

The function of minimal response "mmm-hmm" is to encourage current speaker to go on with the following stories. In this case, the listener used minimal response "Mmm-hmm" in order to show that she was listening to the current speaker. Based on the dialogue above, the minimal response can be indicated as continuers. It could be seen that Oprah used a minimal response after Maya finished her story. The word "Mmm-Hmm" shows that Oprah recognized that Maya's utterances in the first line on the dialogue was not the end of her story and she used the responses to allow the current speaker to continue her story.

Excerpt 2:

M: Two or three days. He'd taken me back to his house. I couldn't even sit up—my ribs were broken. I couldn't call anyone. I had no breath. I prayed. Then suddenly I heard loud shouting in the hall, and my mother said, "Break this S.O.B. down. My baby's in there." And the two huge men broke down the door, and my mother walked in and saw me and fainted because I looked so—well, my teeth had gone through my lips.

O: So she rescued you. That is what I love about this story.

M: **Yes.**

O: And she nursed you back to health. And then one day she handed you her .38—

In the excerpt 2, Maya told her experience when she was imprisoned by someone in a house. Then, her mother came and rescued her from that incident. Oprah gave a comment about Maya's incident. She thought that the action of her mother at that time was the best moment in Maya's story. Subsequently, Maya supported Oprah's statement by giving minimal response at the end of Oprah's utterances. She wanted to show that she agreed with Oprah's statement. Then, Oprah continued her statement in the following dialogue.

In the dialogue above, the use of minimal response "yes" is not to answer Oprah's question. Maya gave short comment of the word "yes" as minimal response after she heard Oprah's statement and let Oprah continue her speech. Maya's responses could be seen as encouragement to Oprah and let her to continue her speech. It also implied Maya's agreement about what was said by Oprah.

From the excerpt above, the function of minimal response “yes” is to show the listener agreement. This minimal response form is a kind of listener’s response to the current speaker’s talk. The use of minimal response “yes” indicates that Maya as the listener supports what Oprah said. It can be seen that Maya was a cooperative conversationalist who was responsible to the flow of talk. Hence, Maya provided encouraging feedback to her conversational partner by using minimal response

3.2 Hedges

In this study, the writers did not analyze all hedges found in interview article. However, she only analyzed hedges that are considered as interesting to be discussed further such as the use of hedges *you know* and its multifunctional functions.

Excerpt 3:

O: [Laughs.] Thank you for that. I want to talk more about your book, because I know what your mother—and I had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Vivian Baxter myself before she passed away [in 1991]—meant in your life. **You know**, the greatest of all the stories I've heard about her over the years or read in this book is the one about the man you were dating who picked you up at work and kidnapped you—tell that story.

M: Well, he picked me up and drove me out to an area near San Francisco called Half Moon Bay. He asked me to get out of the car, and I did.

Oprah talked about Maya’s book. She knew what Maya’s mother meant in Maya’s life and she told that she once met Maya’s mother before she passed away. In Oprah’s dialogue, she mentioned that the greatest of all the stories from Maya’s book. She told that the best one is when the man, who dated with Maya, picked her up from her office and kidnapped her. Oprah asked Maya to tell more about the incidents.

Oprah’s usage of hedge “you know” in the dialogue above that literally had no meaning actually conveyed that she guaranteed the truth of the proportion she uttered. She wanted to emphasize that she is certain with her opinion by using hedges. In addition, the hedges “you know” assert her certainty that the greatest of Maya’s book is about kidnapping incident.

The function of hedges “you know” is as a signal of giving opinion. It can be seen that Oprah used hedges in her utterances when she shared her opinion about Maya’s book. In addition, the form of hedges “you know” functioned to show that the current speaker’s certainty. Oprah used hedges “you know” is to emphasize that she is sure that her opinion is truth.

Excerpt 4:

O: **You know**, when I first approached you so many years ago and asked if I could interview you...I just think how great God is. Because in that moment, I allowed myself to be vulnerable enough to take the risk of being turned down. I think I was in my early 20s.

M: If that. I was speaking at a university, and when you came up to me and said, "Dr. Angelou," I said, "No, I'm afraid I can't, but I thank you." And you said, "If you'll just give me five minutes...." So I said all right, because of your persistence. And you had good questions. You listened to my answers. And then you said, "Thank you so much." I looked at my watch, and it had been exactly five minutes.

Oprah and Maya were talking about their first meeting. Oprah explained how her first impression when she met and interviewed Maya when she was still around 20s. In her dialogue, she thought about how great God was for allowing herself to be vulnerable to take the risk of being turned down. In the second dialogue, Maya told that it took Oprah five minutes for the first interview.

Oprah used a hedge “you know” in her first utterance before telling her story. The use of the hedge “you know” placed in the front of the speaker’s utterances was due to the speaker’s wish to emphasize what he/she said. Oprah’s usage of hedges form “You know” showed that she wanted to assert that she did know well about how Oprah met Maya in the first time interview. She wanted to assert her certainty that she still remembered about her first interview with Maya in the past.

The function of this hedge in this context as a signal of reminding the listener to what the current speaker said. The speaker hedged her utterances in order to let the listener remember what they have done. It could be seen from the response of Maya about her first impression in their first meeting.

3.3 Question

There are two kinds of questions such as yes/no question and WH-question that will be analyzed for this study. However, there are some questions which were not analyzed although their emergence was in the forms of question. They were not counted as question if those inquiries were as quotation from the conversation that happened in the past or from what other people said. The data were only based on the question spoken by the speakers during the interview.

Excerpt 5:

- O:** So as we list all your achievements, the first black streetcar conductor—I'll give that to you, and not the man who passed for white—recipient of 70 honorary degrees, author of more than 30 books, **is there anything you wanted to have on that list but didn't get a chance to do?**
- M:** Well, one of the things I wanted was to have a daughter. I have a son, who is my heart. A wonderful young man, daring and loving and strong and kind. I wanted a daughter. So I've taken people's daughters. I have certainly taken you. I took my daughter-in-law. Because I know I'm a good mother.

In this conversation, Oprah mentioned all Maya's achievement such as being the first black streetcar conductor recipient of 70 honorary degrees and the author of more than 30 books. Then, Oprah asked a question whether there was anything she wanted but could not get it. Maya answered that she wanted to have a daughter. She thought that she was a good mother, hence she adopted peoples' daughters to be her daughters-in-law.

The usage of question in excerpt 5 is a kind of yes/no question. Oprah questioned Maya since she did not know what Maya wanted. In this case, the usage of question could be seen as Oprah's need of response from Maya since she wanted to know more about her desire in her life. The form of question used was to get an answer from other speaker. In the dialogue, Oprah used a yes/no question that needs a simple answer. Instead of giving a simple answer, Maya used a long descriptive answer that had a similar meaning with a simple form of 'yes' answer. Excerpt 5 shows how Maya was forced to participate in the conversation by Oprah's use of question.

The usage of question in excerpt 5 functioned to obtain the information. The interviewer's use the form of question is to seek information from interviewee's answer. From the explanation above, it could be noted that female speaker used the question to check whether or not there was anything that Maya wanted but she could not make it.

Excerpt 6:

- M:** At the White House. Thank God. I thank God I'm myself and for the life I'm given to live and for friends and lovers and beloveds, and I thank God for knowing that all those people have already paid for me.
- O:** That's one of my favorite lessons you taught me. **Will you share that?** What does it mean that we've already been paid for?
- M:** You've been paid for by people who never even saw your face. Your mother's mother, your father's father. And so it behooves you to prepare yourself so you can pay for someone else yet to come. Whose name you'll never know. You just keep the good thing going.

In excerpt 2, they were talking about how Maya felt when she got a medal from president at the white house. She said that all those people have already supported her. Then, Oprah told that it was her favorite lesson and asked Maya to share her opinion about the meaning of what she has said. Maya told that "we have already been paid" means that someone has paid for people whom they never met before and it behooves someone to pay for someone else in the future. This conversation could be about someone appreciated to other people's achievement even if they have never met each other before.

In excerpt 2, Oprah used WH question, "What does it mean that we've already been paid for?" to show that she needed more explanation from Maya since the interviewer did not know the meaning of the interviewee's utterances. Subsequently, Maya explained her utterances to make the hearer understand better. In this case, Oprah as the interviewer is the listener of Maya's story.

The use of WH question functioned to instigate the stories. In this case, the interviewer asked the form of question to asked the interviewee to explain more about her utterances in specific and clearer

information. Therefore, the use of WH question shows that Oprah, as the interviewer instigated the information in Maya's answer.

3.4 Command and Directives

A directive is one of the conversational strategies that imply power. The analysis of directive forms shows that both of interviewer and interviewee used directives in their utterances in form of 'aggravated' and 'mitigated' directives. This study is focused on the analysis of female in the same-sex conversation. Therefore, some directives were not counted as the data since the emergences produced by male speakers or the directives forms uttered by female speaker toward male addressee.

Excerpt 7:

- O:** [*Laughs.*] Thank you for that. I want to talk more about your book, because I know what your mother—and I had the pleasure of meeting Ms. Vivian Baxter myself before she passed away [in 1991]—meant in your life. You know, the greatest of all the stories I've heard about her over the years or read in this book is the one about the man you were dating who picked you up at work and kidnapped you—**tell that story.**

In the excerpt above, the interviewer led the topic of the interview to talk about Maya's book. Oprah said that she had pleasure to meet Ms. Vivian Baxter, Maya's mother, before she passed away. She said that the best part of Maya's book was when Maya told about her kidnapping incident. Then, Oprah asked Maya to tell that story.

The directive form "tell that story" used by the interviewer was the stronger form. She used an explicit command to get the following stories spoken by the interviewee. Therefore, this interviewer's utterance is classified as imperative directives. In this case, the interviewer has a dominant position in the conversation to take control of the topic of the conversation and the flow of the interviewee's utterances.

The directive form used by the interviewer "tell that story" in the excerpt above was in a aggravated form. She used a direct form to give command to the interviewee to do what she wanted. In this case, the use of directive form by the interviewer functioned to drive the hearer to commit a certain action verbally. This form of directive presents a power of controlling. It means that the interviewer has an authority to demand the hearer to tell the story that the interviewer's need.

Excerpt 8:

- M:** At the White House. Thank God. I thank God I'm myself and for the life I'm given to live and for friends and lovers and beloveds, and I thank God for knowing that all those people have already paid for me.
- O:** That's one of my favorite lessons you taught me. **Will you share that?** What does it mean that we've already been paid for?

In the dialogue above, Maya told that she was very thankful to God and everybody around her when she got the medal from the president at the White house. She was very happy because those people have supported her life. Then, Oprah said that her stories were her favorite's lesson that Maya thought. She asked Maya to share more information about what she had said.

The excerpt above shows that the directives used was in the form of question "will you share that?" This form of question is kind of imbedded imperatives hence the speaker asked permission to demand the interviewee to explain more information about what she wanted to know. The emergence of this form was because the speaker required an action by the listeners. Moreover, the form of directive in its submissive form showed that the speaker did not want to be rude by asking other female speaker assertively. It can be noted that the female speaker used less direct form by asking when she wanted the addressee to do something. The use of submissive directive forms was due to female speaker was non-hierarchical with all female speakers in conversation who participated in making decision.

The question of directive form "Will you share that?" by the interviewer implied that she was aware of other people's feeling. Thus, Oprah used the mitigated directive form that was less straightforward and well mannered. The use of question form was to show indirectness in uttering what the speaker wanted to the addressee to do. The mitigated directive is used to show that the speaker was concerned of maintaining the politeness during conversation and other speaker's feeling.

Therefore, the function of this directive form was to maintain good social relations among the speakers.

Excerpt 9:

O: And even when you were 16 and pregnant, she did not shame you.

M: Not at all. She said, "Do you know who the father is?" I said yes. She asked me, "Do you love him?" No. "Does he love you?" No. Then she said, "We're not **gonna** ruin three lives. We're **gonna** have a beautiful baby."

In the dialogue above, Oprah asked how Maya's mother felt when her daughter was pregnant at the age of 16. In excerpt 9, Maya retold her conversation with her mother at that time. Maya's mother asked about who her baby's father was and how Maya felt to the man. Then, her mother said in Maya's utterances that they would keep the baby.

The use of directive form is not always linked to give command to other speakers in conversation. The speaker used directive form "gonna" when the speaker gave advice of the other speaker's problem. In this case, Maya's mother still took account of her daughter's problem. Her mother asserted her decision to what proposed action would be taken in the future. She told what they were going to do to solve Maya's problem.

The uses of directive form "gonna" in both of utterances was to make an implied suggestion for future action. The form of directive shows that the current speaker cared about other's speaker problem. This kind of mitigated form functioned to arrange what both of speakers were going to do together in the next future. In this case, Maya's mother suggested that they would not ruin their lives and the baby's. Moreover, she gave a decision to keep the baby until it was born. It can be concluded that the mitigated directive used by the female speakers functioned to maintain good social relation with others.

4. Conclusion

In this study, there are conversational strategies found in the interview article of *O' The Oprah magazine*. Those strategies are minimal responses (such as *mmm-hmm* and *yes*) used in the interview article. The use of minimal responses functioned to encourage current speaker to go on with the following stories and to imply the listener's agreement about what was said by the current speaker. Then, In analysis of hedges form, the writers only focused on analyzing the use of hedges *You Know* which has multifunctional functions. Based on the data, the writers found that the use of hedge *you know* is functioned to emphasize the speaker's utterances when she wanted to give her opinion and to remind the hearers. Both of the functions of hedge *you know* show that the speakers are certain with what they say. Furthermore, the use of question functioned to obtain the information and to instigate the stories. The last strategy is directives and the use of aggravated directives functions to drive the hearer to commit a certain action verbally. This form of directive presents a power of controlling. Then, mitigated directives are used to show that the speakers are concerned with maintaining the politeness during conversation and other speaker's feeling. Therefore, the function of this directive form is to maintain good social relations among the speakers. Therefore, it can be concluded that women tend to be cooperative speakers since they tend to build good relations when they talk in the same sex talk. Female speakers used conversational strategies to maintain social relationship among the speakers.

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