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# PROVERBS IN FEATURE INTERVIEWS: A COGNITIVE-DISCURSIVE STUDY OF OPRAH WINFREY'S INTERVIEWS

***Abstract:*** In this article Anglo-American proverbs are studied within the framework of the cognitive-discursive approach in linguistics. Oprah Winfrey's print feature interviews were selected as the material for analysis. First, we single out the characteristics of O. Winfrey's interview discourse relevant for our research. Next, we look at the functions proverbs fulfill on the structural level of the interview discourse. Last, we analyze the way proverbs (and proverbial expressions) function on the thematic/content level.

***Keywords:*** context, feature interview, discourse, cognitive-discursive function, magazine, mass media, Oprah Winfrey, *O. The Oprah Magazine*.

Conversation consisting of a chain of questions and answers is typical of everyday communication in different situations and social settings. The same question/answer structural principle implying turn-taking is used for the organization of interviews. Generally speaking, an interview is a form of dialogue aimed at retrieving relevant or important information. Thus, the interview is an institutional interaction with the clearly defined roles of interviewer and interviewee whose relations are asymmetrical. The former coordinates the flow of the conversation; the latter is rather passive being involved only in providing necessary information by answering questions. What differentiates a professional interview from everyday conversation is the mass audience for which it is intended.

Today's popular genre of interview is relatively young. The word itself, although known since 1514 (Anglo-French *entreveue* = meeting of great people), has been used in its now accepted meaning for a little more than just a century, since the 1860s. It has gone through criticism[1] to omnipresence in the mass media of

today. Some scholars even go as far as to brand the modern society as 'the interview society' (Fontana, 2001:161).

Popular as this journalistic genre is, the interview discourse is not sufficiently studied both by social sciences and linguistics (Platt, 2001:33, Briggs, 2001:137). Most research has been done into the news interview discourse, which is a genre of 'serious journalism' aimed at delivering serious and timely information.

David L. Altheide argues that interviewing has been transformed to an 'entertainment vehicle' (2001:411). According to him, this transformation was caused by "the media logic that has developed since the early days of print journalism." His basic thesis is that a major reason for interviewing being so relevant nowadays is its shift "from an information orientation to an impact orientation that is more characteristic of our media culture." (ibid.)

Today many new 'infotainment' media products aimed at providing information in an entertaining manner enjoy great popularity. They deal with human interest topics, like art and entertainment, health and life style, fashion and celebrities.

For our research we selected the interviews done by Oprah Winfrey, one of the best-known American media persons and most influential women in show business. The stunning popularity of the Harpo Productions, Inc. Company's products accounts for this choice as well. We studied her print feature interviews published in *O, The Oprah Magazine*.

The magazine industry is considered one of the most highly sophisticated and innovative parts of the media industry (Niblock, 1996:72). *O, The Oprah Magazine* is a monthly women's edition with a clearly stated mission of helping women "see every experience and challenge as an opportunity to grow and discover their best self." Thus, frank conversation with readers is the magazine's priority. The interviews featured in some issues serve this goal really well, too.

Nowadays, interviewing is widely used on TV, radio, and in the press. Numerous interview discourse scholars note the main role of television in setting standards for the interview (Altheide, 2001:411). O. Winfrey gained her popularity working in the field of the so-called celebrity journalism thanks to her ability to make contact with her interviewees on The Oprah Winfrey Show. It is worth mentioning that the topics discussed in her interviews are of

high social significance and concern spiritual growth, knowing oneself, fighting bad diseases, charity, and community service. Barbara Walters, another legendary American TV host, called Oprah an extraordinary person who changed many people's lives[2]. The celebrated journalist Les Payne of Newsday believes that she is very well "attuned to her audience, if not the world."[3] These, as well as many other reviews and quotes, may account for the fact that Oprah Winfrey's interviews provide exciting material for cognitive-discursive study.

We should start our analysis with the description of the key features of Oprah Winfrey's interview discourse. We will mainly focus on such significant discursive characteristics as structure, goal, interviewer and interviewee's interrelations, their roles, and the style of communication.

According to celebrity journalism scholars, the now existent publicity concept gave birth to the celebrity profile formula, i.e., a number of standard structures and key elements typical of feature interviews (celebrity profiles) found on pages of large newspapers and mainstream magazines (Marshall, 2005:24-25). The same publicity concept asks of a journalist to take on an insider's role to be able to get his/her star interlocutor into an intimate conversation to capture readers' attention. The following elements of the print feature interview/celebrity profile are distinguished:

A. The meeting of journalist and star in either domestic setting or café.
B. The description of the casual dress and demeanor of the star.
C. The discussion of their current work-which is essentially the anchor for why the story is newsworthy.
D. The revelation of something that is against the grain of what is generally perceived to be the star's persona-something that is anecdotal but is revealing of the star's true nature (ibid).

Oprah Winfrey interviews have the traditional print interview structure and include its basic elements, i.e. heading, headline, lead, interview (the text), and pictures. However, we can observe some deviations from the aforementioned celebrity profile formula. Oprah and her respondents typically have their conversation in domestic settings, which she frequently speaks about in the lead. Nevertheless, she prefers not to provide the description of her interviewees' appearance but rather to reflect on some of their bio-

graphical facts, her perception of their demeanor, or to focus on some of their quotes taken from the interview that follows afterwards. It is, as we believe, demonstrative of her not being 'hunt for sensation' oriented, but her pursuing a serious task of retrieving highly valuable information, acquiring new pieces of knowledge, and exchanging bits of life experience.

What distinguishes the Oprah Winfrey interview discourse is a wide circle of respondents. Every time her guests are well-known people, ranging from statesmen, like Nelson Mandela and Barack Obama, spiritual leaders, like The Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh, showmen, like Jerry Seinfeld and Tina Fey, actors, like Meryl Streep and Tom Hanks, sportsmen, like the Williams sisters and Lance Armstrong, writers, like Toni Morrison and Janet Fitch, musicians, like Bono and Stevie Wonder, to ordinary people who have been in all sorts of dire straits in their life and managed to cope, e.g. the Central Park Jogger who was left for dead after having been violently raped in New York's Central Park, or Christine McFadden, a mother of four kids, all of whom were shot by her ex-husband.

Our study shows that *O, The Oprah Magazine* uses interviewing not only as an entertainment vehicle helping to reveal famous interviewees' personalities. Oprah's interlocutors are people with diverse backgrounds, many of whom have gained wealth and reached fame and success. Like any other human being, they are 'storages' of feelings and emotions, opinions and judgments, i.e., elements of life experience. Oprah Winfrey, however, tends to interview those who, in her opinion, possess valuable experience, that can be of use to her readers. Thus, her interviews are acts of cooperation based on the mutual exchange of knowledge and aimed to provide help.

The journalistic interview gives journalists much more freedom compared to the news interview, which requires their neutrality and impartiality. Thus, the interviewer gets the chance to share his/her point of view or make judgments. Oprah's interviews are highly informal being close to everyday talk and following its model. Her interviewees testify to this fact, too. Consider the following extract from the interview with Ralph Lauren, a successful American designer:

**Oprah:** A lot of people have described you as shy. Do you see yourself that way?

**Ralph:** I'm not great at cocktail parties. I can sit with you and talk about anything, because this is a real conversation. It's not about bullshit. It's about realness, and that's what I'm good at. If you get me on a subject I know about, I'm very strong. If I don't know much about it, I don't say much.

As an interviewer, Oprah Winfrey adheres to a cooperative style of communication providing equal interaction of interlocutors. It sometimes results in role switch in the course of the interview, when the interviewee takes on the role of the interviewer and asks questions her/himself. This happened, for instance, in the interview with Bono. The topic of joy caused a lively exchange of ideas which led to the respondent asking the interviewer questions. This, as we suppose, manifests their sincere interest in the discussion and the partner as well as their focus on exploring the topic to the fullest:

**Oprah:** Is joy elusive for you?

**Bono:** I don't know. Our band has it when we're going off. There's a joy vibration there. It's not miserable-ism.

**Oprah:** Joy is a very high energy field.

**Bono:** I'm grumpy. You seem to have a level of joy. Are there months when things aren't going right for you, when you're in a trough, or do you have just, like, one bad day a week?

**Oprah:** Not even a bad day a week.

**Bono:** Really?

**Oprah:** Absolutely not.

**Bono:** Well, I have a couple of bad days a week.

Another characteristic feature of the Oprah Winfrey interview discourse is frequent extemporization. Beyond doubt, any interview presupposes some degree of interviewer's preparedness, i.e. collecting data about the interviewee, selecting theme/topics for

discussion, making a list of questions to be asked, etc. In her many interviews Oprah speaks about huge preparatory work that she usually does when getting ready for the discussion. However, it should be noted that her interviews don't have a 'fixed' content as in many cases she comes up with on-the-spot questions which are a response to the previous statement. As an illustration let us consider the beginning of the interview with the standup comedy actress Ellen DeGeneres:

> **Ellen DeGeneres** [*After checking her caller ID*]: Harpo Inc.
>
> **Oprah:** [*Laughs*] I love it. Are you awake?
>
> **Ellen:** I am. I just woke up. I had a horrible night. The weirdest thing happened. We had some huge pop in the wall at 2:30 in the morning, and then it sounded like our whole house was going to explode. I don't know if a speaker blew or what—it was just this crazy loud vibration that went on forever, and I lay in bed thinking that the house was going to catch fire because there'd been an electrical short. So I went down to the basement—I haven't been down to the basement since we moved in two years ago—and lying next to all the audiovisual equipment is an audiobook called *Being in Balance*.
>
> **Oprah:** Oh my goodness. Isn't that just how the world works?
>
> **Ellen:** There's always a reason things happen.
>
> **Oprah:** You're exactly like I am. I know that everything happens for a reason, so I look at everything like, "Okay, what does *that* mean, *and* What am I supposed to be getting from that?"
>
> **Ellen:** Right.
>
> **Oprah:** You know, you can make yourself nuts doing that, though. But it's also the way to live, I think. How long have you been living this way?
>
> **Ellen:** Well, I think I've always been a searcher <…>

The basic characteristic features of the Oprah Winfrey interview discourse described above are of great importance and, thus, will be taken into account in our cognitive-discursive study of the way proverbs (and proverbial expressions) function within it. We selected 75 interviews published in *O, The Oprah Magazine* (2000-2009).

Like many other glossy women's magazines *O, The Oprah Magazine* profusely employs proverbs in advertisements published on its pages, both in headings and texts of articles. In the interviews under discussion, we have come across numerous cases of proverb use.

Proverbs in headings/titles—one of the strong positions of the text—are known to be efficient attention grabbers. Nevertheless, none were found in the headings of the interviews we studied. The editors of the magazine follow a certain pattern of using the standard phrase 'Oprah Talks to…', which in every separate case is complemented by some famous person's name. Such recurrent headings serve as the magazine's hallmark, and by announcing the celebrated interviewee, they secure readers' interest. In the interviews we studied there are no proverbs in the headlines and leads, too. However, as has been revealed, paremias play a special role in the structural organization of the interview discourse.

Any print interview is based on a written version of a live talk. According to H. Sacks, E. A. Schegloff, and G. Jefferson, the conversation analysis method founders, any naturally occurring conversation is a deeply ordered, structurally organized social practice (Hutchby, 2005:211-212). Much earlier Kenneth Burke likened society to "a conversation where people join in, say their piece and leave" (Machin, van Leeuwen, 2005:41). Conversation analysis is aimed to disclose how interlocutors comprehend each other and respond to each other in their turns at talk, paying special attention to how sequences of social actions are formed, e.g. the beginning/end of talk, invitation to participate in conversation, settling disagreement, etc. Thus, the interview like ordinary conversation possesses global and local structures. The elements of the global structure include the beginning, the main part (unfolding of the main topic, subtopics, secondary topics), and the end of the interview. But for our cognitive-discursive analysis of the way proverbs function in the interview discourse its local structure is of greater interest.

On the local level of its organization the interview has a typical interactional form. The interview is a kind of interaction involving subsequent turn-taking of asking and answering questions by participants. Thus, we refer to the following core elements to the local structure:

- **turn-taking;**
- **question-answer adjacency pairs**, i.e. a sequence of communicative turns;
- **turns**, made up of functional units called '**moves'**;
- **continuers/ receipt tokens.**

It is worth mentioning that interaction happening between an interviewer and an interviewee is a process generating the content of the interview. Turn-taking is consequently a means of organizing the content structure of the interview.

We shall start our analysis of the role that Anglo-American proverbs play in the interview discourse structural organization by looking at their functioning in adjacency pairs. In a conventional interview communicants orient to the strict question-answer format. In Oprah Winfrey interviews we studied proverbs are used both as questions and answers. Consider the following extract from the interview with Jamie Foxx (real name Eric Bishop), a successful American actor, musician and film producer. This talented African American, who had to endure great hardships and racist attacks almost every day in his childhood, was honored with an Oscar for his brilliant portrayal of the legendary musician Ray Charles in the biographical movie 'Ray' (2004). In the part of the interview where they raise the topic of success and his self-identity, Oprah Winfrey uses a famous American proverb 'All people are created equal' in a question:

> **Oprah:** Is there a mantra or phrase you'd use to describe yourself?
>
> **Jamie:** I think of myself as concentrated Kool-Aid—the kind in the packet. [Once you stir it up, it changes everything around it.] Hundreds of years ago, the slaves sent a message to a kid named Eric Bishop—a boy they knew could grow up to inspire a generation. I want to do great things with great people.

**Oprah:** Do you think **all people are created equal**?

**Jamie:** No. If that were true, there'd be no poverty, no shortcomings….We're all energy. Some people are stronger forces than others.

**Oprah:** I love that. That's what I know for sure. <…>

Taking into account the retrospective plane of Oprah's question, we may assume that it is informed by the interviewee's preceding statements about his being chosen in early childhood ("the slaves sent a message to a kid named Eric Bishop", "could grow up to inspire a generation") and his desire "to do great things with great people." So naturally his reflections on his special place in this world are followed by the question about his stand on the idea expressed by the paremia 'All people are created equal.' This proverb being one of American national principles is conventionally understood in the sense that all people are born equal and, thus, endowed with equal rights. In this case J. Foxx offers his own interpretation of the popular dictum (and is met with support by Oprah!) deduced from the simple fact that some people reach certain heights in life, and others don't.

In several of Oprah's interviews proverbs are used in prefaced questions, which help prepare both the interviewee and the audience for the next question, to herald new topics for discussion, thus providing their smooth switch. The following context is marked by such proverb use. In the interview with the tennis stars Serena and Venus Williams, Oprah Winfrey alludes to the widespread proverb 'Money can't buy happiness', which serves as the preface to her question about happiness:

**Oprah**: <…> You've been quoted as saying that fame and money are great, but they don't bring you happiness. What does?

**Venus**: My family. Laughter. Being able to decide what I want to do. My health.

In the course of our study we have encountered some cases of proverbs being used as answers, as, for instance, in the interview with Julia Roberts:

**Oprah:** So you're not one of those movie people who live or die by the box office?

**Julia:** <…> I've had people call me with numbers, and I say, "I can't even tell by the tone of your voice whether this is good or bad news." You just have to let it go.

**Oprah:** And you have?

**Julia: Whatever happens is going to happen**, whether you're sitting by the phone anxious and worried about it or not.

As we can see, Julia Roberts resorts to the paremia 'What's going to happen will happen', subjecting some components within it to slight grammatical changes and complementing it with her own commentary revealing her understanding of the proverb's meaning.

It must be once again stressed that an interview is a conversation occurring in an institutional setting. Hence, the orientation to turn-taking format (question-answer-next question). However, depending on the type of interview, there can be some deviations. In the canonical news interview the question-answer sequence is obligatory (Hutchby, 2005: 214-215), while it is often the case in the feature interview/celebrity profile that a third position slot is inserted into this pair, e.g. question-answer-acknowledgement, question-answer-evaluation, etc. These continuers situate "their producer as the intended, and attentive, primary recipient of the talk being produced by an interlocutor" (Hutchby, 2005: 214), and in each particular case can fulfill different pragmatic functions, e.g. passing judgments, or evaluating what is being said.

As has been shown above, Oprah's style of communication is rather informal in that she frequently makes some remarks about her respondent's answers. For this purpose she employs proverbs.

One of O. Winfrey's respondents, a talented R'n'B singer, Mary J. Blidge opens up about the spiritual transformation she has gone through after a period of drug and alcohol abuse. This renewal reflected in her lyrics came from the realization of how her artistry may impact her fans:

**Oprah:** Has your transformation compelled you toward a greater responsibility in your artistry and lyrics?<…>

**Mary:** <…> After the *No More Drama* album, people came up to me and said, "You saved me. You talked me out of an abusive relationship." Artists have so much influence. <…>A lot of people hate me for this. People say things like "Mary, I liked it better when you were singing them sad songs. You need to pick up a pack of cigarettes and come back down with us." It blows my mind-then again, not really. They just want someone to waddle with them in their environment.

**Oprah: Misery loves company**. People identify with the rawness and pain in your music. Now that you've outgrown that pain, they think you can no longer relate to them. They have an expectation about you based upon themselves.

In her answer the singer mentions that the changes in her work triggered a negative reaction from her long-time fans and acquaintances. These reflections are not followed by Oprah's next question but, instead, are accompanied by acknowledgement, which begins with the proverb 'Misery loves company.' Proverbs as precedent texts[4] and elements of the 'cognitive base'[5] shared by interlocutors reflect some well-known truth, and, thus, are ideal means for third position acknowledgements.

The next proverbial acknowledgement is remarkable due to the fact that it belongs to the interviewee and not to the interviewer. In his interview the famous American comedian and producer Jerry Seinfeld talks about his first encounter with the legendary film director Steven Spielberg[6]. While having dinner in a restaurant, they were suddenly stuck in 'awkward silence' for a while after their conversation had faltered:

**Oprah:** What about *Bee Movie*?

**Jerry:** Oh, right! I forgot. [*Laughs*] In the middle of dinner, we're chatting away, and it's all going nicely. When we started talking about kids we were off to the races, but then the conversation ground to a halt.

**Oprah:** I know– there's that awful moment...

> **Jerry: It happens to the best of us**. As an entertainer, that's when I kick into gear and say something witty to jump-start the conversation. The night before, I was sitting with a couple of friends, eating a Twizzler, and I said, "What if somebody did a film called *Bee Movie,* and it was about bees?" So during the dinner with Steven, I said this to relieve the lull we'd just crashed into. <…> But he didn't laugh; he fixed his eyes on me and said, "We're going to make that movie." <…>

The interviewer's unfinished utterance «I know—there's that awful moment...», which serves as a receipt token, is followed by the interviewee's acknowledgement. The proverb 'It happens to the best of us' is thus used to show that even public figures, thought to be accustomed to all sorts of situations, can sometimes feel ill at ease.

In the extract quoted below, O. Winfrey creates a nonce phrase from the elements of the imagery of the proverb 'Better a big fish in a little pond than a little fish in a big pond', which she uses as a third position evaluation of her famous interviewee's words. Salma Hayek, who came from Mexico to conquer Hollywood, is talking to Oprah about her earnest attitude to the quality of the work she does:

> **Oprah:** So you didn't question whether you could or couldn't—it just was?
>
> **Salma:** I wanted to do films, and at that time in Mexico, a film industry didn't really exist. So where do you go to do movies? You go to the mecca. I also was afraid I was a very bad actress, because I'd become famous very fast and was making money for people. <…> I never wanted to be a famous bad actress! I had a panic that people would think, She's good only because everyone knows her.
>
> **Oprah:** Girl, that's deep! Many would've settled for **being a big fish in a not-so-small pond**.

It is noteworthy that O. Winfrey breaks not only the syntactical structure of the proverb, but also adds the negation 'not',

which helps create the opposite image. In actuality, Hollywood is not 'a small pond', that is why Salma Hayek's fear of being a bad actress resonates with the interviewer, who obviously does not support 'the hunt for fame' in actors. We believe that effective use of proverbs (and in this case, of a modified proverb) in third position evaluations is ensured by such proverb characteristics as indirect meaning and evaluative connotation, which help the interviewer to summarize the interviewee's words and to approve of her position.

One more continuer found in Oprah Winfrey's interviews published in *O, The Oprah Magazine* is formulation. This third position slot, complementing the standard question-answer sequence in interviews, can be used as means of packaging or repackaging the central point made in an interviewee's turn (Hutchby, 2005:217). Formulations, thus, emphasize an interviewee's most important or controversial previous statements. As J. Heritage points out, formulations are relatively rare in everyday conversation but are common "in institutionalized, audience directed interaction [where it is] most commonly undertaken by questioners" (Heritage, 1985: 100).

In Oprah Winfrey interviews proverbs are also used as formulations. The topic of poverty is raised in the interview with the talented singer and composer Alicia Keys. This issue is of special interest to Oprah for she, like her numerous celebrated respondents, was raised extremely poor. By scrutinizing it in her interviews, she aims to show her readers that poverty is not a hindrance to success, and tries to find out how her interlocutors managed to develop their talents and reach heights in what they do, despite of having lacked material resources for it. In A. Keys's case her mother was her support. The woman worked night and day to provide for her family and did her best so that her daughter could proceed with her music classes:

> **Oprah:** <…> I've found that unless you're rooted in something bigger than fame, you start believing your own hype. I'm so impressed with you because you seem grounded. You must've had some kind of mother!
>
> **Alicia:** She has given me something real to hold on to. She's so strong. When I was younger, there were times

when I'd look at her and think, "Wow, it's just you and me."

<…>

**Alicia:** She worked around the clock. I don't know how she stood up from day to day. If there was a big trial, she'd come home at 3 A.M., then get up at 6 A.M. and keep going.

**Oprah:** Where were you on the food chain—poor or lower—middle-class?

**Alicia:** It fluctuated.

**Oprah:** You were **robbing Peter to pay Paul**.

**Alicia:** Definitely. But I realized that if everything fell apart, she'd always be there.

In the extract quoted above Oprah Winfrey uses the proverbial expression 'Rob Peter to pay Paul' to repackage her interlocutor's answer. The indirectness of its meaning and emotive connotations enable the speaker to comment on the humble circumstances of the singer's family in the past.

As has been stated earlier, interaction occurring between an interviewer and interviewee is a generative process in which the content of conversation is formed. In this respect, it is necessary to look at the way proverbs function on the content level of the interview.

One of the acutest issues that Oprah Winfrey raises in her interviews is the problem of terrorist attacks upon the USA, including 9/11. It comes as no surprise that she prefers to discuss this serious problem with high-ranking statesmen, like Rudy Jiuliani, mayor of New York (01.1994-12.2001), Madeleine Albright, former US Secretary of State, and Condoleezza Rice, in 2001 US National Security Advisor. It is our concern now to look at how proverbs function in discussions about this grave national threat.

Soon after the Twin Towers had collapsed Oprah Winfrey hastened to speak to C. Rice and R. Jiuliani, who received national acclaim for his outstanding leadership during the crisis and who was called 'America's mayor' in its aftermath. In both interviews

the journalist uses the proverbial expression "(to wait) for the other shoe to drop." In the conversation with R. Jiuliani it appears in Oprah's question:

> **Oprah:** Were you ever afraid during the attack?
>
> **Rudy:** I wasn't, but when I look back on it, I realize I should have been. That day, a reporter asked me, "Is it true that you narrowly escaped death?" I said, "No, that's exaggerating." When I got home that night and I saw how the building came down, I said, "Yeah, I did."
>
> **Oprah:** Since the attack, have you felt anxiety that **the other shoe is about to drop**?
>
> **Rudy:**I don't have that fear any more than I had it the day before this happened. The risks in life are pretty much what they have always been.

While talking to C. Rice about her perception of the 9/11 tragedy and bringing out her own fears of possible bioterrorist attacks, Oprah employs the same proverbial expression in the preface to her question:

> **Oprah:** Should Americans be concerned about bioterrorism?
>
> **Condoleezza:** There are a number of threats to the United States—and bioterrorism is one of them. But the American people should not be overly concerned about bioterrorism because there are certainly ways to deal with most of the agents <…> I can't promise anybody that there will never be an incident, but I don't think there has ever been this much attention on trying to prevent one.
>
> **Oprah:** As we've received FBI warnings, many have been feeling that at any moment **the other shoe could drop**. Do you feel that way?
>
> **Condoleezza:** No, but I can't promise that something won't happen.

As we have seen, in both interviews the serious issue of national security, which became especially acute after the 9 /11 terrorist attacks, is raised. Any interviewer's task is to touch on such

complex problems and ask his/her interlocutor inconvenient questions which are the main public concern at the moment. In our opinion, the way these questions are asked and verbalized attests to a journalist's professionalism. The use of metaphoric proverbial expressions enables Oprah Winfrey to avoid creating intensity of emotions. Thus, by raising the burning problem of probable terrorist attacks on American people, Oprah Winfrey sounds reserved and maximally correct. The two extracts discussed above are a good example of effective proverb use in euphemistic function. Due to their indirectness, paremias help bring down the intensity of communication, whenever it occurs, and eliminate any chance of a conflict.

Of special interest is the interview with M. Albright taken right after the 9/11 attacks and devoted to interpretation of the reasons for what had happened. In the extract quoted below O. Winfrey builds her own aphoristic expression on the basis of the popular proverb **'**Beware of a silent dog and silent water (Am. Eng)/Beware of a silent man and still water (of a silent man and a dog that doesn't bark) (Br. Eng)':

> **Oprah:** Could we have protected ourselves against the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks?
>
> **Madeleine:** I don't know the answer to that. What most Americans don't know is that we have prevented a lot of terrorist incidents before this one. **There's always the dog that doesn't bark that you don't know about**. We need to be very careful not to get so into the blame game that we forget those who died. The challenge is to draw lessons from the past and move forward without spending time finger-pointing.

In the example under discussion the journalist creates a meta-metaphor by first singling out the element 'the dog that doesn't bark' (meaning 'threat') from the standard proverb, and then building a new metaphoric image in the phrase "There's always the dog that doesn't bark that you don't know about." In the given context the phrase coined on the basis of the proverb fulfills the function of semantic foregrounding. The familiar proverbial image captures readers' attention, while its metaphoricity makes them

take a pause when reading and reflect on the speaker's words. Thus, the respondent highlights the idea that there is always some hidden threat which one may not know about, and that it is sometimes impossible to prevent tragic events in spite of the constant efforts by the secret services. This is why after having used this proverbial signal M. Albright appeals to the people, asking them to learn the lessons of the past and warning against searching for the ones to blame, for it could only aggravate the situation.

In the course of the cited interview Oprah Winfrey focuses on her interlocutor's perspective on what psychological impact the terrorist attacks could possibly have on the Americans:

> **Oprah:** After such a crisis, do you think it's possible for us to be better people?
>
> **Madeleine:** I hope so. I don't want to sound Pollyannaish, but I hope that out of a tragedy like this, something good will come. I hope we understand we're one family. In the past, New York has been seen as a place where people are cold-blooded, yet New Yorkers are behaving wonderfully toward one another and they are helping one another. There's this whole sense of caring for each other. And I think that is excellent. I am also moved by the unbelievable bravery of the firefighters, the police officers, and the rescue workers. **Sometimes the worst can bring out the best in us**.
>
> <…>

The popular modern proverb 'The worst (tragedy) brings out the best in us'—like any other paremia—expresses a generalized idea based on some observations of a regularity or law. Although O. Winfrey doesn't use the whole proverb in her question, but only the proverbial juxtaposition crisis::better, she is intent on disclosing her interviewee's opinion about this observation. Having undergone some structural-semantic changes, the proverb is used in M. Albright's speech to cover all the facts of care and mutual help in the times of crisis and serves as a summary proving the people's observation. By inserting the adverb 'sometimes' and modal verb 'can' into the traditional proverb, the speaker points to her personal experience, which gives credibility to her words.

As has been stated earlier, *O, The Oprah Magazine* is intended for female readership, so its numerous interviews are devoted to 'women's problems.' In some of them the problem of women is a separate topic for discussion; in others it is only touched upon in some utterances. The interview with P. Donahue, a legendary American TV host, who was one of the first to raise 'female questions' on air, is remarkable for the use of an anti-proverb coined on the basis of the traditional paremia 'A man's home is his castle' (Br./Am):

> **Oprah:** The bottom line is that we need you, Phil, because we need to be challenged by the voice of dissent. What do your children think of your return?
>
> **Phil:** They're surprised. But they've also said, "Go get 'em, Pop." I'm not 29 anymore, my wife isn't pregnant, I'm not trying to raise kids, I don't have a mortgage—so it takes less courage for me to speak up. Maybe I'll get to talk about things like why this administration is so secretive. Whatever the framers meant, this wasn't it. I'm an American, just like you, and I am impressed with the Bill of Rights. I believe **a woman's home should be her castle** <…> People can yell at me, they can criticize me, they can call me names. But there's one thing they can't do: They can't take away my flag.

While speaking about his return to TV with a new show, P. Donahue defines the topics to be discussed on his future program. Each of them is expressed in a separate sentence but for one. The interviewee chooses proverbial language for the problem of women, which makes it prominent. The traditional English proverb 'A man's home is his castle' has become a folk embodiment for one of the fundamental principles protected by the US Constitution, the principle of individual privacy (hence his reference to the Bill of Rights). By substituting the lexeme 'man' for the lexeme 'woman' and inserting the modal verb 'should', the interviewee expresses his belief in the equality of both sexes.

In the interview with Madonna there is the proverb 'Clothes don't make the woman' (Am). It is interesting to note that *Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs* (Speake, 2004) registers the paremia

'Clothes make the man' (1400), while *A Dictionary of American Proverbs* (Mieder, 1992) lists an antonymic proverb 'Clothes don't make the man' (var. Clothes don't make the woman, but they help) (1500). The paremia 'Clothes make the man' was probably reconsidered, and the anti-proverb 'Clothes don't make the man' started to be used, and later gained the status of a proverb in its own right. Consider the following extract from the interview with Madonna:

> **Oprah:** I've read that you no longer want people to dress like you. What do you mean by that?
>
> **Madonna:** I mean just that. In the beginning of my career, I was consumed with fashion and the way I looked.
>
> **Oprah:** Aren't you still?
>
> **Madonna:** I think about clothes all the time—you see the boots and pants I'm wearing. But who cares? You know as well as I do that **clothes don't make the woman**.
>
> <…>
>
> **Oprah:** The realization that there's something bigger—is that your newest transformation?
>
> **Madonna:** Shoes won't make me happy. Well, they do make me happy, but not really happy. I'm not going to lie and say I don't care about the way I look or dress. I'm very jealous of your closet! But I know those things don't last, and I know what does. I hope I can impart that to people.
>
> **Oprah:** But you are the Material Girl.
>
> **Madonna:** That was meant to be ironic. I'm so not the Material Girl now. There were many years when I thought fame, fortune, and public approval would bring me happiness. But one day you wake up and realize they don't.

When describing her attitude to fashion and fancy clothes, Madonna resorts to a rather popular American proverb 'Clothes don't make the woman', arguing against the common belief that a woman is defined by her looks. Working together with the introductory formula "You know as well as I do" in this context, the

proverb fulfills the function of maintaining contact in conversation. The traditional proverb presents a piece of knowledge shared by the communicants. The introductory formula, in this case used by Madonna, helps show her likeness to Oprah Winfrey and highlight the fact of inner transformation the singer went through.

In the interview with Shonda Rhimes, conducted by Oprah with her long-time friend Gayle King, the use of a proverb helps establish contact between the communicants. Sh. Rimes is the author and producer of Grey's Anatomy, a successful American medical show. The three participants are discussing the character played in these TV series by the actor P. Dempsey. Dr Derek Sheperd (aka McDreamy) is at first portrayed as an ideal man, for whom the main female character Meredith Grey falls in the opening episodes, and who, as becomes known later, is married:

**Shonda**: So you let the audience fall in love with this guy.

**Gayle**: And we did.

**Shonda**: And then you reveal that he has a huge flaw, which is that he has a wife. Which I felt like is how things really happen. You go through that honeymoon period where they're—it's wonderful and fabulous.

**Oprah**: **Been there**.

**Shonda** (laughs): Yeah, as opposed to feeling, like you know, oh we knew he has a wife in the beginning, and oh, we already know the stuff. No, you fall in love with somebody and then—

**Gayle**: And by then you're hooked.

**Oprah**: I've heard you say that you too are waiting for McDreamy.

**Shonda**: Yes. Yes.

**Oprah**: We're all in that club.

**Shonda**: Yes.

In the given discussion, Oprah raises intimate questions concerning her respondent's private life. Being a professional, Oprah

Winfrey manages to artfully reach mutual understanding with the interviewee and have her involved in a candid conversation. Needless to say, her own sincerity and readiness to deal with such topics contribute to this effect. In this very context, however, the main role belongs with the choice of verbal means of expression. By using the truncated paremia 'Been there' (Cf. Been there, done that) as acknowledgment of Sh. Rimes's answer, Oprah Winfrey opens up about being familiar with this 'love triangle' situation created in the screenwriter's imagination. We believe, this concise phrase ensures contact with the respondent and sets in an intimate mood. Besides, Sh. Rimes responds to Oprah's comment with a laugh, which attests to contact having been established. That is why the journalist's next remark "I've heard you say that you too are waiting for McDreamy," which could be perceived as being inconvenient or private by some, is met with a frank reply from the interviewee. The established contact is then maintained with figurative language. The interviewer resorts to the expression "We're all in that club" (also met with Sh. Rimes's approval), which once again reveals the fact that these two famous interlocutors, as well as many other women, share the same bits of life experience.

Many among O. Winfrey's interlocutors are people whose life stories could teach readers a lesson, inspire to make a serious decision, provide some clues to seemingly impossible questions, or make them see their problems in a different light. As our study shows, most respondents prefer to use proverbs to formulate their 'life lessons'. In this respect, it is worthwhile to look at Oprah's interview with Bill Clinton, in which among other things they discuss the notorious scandal which emerged from his sexual connection with Monica Lewinsky, then a White House intern, and resulted in the impeachment process. Of special interest is the way proverbs function in the following extract:

> **Oprah**: What was the major lesson you took from the crisis?
>
> **Clinton**: <u>You know what the Greeks said</u>: "**Those whom the gods would destroy they first make angry**." In November 1995, I was mad. Workaholics like me get so involved in their work. But there is a point beyond which—and I don't care how good you are or how much stamina

> you have—no one can go without losing his or her fundamental sense of what ought to be done. It was a very difficult period for me. At the time, I was engaged in a great public war with the Republican Congress over the future of the country, and a private war with my old demons. I won the public fight and lost the private one.
>
> You just have to deal with that stuff and go on. It's not the end of the world. <…> I'm no different from anybody else. An old Irish proverb says that **even if the best man's faults were written on his forehead, he would put his cap over his face in shame**. Once I got that, it was liberating. Some people think, "Gosh, if I got humiliated like that in front of billions, I'd want to stick my head in an oven." I didn't feel that way. I felt, This is great—I have nothing more to hide. <…> I don't have to pretend anymore.

As we see, the former US president employs two ancient proverbs in his reply 'Those whom the gods would destroy they first make mad' and 'If the best man's faults were written on his forehead, he would put his cap over his face in shame', which fulfill the function of semantic foregrounding in his discourse. They are used to designate the two phases crucial to the critical situation which occurred in the past. The first encapsulates B. Clinton's psychological state, which, according to what the proverb conveys, had been a signal before the crisis broke out. The second marks its critical point and the break-through moment. It is worth noting, that in both cases the interviewee resorts to introductory formulae "you know what the Greeks said" and "an old Irish proverb says" which point out the origin of the paremias and manifest the speaker's erudition. In their own turn, these introductory formulae contribute to semantic foregrounding of the proverbially expressed ideas that follow. In B. Clinton's answer we also observe a phraseologically saturated context, for along with the proverbs he uses several metaphoric phrases. The figurativeness of his speech makes explicit his deep psychological involvement at these two phases of the crisis. The expression 'war with my old demons' (Cf. 'to fight one's demons') conveys his depression and emotional tension before the scandal. The phrases 'it's not the end

of the world', 'stick my head in the oven. I didn't feel that way' signify psychological freedom, admitting his faux pas, and realization of the fact that the truth sets you free.

The next proverb we should look at is 'Life is a voyage/journey' (that's homeward bound), which, according to G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (2003), is one of conceptual/cognitive metaphors shaping the way people think and communicate. This well-known paremia appears in the interview with the famous American actress Bette Midler:

> **Bette:** <…> When I turned 50, I threw myself a big birthday party, and I looked seriously at what my life has been about. <…> When I did this assessment of my life, I said to myself, "It was really good." <…> in all those years, I saw a lot. I went to foreign lands. I met interesting people. And I got it!
>
> **Oprah:** What did you get?
>
> **Bette:** I got that **a person's life is a journey, a road**. Sometimes you go off the road and sometimes you stay on all the way through. But you are the only one on that road. It's your road.
>
> **Oprah:** Yes.
>
> **Bette:** And in a funny way, when you realize that, it demystifies everyone else's journey for you. You're not jealous of other people. It takes a lot of anguish out of life.
>
> **Oprah:** That makes so much sense.

In the interview under discussion the proverb is a kind of proposition (true sentence), a statement which finds proof in the speaker's ensuing reflections. The proverbial image is developed in B. Midler's answer in the sustained metaphor: 'go off the road' (not to be able to resist hardships), 'stay on all the way through' (stay afloat), 'the only one on that road/It's your road' (each person lives his life alone), 'it demystifies everyone else's journey for you'. This sustained metaphor presents the interviewee's take on the proverbial postulate based on her personal life experience. Her reflections show that acceptance of this idea brings comfort into one's life.

There is a whole set of interviews in which Oprah closes conversation with the question 'What do you know for sure?' As a rule, it is the final question, so the respondents are pressed for time. It is noteworthy that in every interview, crowned with this question, the respondents use proverbs in their reply, and occasionally build proverbial chains. In such instances proverbs fulfill the function of cognitive economy. Being miniature theories (Honeck, 1997:103), proverbs encompass an infinite number of analogical situations, serve as a kind of quintessence of speakers' life observations, and present a mosaic made up of different bits of experience. The examples discussed below illustrate that.

If we come back to B. Midler's interview, we will find there two traditional proverbs in their standard form 'You have to eat a peck of dirt before you die', stating that in each person's life there is a place for positive and negative things, and 'There is no such a thing as a free lunch', teaching that you have to pay for everything:

> **Oprah:** On the last page of the magazine is a column I write called "What I Know for Sure". I was inspired by the late film critic Gene Siskel, who asked, "What do you know for sure?" at the end of every interview. The first time I heard that question, I couldn't answer. Then I went home and thought about it. Bette, what do you know for sure?
>
> **Bette:** That laughter feels really good. That there's a lot of conscious, tangible evil afoot in the world. That the planet will always go on. That you can find peace in nature. That music has great charm and is a great communicator. That dancing is good for the soul. That beauty is very healing and great for the spirit. **That you gotta eat a little dirt before you die**. That payback is a bitch. And that no matter who you are, **there is no free lunch**.

While sharing with Oprah what she knows for sure, Madonna builds a sequence of parallel constructions reduplicating the structure of the proverb 'We reap what we sow' and having a synonymous meaning:

> **Oprah:** What do you know for sure?

> **Madonna:** That my husband is my soul mate. That I'm going to meet my mother again someday. That there are no mistakes or accidents. That consciousness is everything and that all things begin with a thought. That we are responsible for our own fate, **we reap what we sow**, we get what we give, we pull in what we put out. I know these things for sure.

Thus, the successive use of a proverb and two synonymous pseudo-proverbs helps the speaker sound confident of what is being said and strengthens her position.

The Oscar-winning actress Charlize Theron provides a succinct answer alluding to the proverb 'Nothing is certain but death and taxes' (var. Nothing is so sure as death), which undergoes splitting, so that its elements appear in two separate successive sentences:

> **Oprah**: <…> What do you know for sure?
>
> **Charlize**: **That I will die. That's the only thing that's certain**.

It is only natural that in the interviews with such celebrated guests O. Winfrey raises the topic of success, and, above all, she seeks to know her respondents' attitude to what it brings. The Hollywood star Ch. Theron believes luck—an incidental encounter with her future producer in a bank—to have played the main role in the story of her success:

> **Charlize:** There's nothing more powerful than a vulnerable woman. I knew my power. What I didn't know is that I was auditioning for a guy who would end up being my manager. On the way out, the man who'd helped gave me his card. [He was John Crosby, who represented John Hurt and Rene Russo.] He said, "If you're interested, I'll represent you."
>
> **Oprah:** Why do you think that happened?
>
> **Charlize: I'd be unbelievably wrong to say there isn't such a thing as the right place, right time**-luck. If I hadn't met John, I don't know what I would have done next. I had no idea how to get a manager. If I hadn't been

> in the bank that day, I honestly don't think I'd be here right now. There are so many talented actors who don't ever get the chance.

In the quoted extract from the interview the actress modifies the popular proverb 'There isn't such a thing as a free lunch', which, due to its convenient structure, frequently serves as a base for new proverbial formations. In this case the device of contamination, i.e. combining elements of different phraseologisms in one new phrase, is employed. The beginning of the proverb is complemented by an element of the idiom 'to be in the right place at the right time'. By stating 'I'd be unbelievably wrong to say there isn't such a thing as the right place, right time-luck', Ch. Theron insists that luck does exist, as knows it from her life experience.

However, this very statement caused disagreement with O. Winfrey, who adheres to her own theory that luck as a concourse of circumstances does not exist, but that it is the person who creates conditions for positive events to take place. In the interview under discussion she encapsulates her theory in Seneca's quote 'Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity'. The proverbial lore of the English language stores the proverb 'Diligence is the mother of good luck' (1591), which conveys the same idea contained in a different verbal form:

> **Oprah:** You keep saying you're lucky, and I can't take it. You're not lucky. You are blessed and graced. Luck is just preparation meeting opportunity. For instance, in the moment you met your manager in the bank, if you hadn't been psychologically or emotionally prepared...
>
> **Charlize:** Things might have gone completely differently.

Let us consider one more interview with O. Winfrey's friend Quincy Jones, a musician, film and TV producer, with whom she discusses his astonishing career, different aspects of his creative work, and, most importantly, his attitude to fame and success. At the very end of their conversation we find the proverb 'Even a blind pig occasionally picks up an acorn':

> **Oprah:** Q, I've never met one person who doesn't love you. Where did your big, open heart come from?

**Quincy:** It came because people were good to me, honey. Though negative things have happened to me, God somehow let me know that becoming bitter was not the way to go. You die when you do that. Someone once told me that if you fully open your arms to receive love, you'll get some scratches and cuts on your arms, but a lot of love will come in. If you close your arms, you might never get cut—but the good stuff won't come in either.

**Oprah:** And right now, you're sitting up here on a hill at the top of Bel Air!

**Quincy:** There is a God! They say **a blind hog will find the acorn one day**.

Q. Jones's fate is really amazing, as this gifted African American raised in a very poor family managed to reach success and wealth, which according to him, was due to his openness to the surrounding world, lack of aggression and anger. It is for a reason that this proverb (Cf. Q. Jones's version «a blind hog will find the acorn one day») is used at the very end of the interview to express, probably, his most important life lesson. Such outcome of a 'fairy' story told in this interview seems to be able to inspire readers, make them embrace the fact that any person, be he/she less privileged than others, can succeed in life.

Of special interest for our study are the cases in which paremias are employed for creating phraseologically saturated contexts, both in respondents' answers and O. Winfrey's questions/remarks. As a rule, in such discursive situations proverbs and proverbial expressions serve to place emotive and semantic emphases. Let us consider the following examples.

In the interview with Laura Bush, the former US first lady, O. Winfrey poses a delicate question regarding caustic jokes in the mass media about her husband's intellect:

**Oprah:** During the campaign, how did you handle all the jokes about your husband being "not very smart"? Did it hurt?

**Laura:** It made me mad, actually—though I didn't hear that many of the jokes because we were campaigning eve-

ry day. <…> When you're in politics, all of that is just part of the territory—and you come to terms with it.

**Oprah:** But did the jokes hurt?

**Laura:** Yes. Coming to terms with the jokes doesn't mean that your feelings aren't hurt or that you aren't miffed, but you learn to take it with a grain of salt.

**Oprah:** I don't know if you take it with a grain of salt, or with a whole box of salt!

**Laura:** It does make you feel like things are unfair. But you just know that happens. As they say, **if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen**.

As we can see, L. Bush expresses her attitude to this mockery of her spouse with two idioms, the expression 'to take something with a grain of salt' and a modern proverb 'If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen.' O. Winfrey is persistent in her desire to get an answer from her interlocutor, so she goes on to ask her question for the second time when L. Bush avoids answering it the first time. With her evaluation of L. Bush's remark 'you learn to take it with a grain of salt', O. Winfrey seems to intensify the discussion, by playing with the idiom ('with a whole box of salt') and, thus, stressing how outrageous and painful this situation is. In response to this comment L. Bush uses the proverb, which completes a peculiar phraseological gradation (take with a grain of salt → take with a whole box of salt → if you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen) and highlights the idea that politics is for strong people who can resist any biting criticism.

While talking with F. Barrino, an American Idol winner (2004), O. Winfrey touches on the topic of juvenile pregnancy:

**Oprah:** Your grandmother is a pastor, your mother is an evangelist. What was it like for you to have to tell your family that you were pregnant at 17?

**Fantasia:** My grandmother already knew <…> My mother was heartbroken. She and my grandmother had both gotten pregnant at 17, and they'd wanted something different for me. This was like a family curse.

> **Oprah:** It's not a curse. It's a family cycle. And **you can break that cycle with knowledge, which gives you power**. That is why you must insist on an education for your daughter. **When you know better, you do better**.

O. Winfrey, who happened to be in the similar circumstances in her adolescence, takes on the role of a teacher, a wiser and more experienced friend. By giving her a different perspective on this situation, the journalist creates phraseologically saturated context. She uses an allusion to the popular proverb 'Knowledge is power' and the aphoristic phrase 'When you know better, you do better', which belongs to her spiritual teacher and friend M. Angelou, and can be treated as a pseudo-proverb. Thus, the subsequent use of two synonymic proverbial phrases strengthens the journalist's belief and stresses the idea that knowledge leads to success.

As for the most frequently used proverb in our material, it is the wide-spread paremia 'One step at a time'. In each discursive context it is modified through the lexical substitution of the component 'step'. Notably, the substituting component is connected with a respondent's profession, outlook, or 'life philosophy'. Thus, in Oprah Winfrey's interviews we registered the following new formations:

- «I choose **one project at a time**» (T. Fey on her approach to work);
- «It happened **one item at a time**» (R. Lauren on his own clothes line);
- «I really just try to live my life **one day at a time** and do what I'm supposed to on that day» (R. Kennedy, Jr. about the future);
- «**One thing at a time**» (Thich Nhat Hanh on his life style);
- «Oprah, I can only take today. **One day at a time**» (W. Houston on her life style).

Our analysis revealed that in Oprah Winfrey feature interview discourse proverbs are used on a regular basis. Proverbs (and, occasionally, proverbial expressions) appear in the interviewer's and interviewees' speech both in standard and nonce forms. As the study shows, proverbs fulfill the following cognitive-discursive functions in O. Winfrey's interviews:

- structural organization of the discourse
- emphatic/semantic foregrounding
- summarizing
- cognitive economy
- euphemistic function (to a small extent).

The functions of emphatic/semantic foregrounding, summarizing, and cognitive economy are specific representations of the proverbs' general function of inner discourse explication. In the interviews we have studied, proverbs are typically used in the function of discourse structural organization, both on its global and local levels.

***Notes***

[1] In his book The Language of Journalism, M. Lasky (2007:164) quotes an extract from London's The Pall Mall Gazette (1886): "The interview is the worst feature of the new system: it is degrading to the interviewer, disgusting to the interviewee, and tiresome to the public."

[2] See http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/Oprahs-Interview-with-Barbara-Walters.

[3] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oprah_Winfrey.

[4] Precedent texts are the texts that an average member of a given linguo-cultural community will easily recognize.

[5] Cognitive base is a complex of pieces of knowledge, ideas, conceptions, etc., shared by the members of a given linguo-cultural community.

[6] This meeting resulted in their mutual project 'Bee Movie.'

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