

## DYNAMICS OF STRUCTURE AND PRAGMATICS OF ACCEPTANCE SPEECHES AT THE "OSCAR" CEREMONY

**Lilia Kalytiuk** (corresponding author),  
National Pedagogical Dragomanov University,  
9, Pyrogova St, Kyiv, 01601  
liliakalytiuk@gmail.com  
ORCID iD 0000-0001-9371-9724

**Mykhailo Reksha**,  
Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University,  
13B, Marshala Tymoshenka St, Kyiv, 04212  
mmreksha@gmail.com  
ORCID iD 0000-0002-4179-8325

*The research focuses on structural and pragmatic aspects of the acceptance speeches at the Oscar ceremony. The carried out research rests upon the aim to verify or refute our working hypothesis that the speeches in question, being part of the institutional discourse, are thematically homogeneous and during a short period of time are not subject for significant structural and thematic deviations.*

*The empirical material was grouped into three chronological layers: the first, the most chronologically distant and covering 1960—1970 time span. The second layer covers the decade dating 1988—1998s. The last, the most recent layer includes speeches, delivered in the 21st century. For the investigation we picked 30 speeches (10 for each layer, equally representing men's and women's speeches).*

*We hold that the speeches in question, being part of institutional discourse, are thematically heterogeneous and during a short period of time are the subject for significant structural and thematic deviations, becoming more personal, more intimate and informal. The said refutes the aforementioned working hypothesis.*

**Key words:** acceptance speech, gender specificity of speech, induced discourse, pragmatics, text.

**Калитюк Л.П., Рекша М.М.**

### Динаміка структури і прагматики промов вдячності на церемонії вручення премії «Оскар»

*Дослідження сфокусовано на об'єднаних тематично й ситуативно (висловлення подяки на церемонії вручення премії «Оскар») англомовних промовах другої половини ХХ — початку ХХІ ст. Встановлено тенденцію до послаблення формалізації виступів-подяк в інституційному дискурсі, зсув тональності таких промов від нейтральної до більш емоційної, зміщення ціннісних орієнтирів від професійних до особистісних, нечіткість гендерних характеристик промов.*

**Ключові слова:** гендерна специфіка мовлення, інституційний дискурс, прагматика, промова вдячності, текст.

### Introduction

The Academy Award (since 1940s also known as the Oscar) is a prestigious award among movie theatre figures. It has been presented since 1929. The ceremony traditionally takes place at the Dolby Theatre, in Los Angeles, California and is broadcast live on dozens of TV channels. The distinctive feature of this ceremony is, first of all, its solemnity; secondly, its extraordinary world-wide popularity; thirdly, the presence of first-rate celebrities, top-liners; fourthly, the mandatory broadcast of the event, which expands the audience up to many millions; and, finally, the double orientation of the event, which seems to be oxymoronic in its essence as it can be defined as an expected surprise. In other words, hosts,

audience, nominees know the script, the distribution of participants' roles, and the result — the presentation of award followed by a standard acceptance speech, which is generally not regulated, but doesn't imply any substantial structural and thematic deviations. Unknown is the prize-winner, hence the intrigue makes this regulated, planned beforehand event unexpected, with resulting emotional outbursts, violation of the text structure, code shifting, theme and thought scattering in Oscar winners' speeches prepared in advance.

The acceptance speeches at the Oscar ceremony have already attracted scholarly attention [4]. However, only 21st-century speeches were analysed with the aim to identify multicultural differences

between Russian and English speakers. The novelty of this investigation is in the attempt to describe the progress of structuring, vocabulary employed, gender marked differences in the speeches given at the Oscar ceremony in the time span covering 60 years backward.

The research focuses on structural and pragmatic aspects of the acceptance speeches at the Oscar ceremony. Our working hypothesis was that such speeches being part of institutional discourse are thematically homogeneous and during a short period of time are not subject for significant structural and thematic deviations. In order to trace noteworthy changes in the length, topical deviations, the selection of addressees in such speeches, our attention was directed to chronologically distant speeches as well. The empirical material was grouped into three chronological layers: the first, the most chronologically distant and covering 1960–1970 time span. The second layer covers the decade dating 1988–1998s. The last, the most recent layer includes speeches, delivered in the 21st century in 2007–2017s. For the investigation we picked 30 speeches (10 for each layer, equally representing men's and women's speeches).

The aim of this investigation is set on the study of structural, gender and pragmatic aspects of acceptance speeches in the situation of induced discourse. We also aim to trace the differences between chronologically distant speeches including the trends of wording in the said texts.

### Theoretical Background

This investigation is explanatory in nature and follows the research method for the discourse analysis [1; 2; 3] and related schools of thought [6; 7].

#### Results and Discussion

The speeches under investigation are identified as being the part of both induced and spontaneous discourse. This dichotomy appears to be reasonable on a number of reasons. On the one hand, this type of speeches was defined as the example of induced discourse on account of thematic, chronological, stylistic and structural restrictions imposed. The traits of spontaneous discourse are proved by the abundance of topic shifting, tautology, pauses, aposiopesis in the material under investigation.

A well tailored speech traditionally consists of three parts: beginning (initial part), middle (main) part, end (final part, conclusion). Fred Zinnemann's acceptance speech (1967) can serve as a typical example of such text, where the following parts can be distinguished: 1) introduction, presented as a formal address to the target audience (*ladies and gentlemen*), 2) main part, which includes reference to the cortege-audience (*on behalf of all the people who worked on "Man for All Seasons"*) revealing the speaker as being an institutionalist, member of the community, team player. The said reference is further followed by semantically obscure

*all the people who worked on "Man for All Seasons"* with the introductory word *especially*, which explicates the cataphoric reference *all the people* as *Robert Bolt, John Box and Bill Graf*. The well-balanced principle of filing the names in alphabetical order: *Bolt, Box, Graf* testifies to the fact that the speaker wants to give equal amount of gratitude to the people mentioned without favoring any of them. This is followed by the thanksgiving started with stylistically neutral and relevant *thank you* plus emotionally evaluative complex *this great honor*, where *this* means not only physical, but emotional closeness. Limit adjective *great* is powerful enough itself, at the same time it is restrained in relevant tonality. Pleonastic *thank* is followed by *must* (accepted and naturally used with the first-person pronoun) and *also*, which partially levels and justifies the abundant use of *thank*. The gratitude is again expressed to the address group *the Columbia executives*, which is explicates in the usage of the specific name *and especially Mike Frankovich* + specification of the reason for gratitude *for the courage, enthusiasm and faith they had in this project*. The conclusion is laconic and thematically coherent with the entire message:

*Ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of all the people who worked on "Man for All Seasons", especially Robert Bolt, John Box and Bill Graf, I would like to thank you for this great honor. I must also thank the Columbia executives, and especially Mike Frankovich, for the courage, enthusiasm and faith they had in this project. Thank you.* (Fred Zinnemann, 1967).

Our findings allow us to conclude that Oscar laureates' speeches have become considerably longer in recent years and now can encompass a few microthemes, which are united by one macrotheme — the expression of gratitude, which remains the quintessence of such speeches.

Though prepared beforehand, the speeches in question can contain elements of spontaneous discourse, thus indicating emotional tension among the nominees at the ceremony. Such spontaneous outbursts can be observed in the violation of regular word order, excessive use of personal pronouns combined with negative forms of verbs, namely *I, you+ neg Aux*. In her speech, Lila Kedrova stammers and pauses, acknowledging her inability to properly react to the situation: *I don't know what... I have to say*. The fragment of the Ruth Gordon's speech contains pleonastic use of time fillers like *actually, you know, anyway*. Such spontaneous outbursts are typical for 1960s.

We maintain that thanksgiving acceptance speeches demonstrate the tendency of being increasingly informal. Our conclusion is supported by the following observations: rather free structuring of a text, including aposiopesis, less formal vocabulary, like Meryl Streep's "*half of America going* (instead of 'saying')": *I — when they called my name I had this feeling I could hear half of America going*, "*Oh no! Oh,*

*c'mon why? Her? Again?" You know? But, whatever;* jokes, as in Cate Blanchett's speech: *Sit down; you're too old to be standing;* and colloquialisms: *I am gonna hug the hell out of you when the feeling reenters my body* (Emma Stone).

Thus, structural organization of the acceptance speeches in induced discourse of the Oscar ceremony is subject to variation. We observe the tendency for structural easing up, the code shifting (preference is given to informal words) and more deliberate thematic packaging of the texts. To be more specific about the latter, i.e. thematic filling, which has also been a subject to change, we maintain that nowadays nominees more often turn their attention to their biography and matters unrelated to their professional activity, i.e. work experience on the film.

The recipients of the celebrities' gratitude have also changed with time. Men more often express their thanks to the Academy and producers in the third

time period, whilst this tendency is decreasing in women's speeches. The director is regarded to be a less important figure for men throughout the first two chronological periods, but in the last third period their contribution is increasingly acknowledged. The Academy appears to be constantly important referent of gratitude for men, whereas the director — for women. Female speeches remain more emotional, but not substantially.

### Conclusions

Acceptance speeches in induced discourse demonstrate a strong growing tendency for informal wording, deliberate structuring, more personal thematic orientation and time regulations. It seems rewarding and promising to study structural and pragmatic aspects of gratitude speech in induced discourse at the Oscar ceremony by the profession of a speaker (director, actor, screenwriter) thematically, stylistically and temporally.

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*Дата надходження статті до редакції: 20.10.2020 р.*

*Прийнято до друку: 18.11.2020 р.*