

# Media Discourse Analysis

## An Application of Goffman's Frame Analysis

Amir Atef Hasanein Mohamed  
The British University in Dubai, PO box 15495, UAE

### Abstract

This paper presents an application of Goffman's Frame Analysis on media discourse. The paper also presents another study by a Brazilian researcher who conducted a similar study comparing the media coverage of a news theme on a specific day, Christmas day. The media discourse example of this paper is taken from the Oscars awards ceremony 2016; particularly the press interview after the awarding ceremony. The incident at hand is the famous one by the Egyptian journalist who asked the Oscar winner Leonardo DiCaprio a meaningless question out of context whose video went viral on social media and famous world newspapers. The paper covers various frames that can help analyze the incident on linguistic, social, and even political backgrounds and it also provides possible interpretations of that incident in relation to frame analysis.

**Keywords:** media, discourse, Goffman, Oscars, frame analysis

**DOI:** 10.7176/JEP/10-26-05

**Publication date:** September 30<sup>th</sup> 2019

### 1. Introduction

Discourse is not merely the language, but it exceeds the meaning to the application level. Discourse reflects real life and sometimes creates real life; the saying that drama is life and life is drama can be amended to discourse is reality and reality is discourse. The analysis of discourse is the analysis of language in use...it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms independent of the purposes or functions that they serve in human affairs (Brown and Yule, 1983). According to my point of view, discourse analysis is the linguistic, social, and political dissection of any text or talk whether it is found in the media, literature, or daily conversations.

Frame analysis was introduced by the American sociologist Erving Goffman who explained it as "definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principals of organization which govern events, and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify..." (Goffman, 1974). Goffman introduced certain social frames to dissect any event and understand its meanings, implications, and significances through some interpretive schemas.

An important aspect of Frame analysis is "what is going on here?" (Goffman, 1974) it is the study about the organization of human's experience not merely restricted to the daily social practices of people but also reaches the level of fiction like novels and dramas and also movies on screen and plays on stage; these artistic genres in addition to media are not only reflections of life but they also contribute to shape the life patterns of people.

The schemas of frame analysis presented by Goffman are "primary frameworks" or what can be referred to as general thematic units to classify events. Primary frameworks are subdivided in two main categories; first, the natural frameworks, second the social framework. The natural framework is concerned with events discourse that are not based or determined by human factors like the weather forecast or a natural disaster event. On the other hand, social frameworks refer to events and their discourse that are designed, directed and controlled by an intelligent social agent; human factors play a major role here. Goffman refers to these social frameworks as "derive action". According to Goffman these frameworks can help analyze and understand social events in life and the relationship among different groups.

According to Goffman, primary frameworks can be changed by what he calls "modalization" which is somehow the difference between the standard frame and the example at hand. For example a final test and a mock test can be viewed as a case or an ideal class by a professional and a demo class by a fresh graduate teacher. The differences and the changes between the standard and the copy give the meaning of the term modalization used by Goffman.

Frame analysis greatly influenced all works on media events and practices. Influenced by Goffman's theory, Dayan & Katz (1996) classify the broadcast of media practices into three divisions: conquest, competitions, and crowning. Conquest are defined as critical and momentous events in the lives of individuals or nations, for instance, the Iraqi war or the Arab-Israeli conflict or when Felix Baumgartner jumped from space to Earth from a helium balloon. Competitions are defined as TV broadcast of sport events that involved competitions like Olympic Games and world cup matches or political disputes and presidential elections or debates in parliaments. Last but not least, crowns which are defined as ceremonies, like funeral or marriages of presidents or celebrities as well as the Oscars nominations and ceremonies, an example of which is given in this study to analyze and interpret.

## 2. Literature Review

The study examined here is “Applying Goffman Frame Analysis in News Discourse” by Smpaio, Adriano de Oliveira from Federal University of Bahia in Brazil. The study compares the news coverage of two Brazilian TV news, “Jornal Nacional” and Jornal Da Record” on Christmas day December 25<sup>th</sup> 2003. The news which was shown during that day was classified into two categories; Christmas and Others. Jornal da record presented many news titles that do not fit into the category of Christmas; “The 29 news report shown in that day by these TV news, 11 of them had Christmas thematic, while the time destined to the subject was 6 minutes and 42 seconds, that represent 22% of the duration of the program at that day” (De Oliveira, ). On the other hand, Jornal Nacional had a greater focus on the thematic Christmas day. “The 27 news reports transmitted in the day observed, 15 of them had Christmas as topic and had occupied a total of 53% of the duration of the program (Adriano de Oliveira, 2004). The difference in percentage reflects the difference in agendas.

This different percentage of news representation of the same topic is considered interesting and can be explained using the frame analysis. One of the examples provided is the coverage of the Pope’s Christmas message; the representation of that piece of news in Jornal da Record focuses more on the nature of the message as a great example of peace and tolerance from the Catholic community while in Jornal Nacional had the attention on the Pope’s message being translated to more than 60 languages. Due to the fact that Jornal Record and TV Globo is managed by a certain religious group, the focus shift to that religious message. All in all, the main distinction comes from the fact that Jornal Nacional focused more attention on national news while Jornal da Record focused more on international news coverage. The primary framework covered here is Christmas day and the social framework mention was charity. Goffman frame analysis was used to make interpretations and to give meanings to the corpus.

## 3. Application on Media Discourse

This paper presents one example of media discourse and the analyses using interpretative schemas of Goffman’s frame analysis. The example under scrutiny is the famous press conference question by the Egyptian journalist to Leonardo Di Caprio after winning the Oscar award March 2016. The video of the question and answer went viral on line and social media and some world newspapers commented on the incident of this discourse.

### 3.1 The Example of the ( Oscars)

The Academy Awards, or "Oscars", is the yearly American awards ceremony organized by the Academy of Motion Pictures, Art and Sciences. The academy evaluates American films and sometime foreign films based on certain criteria and voting by a large number of members in the cinematic field.

The event is a very official one and it is internationally recognized as the most professional cinematic event. Actors, directors, screenwriters, critics and everyone in the cinematic field is honored to attend the ceremonies or some parts of screenings and seminars.

Viewers always have high expectations of such events and they are used to a certain level of professionalism in terms of interviews and press conferences or awarding speeches. The event is viewed by millions of people around the world and the awarding ceremony is broadcast live. The language used for communication is English because the event is based in an English speaking country and because it is the lingua franca around the world and accordingly millions of people can understand the language spoken by the people involved in the event whether they are actors, directors, reporters, journalists, or presenters.

Journalists, reporters, or correspondents should have a high level of professionalism when it comes to covering as big an event as the Oscars in addition to a high level of English proficiency and fluency. Another essential constituent of a journalist covering the Oscars is the preparedness as in reading films reviews and expectations together with preparing potential questions that are important, specific, and meaningful.

The Egyptian journalist, Shaima Abd EL Moneim, who asked The Oscar winner Leonardo Di Caprio about his Oscar forced people around the world to ask another question about her English fluency, professional skill, and preparation level. The question she asked and kept asking “What about the Oscars” through the 56 second video in the press conference after the ceremony went viral on social media and newspapers around the world and even turned into comics and material for comic talk shows.

### Following is the transcript of the video:

“Shaimaa :Leo,Hi

Leonardo DiCaprio: no response

Q. I am the first-Egyptian journalist covering the Oscars from here. And what about the first Oscar for you?

A. (Leonardo DiCaprio) I’m sorry, what was your question?

Q. What about the first Oscar for you? (Louder voice)

A. (Leonardo DiCaprio) What about it?

Q. For your Oscar? (Rising intonation with tension)

A. (Leonardo DiCaprio) Yeah, it feels amazing.

(Audience laugh for 4 seconds)

Q. It's a first. What about that?

A. (Leonardo DiCaprio) Yeah, it is the first..... Look, like I said, I'm just incredibly grateful. Thank you  
" (Anon, 2016)

"There are so many things you could ask such a talented man with such a diverse range of films behind him, but literally something as simple as 'What is your favourite flavour of Skittle?' would have been more worthwhile than this." (The Independent, 2016)

(3)

### 3.2 The Questioning Technique

Questions should ask about a specific piece of information and they have to be relevant and make sense to the reader or listener. Such a question in such a context does not meet the criteria of a logical question. Normally the question should have an introduction to signal the beginning of communication of discourse and then moves to narrow down the question to ask about a certain point. In the case under scrutiny, the question sounded like cut out of context and without any reasonable introductions. The question sounded vague and unclear and therefore the receiver gave a body language, facial expressions, and intonation of misunderstanding and bemuse. The receiver replied politely and asked to repeat the question to avoid any misunderstanding related to clarity. Yet, the question remained vague and extremely generalized. The actor Leonardo Di Caprio resorted to giving a very general statement about his happiness due to receiving the award to avoid embarrassing the journalist more and to end this round of questions. On the other hand, from the point of view of the sender, Shaimaa, she thought that her voice was not clear (which was somehow true though not the main problem) and she raised her voice in the second time. Upon Leonardo's reply and people laughing at the poor quality and unclear purpose of her question, she sounded tense and shortened her question (although she was not aware of the problem). Another remark is drawn on the poor accent and pronunciation of the journalist. Her version of English was broken and its poor quality in terms of pronouncing certain sounds/letters (like *The* being pronounced as *S* or *Z*) added to the scandalous effect of the gaffe; Social plunders in such international events are easily remarked and ridiculed, yet hardly forgotten or forgiven. Such a poor pronunciation indicates a low level of education (unfortunately, most governmental schools in Egypt teach this low quality of pronunciation; the accent is known and made fun of internationally as Egyptian English). Few Egyptian students graduating from governmental schools may manage to overcome this problem through some professional language training courses; such a known fact makes the case worse for the Egyptian journalist as she seems to have never received any professional language training to be qualified to cover such an international event.

### 3.3 Grammar, Structure, and Tone in Discourse analysis

Grammar mistakes had also a hand in creating this linguistic absurdity and verbal ambiguity. In one of the times she asked a question, she came up with a sentence fragment and not a full question "for your Oscar?" and in another statement she used the adjective "first" as a noun with no noun to describe "it is a first" which is a weird form in an English sentence and is wrong to use. The discourse analysis of the few sentences the journalist uttered is enough to evaluate her level of English proficiency as very weak and non-qualified to cover such an international event whose first language is English. The structure of sentences was very weak and sounded weird. A sentence like "And what about the first Oscar for you?" indicates inability to phrase proper questions and it is likely that the Journalist may have used Google Translate to get that structure although even the form in Arabic before translation is faulty and sounds weird as well. Journalists should have very good command of language and primarily their mother tongue

Finally the tone that was mumbled at the beginning had a change and it turned tense and a little angry when the audience started to laugh and Leonardo Di Caprio and the director held back their giggles. The tone is an indicator that the journalist lacks the minimum requirement and basic skills of public speaking although asking one question does not count as such an art. Over all, journalists are supposedly professional people when it comes to writing, editing, preparing, interviewing and public speaking. The journalist has no command of the language or any of its related skills. All of the afore-mentioned aspects of discourse confirm that the journalist, Shaimaa, was not a qualified person for the task and it shows her choice by the Youm7 News TV to be a big mistake that raises a bigger question mark about the mechanism of delegating and assigning staff members in news TV network she works in in particular, and in Egypt in general( as she was representing her country).

### 3.4 The Choice of Words and Possible Interpretation

The choice of words can also be examined here. The journalist stressed at the beginning of her question that she is "the first Egyptian Journalist" to cover such a grand event. This stress on that particular piece of information highlights an excessive feeling of self-importance and an attempt to show off in front of cameras knowing that

her country men and definitely other journalists (maybe competitors) will be watching. This attempt was a big failure and it was already a false story of self-propaganda as there have been some Egyptian journalists and critics who have covered the event during the 88 years of its existence (there was already other Egyptian journalists and TV anchors covering the same event on the same day). The imposition of such an introductory statement which is irrelevant to the context of the Oscars awards ceremony and its press conference gives another blow to the lack of professionalism even in the slightest level on how to start a question in a celebrity interview let alone preparing something of value ahead of a time to start the question in an engaging way. “The first Egyptian Journalist” is definitely not the attention grabber to work with such a celebrity and audience or in such a context.

### **3.5 Social Media and its Satire**

Social media and comedy shows utilized this material to reproduce laughter. The ridicule was exaggerated to have the Egyptian journalist photo shopped to appear in a video alongside Leonardo Di Caprio who slapped her upon hearing the famous question “What about za Oscars (Anon, 2016). Many social media users stated that the journalist is such an embarrassment to all Egypt and demanded that Youm7 TV news publicly apologize for sending such an unprofessional journalist who knows no English (Egyptian Street, 2016). Another wave of satirical use of her discourse was taken to a professional level and it was reproduced to serve commercial purposes; DJs have recorded remixes of her comments to DiCaprio and the Saudi Arabia branch of Volkswagen posted a photograph on social media (facebook, 2016) asking: “For your first Volkswagen car, waz abouz it?” (The Guardian, 2016)

### **3.6 Allegations of Nepotism in the Case**

Another video of the journalist showed her unable to pronounce some actor’s names and streets which raised more anger signs and question marks on the process of selecting professionals and allegations of nepotism. The journalist happens to be the daughter of a powerful police general who is in charge of Inspection and censorship follow up in the Egyptian Ministry of Local Development (EL Bashayer, 2016). Such a revelation raised big question marks and even confirmed that the journalist is never qualified and that she got her chance among all staff members who maybe more qualified (at least to prepare) due to her father’s powerful position. Allegation of corruption and utilizing a government position was raised to accuse both the general and the editor in chief, Khlaed Salah who bluntly defended the journalist and said it was natural to make such a mistake and there was no big deal “It’s very common and many celebrities get confused on stage,” (Egyptian Street). Such an example of nepotism, gives an idea about the nature of low professionalism in the Egyptian media. This is not a hasty generalization or jumping to conclusion with no evidence; a lot of examples are given everyday on the media and witnessed everyday by Egyptians and the governments in more than one occasion stressed the importance of getting rid of corruption and nepotism in the Egyptian society. Such an incident does not only have an echo on the internal affairs of Egypt but also it is reflected on the international image of the country and its global representation

### **4.1 Frame Work Analysis**

This incident falls under the category of Crowning according to Dayan & Katz who were influenced by Goffman and his frame analysis. The primary framework is that of Oscar’s celebration and it definitely fall under the social framework as it is an event controlled by human agents. “[t]o frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” (Entman, 1993). the what is going on here method is used to provide possible interpretations and analyses of such social incidents and what they reflect of psychological, political, and intellectual backgrounds.

### **4.2 Link to Discourse Analysis for ELT**

This example of a dialog or interview despite its shortness can highlight the most common mistakes and language practices by non-native speakers and learners. Having English as a second language of the journalist and the mother tongue of the actor Leonardo DiCaprio can help teachers analyze the weakness and needs of such learners coming from the same region. Recommendations can be given in terms of pronunciation as well as intonation as learners should start acquiring these skills first. Also, grammar rules when it comes to correctly forming questions is to be targeted in language courses and ESL classes from syllabus design to lesson delivery. Role play can be utilized using the same context and students can work out their own version of the interview to be as professional as possible and to do their best to avoid the mistakes made by the Egyptian Journalist.

### **5. Conclusion**

To sum up, frame analysis is concerned with “what is going on here?” and it gives practical meanings to

incidents on the ground. The incidents presented and analyzed here is a social practice of crowning and celebration. People in general and media professionals in particular are aware of the context and it is predicted discourse and therefore they expect a certain code of spoken or written text. What happened actually on the ground was unconsciously compared to the standard models in the experiences and background of people's minds. People know and expect what professional interviews look like and how professional questions are supposed to be asked. That automatic unconscious comparison is what gave the shock to the audience and provoked many on the media to jump on the Journalist's gaffe. Frame analysis is one of the best methods to analyze such media events depicting such social plunders.

## References

- Adriano de Oliveira, S. (2004). Applying Goffman Frame Analysis in News Discourse. [online] Available at: <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.198.8881&rep=rep1&type=pdf> [Accessed 18 Mar. 2016].
- Anon, (2016). [video] Available at: <http://youtu.be/28n0NnHcBxk> [Accessed 18 Mar. 2016].
- Anon, (2016). [video] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVCZ4Fjcy-U> [Accessed 20 Mar. 2016].
- facebook. (2016). [online] Available at: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Volkswagen-Group-Saudi-Arabia/257817827757574> [Accessed 18 Mar. 2016].
- Brown, G. and Yule, G. (1983). *Discourse analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Dayan, D., Robert, M., Katz, E., Sfez, L. and Feydy, J. (1996). *La Télévision cérémonielle*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Egyptian Street, (2016). Egyptian Journalist Ridiculed Online For Asking DiCaprio 'What About First Oscars For You?'. [online] Available at: <http://egyptianstreets.com/2016/03/02/egyptian-journalist-ridiculed-online-for-asking-dicaprio-what-about-first-oscars-for-you/> [Accessed 18 Mar. 2016].
- EL Bashayer, (2016). [online] Available at: <http://elbashayeronline.com/news-627776.html> [Accessed 18 Mar. 2016].
- Entman, R. (1993). Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm. *J Communication*, 43(4), pp.51-58.
- The Guardian, (2016). 'I have sinned against my country': reporter who fluffed DiCaprio Oscars question apologises. [online] Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/mar/07/i-have-sinned-against-my-country-reporter-who-fluffed-dicaprio-oscars-question-apologies> [Accessed 18 Mar. 2016].
- The Independent, (2016). [online] Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/leonardo-dicaprio-fields-horribly-tinge-worthy-question-from-reporter-following-his-oscar-win-a6906806.html> [Accessed 18 Mar. 2016].