A Discourse Analytical Study of TV Talk-show Therapy

YAN Xiaoping

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Dr. Kenneth Kong

Hong Kong Baptist University

March 2008
Abstract

Using therapeutic conversations from a televised talk show as the source data, this research investigates how people solve emotional problems in an institutional setting within a specific social cultural context. A combined methodology of Genre Theory, Conversation Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics and Sociolinguistics disciplines is employed to examine the problem-focused discourse.

The research considers TV talk show therapy a valid genre. This claim is based on the generic evidence drawn from the data. As a task-oriented interaction, the talk show therapy has been characterized with the communicative intentionality to resolve emotional problems and to promote mental health to the public. These components in turn have shaped the generic structures, which become the crucial criteria that constitute a text as a genre.

Hierarchically, the TV talk show therapy emerges as a four-layer-structure. On the top layer, this social event is “Therapeutic Interview”, working to solve emotional problems. This interview is then composed of a lower rank of “Phases”. Each “Phase” is in turn composed of “Stages”. A “Stage” is further composed of the next layer of “Sub-moves”. Sequentially, this interview progresses through nine stages, which are labeled as Orientation, Elicitation, Identification, Confirmation, Explanation, Intervention, Advice, Reformulation and Projection. The internal structure of this social event has a clear beginning, a carefully organized closing, and a recognizable body of Problem-Construction and Problem-Solving Phases in between.

Two sub-genres, namely, the talk show genre and therapy genre predominately direct the “track” of the conversation. The goal of resolving emotional problems via the talk show interview is met by focusing on two thematic topics. The first thematic topic is to identify the problem that afflicts the client in the Problem-Construction Phase. The second thematic topic is undertaken in the Problem-Solving Phase to alleviate stress and resolve problems for the client.

As talk show therapy, intervention in this program is executed by means of conversation, and the verbal interaction is action-centred. This type of intervention is illustrated by the two action-focused stages of Confirmation and Intervention, wherein the client is invited to join in the therapeutic activities in order to make an accurate diagnosis and to exert influence on the client’s perspective or behaviour.

The healing talk employs the use of dialogue rather than a monologue in its effort to resolve emotional issues. This is shown by the predominance of the discursive structure of question-answer in therapeutic counseling. As the therapeutic conversation proceeds, questions typically switch from open-ended types to close-ended types. Such
# Table of Contents

Declaration I  
Abstract ii  
Acknowledgement iv  
Table of Contents v  
List of Tables and Diagrams ix  

Chapter 1 Introduction  
1.1 Background to the study 1  
1.2 Objectives of the study 5  
1.3 Outline of the thesis 6  

Chapter 2 Literature Review  
2.1 Introduction 8  
2.2 Psychotherapy 8  
2.2.1 History of psychotherapy 8  
2.2.2 Psychotherapy and counseling 11  
2.2.3 Studies in the related areas 13  
2.3 Institutional conversation 16  
2.4 Conversation Analysis (CA) 18  
2.5 Birmingham School 20  
2.6 Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) 21  
2.6.1 Three metafunctions 22  
2.6.2 Generic Structure Potential Model (GSP) 23  
2.7 Study of conversation in sociolinguistics 26  
2.7.1 Ethnography of the “Speaking” Model 26  
2.7.2 Interactional Sociolinguistics 29  
2.7.3 Internal Narrative Structure Model 30  
2.8 Genre Study 31  
2.8.1 Development of genre study 32  
2.8.2 Defining features of genre study 35  
2.8.3 Application of genre in pedagogy 36  
2.8.4 Application of genre in other contexts 37  
2.9 Discourse and productive power 38  
2.10 Summary 39  

Chapter 3 Research Methodology  
3.1 Introduction 40
3.2 TV talk shows
3.3 About the data
3.4 Research focus
3.5 Theoretical framework
  3.5.1 Genre study as the major framework
  3.5.2 Approaches combined with the major framework
3.6 Data processing
3.7 Data transcription
3.8 Summary

Chapter 4 Generic Structures of the TV talk show therapy
  4.1 Introduction
  4.2 Identifying the communicative purposes
  4.3 Identifying the generic structures
    4.3.1 Emergent stages
    4.3.2 An example of analyzing a complete interview
    4.3.3 The prototype of the generic structure
  4.4 Discussion
    4.4.1 The overall structure
    4.4.2 Salient features of the generic structure
    4.4.3 Relationship between the communicative purpose and structure
  4.5 Summary

Chapter 5 Analysis of Opening and Closing Phases
  5.1 Introduction
  5.2 Analysis of the Opening Phase
    5.2.1 Functional moves in Opening
    5.2.2 The structural prototype in Opening
    5.2.3 Interpersonal functions in Opening
  5.3 Analysis of the Closing Phase
    5.3.1 Functional moves in Closing
    5.3.2 The structural prototype in Closing
    5.3.3 Ranking of the functional moves in Closing
  5.4 Summary

Chapter 6 Analysis of the Problem-Construction Phase
  6.1 Introduction
6.2 Stage of Elicitation
   6.2.1 Functional moves in Elicitation
   6.2.2 Questions in Elicitation
   6.2.3 Responses in Elicitation
6.3 Stage of Identification
   6.3.1 Functional moves in Identification
   6.3.2 Questions and answers in Identification
   6.3.3 Exchange patterns and power
6.4 Stage of Confirmation
   6.4.1 Functional moves in Confirmation
   6.4.2 The structural prototype of Confirmation
   6.4.3 Politeness in Confirmation
6.5 Summary

Chapter 7 Analysis of the Problem-Solving Phase
7.1 Introduction
7.2 Stage of Explanation
   7.2.1 Functional moves in Explanation
   7.2.2 Authoritative voice in Explanation
7.3 Stage of Intervention
   7.3.1 Functional moves in Intervention
   7.3.2 The structural prototype in Intervention
   7.3.3 Differences between Intervention and Confirmation
7.4 Stage of Advice
   7.4.1 Functional moves in Advice
   7.4.2 Advice-seeking move
   7.4.3 Advice-providing move
   7.4.4 Advice-evaluation move
7.5 Stage of Reformulation
   7.5.1 Changes in the client’s perspective
   7.5.2 Changes in the client’s modal expressions
   7.5.3 Modal expressions in the conversation
7.6 Summary

Chapter 8 Conclusion
8.1 Introduction
8.2 Talk show therapy as a hybrid genre
8.3 How talk show therapy differs from conventional therapy
8.4 How therapy focused talk shows differ from traditional talk show
8.5 Communicative purposes determining the generic structure
8.6 Integration of Chinese culture in therapy
8.7 Talk show therapy as institutional discourse
8.8 Talk show therapy as empowering discourse
  8.8.1 Empowering through genre
  8.8.2 Empowering through “troubles telling”
  8.8.3 Empowering through introspection
  8.8.4 Empowering through reformulation
  8.8.5 Empowering through politeness
  8.8.6 Dynamic power in talk show therapy
8.9 Implications of the research
  8.9.1 Theoretical implications
  8.9.2 Pedagogical implications
8.10 Limitations and future direction
8.11 Conclusive remarks

References
Appendixes
Curriculum vitae