Conversation Analysis: The Case of Power of Language

Abstract

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This study discusses the power differences between people, and the situational, social and cultural contexts that influence language of power. This study handles a transcribed interview that analyzes the language of power. The paper evaluates the features of power differences between the guest and the host of a comedy show. It analyzes some differences between them in terms of length, vocabulary, syntax, grammar and conversation features. Goffman's system components, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) features, and speech acts features in association with language of power are examined. First, the paper begins with the procedures in which who are the subjects and what are the methods of data collection. Second, it provides data analysis to clarify the main idea. The findings of the analysis are stated. Finally, the discussion of the implications of these findings for ESL/EFL learners are written. The main findings show that Chris Christie has power as same as Jimmy Fallon due to various reasons regarding to situational, social, and cultural context.

Key words: Language, power, analysis, features, critical, discourse

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تحليل المحادثة: دراسة لقوة اللغة

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مستخلص الدراسة

تناقش هذه الدراسة اختلافات القوة بين الناس، والسياقات الظرفية والاجتماعية والثقافية التي تؤثر على لغة القوة. وتتناول ايضا مقابلة مكتوبة لتحليل لغة السلطة. فيقيم البحث ملامح اختلافات القوة بين الضيف ومضيف لعرض كوميدي. ويحلل بعض الاختلافات بينهما من حيث الطول والمفردات وبناء الجملة والقواعد وميزات المحادثة. ويتم فحص مكونات نظام جوفمان، وميزات التحليل النقدي للخطاب (CDA) وخصائص أفعال الكلام المرتبطة بلغة السلطة. وتبدأ الدراسة بالإجراءات التي يتم فيها تحديد الأشخاص الخاضعين للدراسة والتعرف على طرق جمع البيانات. ثم توفر تحليل البيانات لتوضيح الفكرة الرئيسية، مع ذكر نتائج تحليل المحادثة. وأخيرًا، تتم مناقشة آثار هذه النتائج على متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية/أجنبية. وتظهر النتائج الرئيسية أن كريس كريستي يتمتع بنفس القوة التي يتمتع بها جيمي فالون لأسباب مختلفة تتعلق بالسياق الظرفي والاجتماعي والثقافي.

الكلمات الرئيسة: اللغة، السلطة، التحليل، السمات، الخطاب النقدي

Conversation Analysis: The Case of Power of Language

0. INTRODUCTION

This paper analyzes an authentic conversation of two people in terms of power differences. The data is an interview from late-night talk show *The Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon*. It is a TV recorded talk. The guest of the show is an American politician, lobbyist and attorney, Chris Christie. The data is analyzed using a transcribed interview. The conversation analysis of the transcription shows that there are some differences between the host and the guest in terms of length, vocabulary, syntax, grammar and conversation features. Additional analysis shows Goffman's system components, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) features, and speech acts features.

1. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study discusses the power differences between people, and the situational, social and cultural contexts that influence language of power. This study handles a transcribed interview that analyzes the language of power. The paper evaluates the features of power differences between the guest and the host of a comedy show. It analyzes some differences between them in terms of length, vocabulary, syntax, grammar and conversation features. Goffman's system

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cutting's book (2005), is the first major source is the class textbook about pragmatics and discourse. The book includes topics related to the data analysis. For instance, Speech Act Theory, politeness Theory, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). So, it is a source that can supply the paper with different features related to language of power.

Hatch's (1992) is considered the second important source about discourse and language. It is the best example of discourse analysis. Hatch shows clear explanation of discourse analysis and different features. Hatch says that system constraints are required for communication

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systems, like conversion. So, some of the conversation features are used in the paper.

The third source is Chafe's (1982). He describes some features that are used in the paper such as: nominalization, participles, attributive adjectives, conjoined phrases, and consequences of prepositional phrases, using 1st person pronouns, and emphatic particles. Also, it is important to understand features like hesitations and hedges that affects the language of power. Different features are very beneficial and helpful in order to analyze data. Such as features of grammar, vocabulary, syntax and monitoring of information flow.

The last major source is Goffman's (1981) which is about forms of talk. In this book the sociologist Goffman describes a set of universal constraints on all communication. These constraints appear in all types of communication and in all languages. So, it is very useful in analyzing the conversation of this paper. Goffman's system features clarify the concept of power.

3. DATA AND PROCEDURES

The collected data is an interview from late-night talk show *The Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon* conducted with an American politician, lobbyist and attorney, Chris Christie. The interview was on November 24, 2010 via NBC channel. It has been posted on the show's official website and YouTube. The interview is approximately 6 minutes and 20 seconds. The transcription of the interview has been posted on observer.com too, where I have got the transcript. I have compared it to the video clip. I have run the video and read the transcript many times in order to analyze the data correctly. Then, I have started the data analysis in terms of length, vocabulary, syntax, grammar and conversation features and Goffman's system components, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) features, and Speech Acts features.

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4. ANALYSIS OF DATA

a. General features of data

First of all, it is important to recognize the subjects of the data analysis. James Thomas Fallon is an American comedian, television host, and musician. He is known for his work in television as a cast member on Saturday Night Live and as the host of late-night talk show *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*. On the other hand, Christopher James "Chris" Christie is an American politician, lobbyist and attorney. He is a member of the Republican Party and has been the 55th Governor of New Jersey since January 2010. His second and final term ends on January 16, 2018.

b. Length

By comparing our subjects' utterances length, it is clear that there is no difference. As it is shown that Jimmy Fallon has 59 utterances while Chris Christie has 58. It is interesting that in the interview, the host and the guest have equal utterances length. However, in comparing words length it is shown that the host has produces more words which are 648. While the guest produces 568 words only. Commonly, the host of the show asks more. In the data he asks around 10 questions, in contrast, the host who asks two questions only. This shows the power differences that are slightly different between the guest and host.

c. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is one of the aspects that affect written or oral communication. Using specific terms and lexemes may indicate power. Zaki (2023, 122) argues that: 'Al-Hakim's use of coffee preparation on his stage qualifies food to appear as a source of power that helps the protagonists to focus on how to supply this global need for the poor.' Surprisingly, there is a slight difference between the host and the guest in using adjectives and adverbs. For instance: Jimmy Fallon uses the following adjectives *"cool, powerful, expensive,* and *amazing"* and adverbs *"sometimes* and *always"*. While the governor Chris Christie uses adjectives such as *"powerful,*

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great, and *amazing*" and adverbs such as "*probably* and *hopefully*". Therefore, by looking to

their use of vocabulary, we notice that they use everyday language in order to reach all

members of society. They don't use complicated words to be clearer because there are talking

in a comedy show aired in local channel to all people from different classes.

d. Grammar

In fragmented language, a typical idea unit consists of a single clause, containing one

predictive element and the noun phrases which are directly associated with that element as

subject, and object. Sometimes it may consist of nothing more than a noun phrase or

prepositional phrase. Moreover, integrated language makes use of a variety of devices

incorporating additional elements into an idea unit, such as: nominalization, participles, and

prepositional phrases. So, there are many features in the interview such as, nominalizations,

participles and prepositions. Interestingly, nominalization is not used at all in both subjects'

speeches. However, both subjects use participles. For example, Jimmy Fallen says "*heated*

debates" and Chris Christie says "g*etting screwed*". In addition, the host and the guest use same

number of prepositions which is interesting, in order to link nouns, pronouns, or phrases to

other words. The host uses (*on* 6, *in* 4, *at* 2, *of* 6). And the guest uses (*on* 4, *in* 2, *at* 3, *of* 6, *for*

3). This shows the power differences between both subjects that are negligible.

e. Conversation features

Conversation features are the most important features that identify the language of power.

Over or less use of these features can affect the power. Conversation features are commonly

used in oral rather than written language such as; hedges, monitoring of information flow,

expressing shared information, or repetition of words. Nasreddeen (2020, 44) has stated that

'upon this common ground, {someone} sets his presuppositions in an attempt to create the

mental image necessary for making his propositions convincing.' This includes power of

language. It is obvious that frequent hesitations and hedges in speech indicates weak power. In

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our data analysis, we notice that Jimmy Fallon has used more hedges than his politician guest. He uses "*like, well* and *I guess*" while his guest uses "*well*" only. Also, the use of first-person pronouns. The host uses 1st person pronouns, around 26 times "*I*" and twice "*my*". While the guest uses 34 first person pronouns around 19 times "*I*" and 15 times "*my*". These features indicate the powerful status of the host as a politician and a governor.

However, they both as same as use emphatic particles such as "*just, really, very, pretty, too*, and *so*". Interestingly, the repetition of words for both subjects demonstrate their interest and concern. For instance, Jimmy Fallon as the host of the show has been repeating *"Governor Chris Christie"* five times in his speaking. And Chris Christie as the governor of New Jersey has been repeating "*New Jersey*" four times. This is evidence of what is their interest and concern. Also, it shows what are they think about a lot during the interview.

f. Syntax

One of the most noticeable characteristics is the use of coordinating conjunctions. A conjunction placed between words, phrases, clauses, or sentences of equal rank. The fragmentation of spoken language shows up partly in the stringing together of idea units without connectives. It is common with coordinating conjunctions, e.g. "and", and "but". In Jimmy's speech there are 17 coordinators, such as: "*and*"14, and "*but*" 3. And in Chris' speech there are 26, such as "*and*" 23, and "*but*". One the other hand, there is only a subordinator in Jimmy's speech "*if*" 1. While there are 2 subordinators in Chris' speech, such as: "*after*" 2.

g. Goffman's system components

There are 8 system constraints that Goffman (1981) claimed to be universal. They are channel open and close signals, backchannel signals, turnover signals, acoustically adequate and interpretable messages, bracket signals, nonparticipant constraints, preempt signals, and Gricean norms. Our data analysis includes some of them, For instance:

- ***Channel open/close signals:***

1- Summons-answer sequence: "*Welcome back*" (1)

2- Identification sequence: "*All the way from across the Hudson River, please welcome the Garden State's own Governor Chris Christie, everybody." (1)*

3- Greeting sequence: Ø

4- How are you sequence: Ø

5- Pre-closing signals:

- ▪ "**JIMMY FALLON**: "*There you are. That's …, thank you so much for being here."* (116)

- ▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE:** "*Thank You*." (117)

6- Closing: Ø

- **Backchannel signals:**

"yeah":   **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: *Who knows, Jimmy. (*89)

   JIMMY FALLON*: Yeah*. (90)

"Right": JIMMY FALLON: *I have a question. …* (23)

  GOVERNOR CHRISTIE*: Right*. (24)

  JIMMY FALLON: *I'm going to name it*. (25)

  GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: *Right*. (26)

  JIMMY FALLON: *we've got to call him Chris*. (27)

  GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: *Right*. (28)

- **Bracket signals:** *(a side sequence)*

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: *By the way,* (105)

- **Non-participant constraints:**

JIMMY FALLON: *Yeah. I was expecting a horse's head* (76)

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: *Be careful. (*77)

JIMMY FALLON: *Yeah exactly.* (78)

h. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) features

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) aims to reveal the norms, values, interests, positions, perspectives embedded in discourse. It focuses particularly on texts where the ideology is not stated but hidden, and examines how those in power use discourse to influence others. (Cutting, 2015). In fact, the interview has Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) features which shows power differences:

- **Positive politeness:**

JIMMY FALLON: *Completely. I think you're a very* **(41)**

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: *Yeah.* **(42)**

- **Negative politeness:**

JIMMY FALLON: *I was wondering if you would… (96)*

 GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: *I'd love to do that.* (97)

- **Seeking agreement:**

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: *"The ….." won't return my calls. [Laughter] (101)*

JIMMY FALLON: *They won't return mine either.* (102)

- **Show empathy:**

JIMMY FALLON: *Okay. All right. I'll take that it's an amazing world. (94)*

- **Claim common knowledge of the world:**

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: *Be Vice President?* (87)

JIMMY FALLON*: Yeah. Be President?* (88)

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE*: Who knows, Jimmy.* (89)

JIMMY FALLON: *Yeah.* (90)

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: *It's an amazing world.* (91)

JIMMY FALLON: *Crazier things have happened.* (92)

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE*: it's an amazing world.* (93)

- **Power**

1- Who controls the floor? JIMMY FALLON (the host).

2- What metaphors are used? "Pros and cons" & "hot tub**".**

3- Who asks questions? JIMMY FALLON (the host). For examples:

- **JIMMY FALLON**: *When did you start?* (45)

    GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: *Well, when I started campaigning.* (46)

4- Who talks more? both

5- Who uses private topics? both. For instance:

- **JIMMY FALLON**: *I have a question. Your parents name…* (23)

- **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: *Right.* (24)

- **JIMMY FALLON**: *I'm going to name it — last name is Christie.* (25)

- **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: *Right.* (26)

- **JIMMY FALLON**: *we've got to call him Chris.* (27)

- **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE:** *Right.* (28)

- **JIMMY FALLON:** *That's cruel.* (29)

- **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE:** *yeah, parents have a sense of humor.* (30)

- **JIMMY FALLON**: *Chris Christie.* (31)

- **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: *Well, there is a story about it.* (32)

- **JIMMY FALLON**: *What is it?* (33)

- **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE:** *Well. My grandfather's name was James Christopher….*(34)

- **JIMMY FALLON**: *That it's Chris Christie.* (35)

- **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: *Right. I got home, my grandmother picked me up …* (36)

6- Who interprets reality? GOVENROR CHRISTIE (the guest). For example:

- **JIMMY FALLON**: *Like you didn't like the tunnel thing there because …* (70)

- **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: *It was too expensive, … (71)*

7- Who gives directions? JIMMY FALLON (the host). By questions.

i. Speech Acts

According to Austin (1962), speech acts are categorized into Locutionary, Illocutionary, and Per1ocutionary acts. These acts are further categorized by Sear1e (1978) into five categories: assertive, directives, commissive, expressive, and dec1arative. Structures mostly reveal some pragmatic functions other than 'the explicit\direct meanings' of them. (Abu-hassoub, 2022, 92). Speech Act features can be useful elements to examin e the power differences. The following obviously occur in the interview:

1- Directives:

Abu-hassoub (2020, 34) states that directive speech acts include 'commanding, advising, requesting, admonishing, asking, forcing, inviting, calling, ordering, charging, urging, begging, advising, suggesting, giving cues, challenging or attempts to make the listener to do something through orders and invitations., etc.'

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: Do you know … Jimmy? (16)

2- Commissive:

JIMMY FALLON: I will not make that joke again.(17)

3- Expressive:

JIMMY FALLON: I like that. (56)

4- Declarative:

JIMMY FALLON: New Jersey Governor has canceled … (12)

5- Representative:

JIMMY FALLON: Like you didn't like the tunnel thing there ...(70)

GOVERNOR CHRISTIE: It was too expensive, … (71)

JIMMY FALLON: And you know it always goes over budget… (72)

6- Apology: JIMMY FALLON: "*I apologize*" twice and "*I am sorry*" 3 times.

5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, by analyzing the conversation and comparing between Jimmy Fallon and Chris Christie, it is shown that power differences between them is negligible due to situational, social, and cultural context. On one hand, Jimmy Fallon is an American comedian and television host. Therefore, he is expected to control the floor, to ask questions and to give direction. This is considered as evidence of power. On the other hand, Chris Christie is an American politician, lobbyist and attorney. So, he has the power as well, because he interprets the reality. Due to his higher status as a politician and his older age than Jimmy Fallon, he is able to have the power. Because of that, Jimmy has apologized to the governor five times "*I apologize*" twice and "*I am sorry*" 3 times. Surprisingly, they both talk a lot and use private topics during the interview it might be because they are both males and well-known, famous people. Generally speaking, power relationship between speakers such as, differences of social status, age, gender can give speakers power and authority.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR ESL/EFL LEARNERS

By understanding power differences and other conversation features ESL/EFL learners will be able to analyze a comedy show, interview or political speech easily. They will enjoy listening to any conversation and recognize different features of power. Also, they will realize the reason behind using some features more than the others in order to have the power and authority. They will master language skills, such as listening and comprehension perfectly. Because it is important for ESL/EFL learners in order to be native-like, to understand different features related to L2 culture.

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Appendix A

a. General feature:

JIMMY FALLON	GOVERNOR CHRIS CHRISTIE
James Thomas Fallon is an American comedian, television host, and musician. He is known for his work in television as a cast member on Saturday Night Live and as the host of late-night talk show The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon.	Christopher James "Chris" Christie is an American politician, lobbyist and attorney. He is a member of the Republican Party and has been the 55th Governor of New Jersey since January 2010. His second and final term ends on January 16, 2018.

b. Length:

Features / components	JIMMY FALLON	GOVERNOR CHRIS CHRISTIE
Sentences vs. utterances length	59 utterances/ sentences	58 utterances/ sentences
Word length	648 words	568 words
Asking questions	10 questions	3 questions

c. Vocabulary:

Features / components	JIMMY FALLON	GOVERNOR CHRIS CHRISTIE
Adjectives	"cool" (58) "too "powerful" (66) "expensive" (70) "amazing" (94)	"greatest thing" (48) "powerful" (65) "great" (67) "amazing" (93)
Adverbs	"Sometimes" (52) "always" (64)	"probably" (48) "Hopefully" (65)

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d. Grammar:

Features / components	JIMMY FALLON	GOVERNOR CHRIS CHRISTIE
Nominalizations	Ø	Ø
Participles	-ed :"heated debates" (52)	"getting screwed" (73)
Prepositions	**Total: 18** on 6 in 4 at 2 of 6	**Total: 18** on 4 in 2 at 3 of 6 for 3

e. Conversation features:

Features / components	JIMMY FALLON	GOVERNOR CHRIS CHRISTIE
Hedges	"**Like**, you didn't like the tunnel" (70) "**Well**" (68) "I **guess**" (74)	"**Well**" (30,32,46,89)
First person pronouns	**Total: 26** "I" 24 "my" 2	**Total: 34** "I" 19 "my" 15
Monitoring of information flow	"you know" 2 (17,72)	"you know" 3 (16,65,73)
Emphatic particles	"just" 2 "so" 1 "very" 3	"really" 1 "just" 6 "so" 1

	"pretty" 2	"too" 1
Repetition	"Governor Chris Christie" 5	"New Jersey" 4

f. Syntax:

Features / components	JIMMY FALLON		GOVERNOR CHRIS CHRISTIE	
Coordinators	**Total 17:**	"and" 14 "but" 3	**Total 26:**	"and"23 "but" 3
Subordinators	**Total 1:**	"if" 1	**Total 2:**	"after" 2

g. Goffman's system components:

System constraints	Examples
Channel open/close signals	1- Summons-answer sequence: "Welcome back" (1) 2- Identification sequence: "please welcome … Chris Christie." (1) 3- Greeting sequence: Ø 4- How are you sequence: Ø 5- Pre-closing signals: ▪ "**JIMMY FALLON**: "There you are. (116) ▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE:** "Thank You." (117) 6- Closing: Ø
Backchannel signals	**"yeah":** ▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: Who knows, Jimmy. (89) ▪ **JIMMY FALLON**: Yeah. (90) **"Right":**

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	▪ **JIMMY FALLON**: I have a question. … (23)
	▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: <u>Right</u>.(24)
	▪ **JIMMY FALLON**: last name is Christie.(25)
	▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: <u>Right</u>.(26)
	▪ **JIMMY FALLON**: we've got to call him Chris.(27)
	▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: <u>Right.</u>(28)
Bracket signals	*(a side sequence)* **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: <u>By the way,</u> (105)
Non-participant constraints	▪ **JIMMY FALLON**: yeah. Yeah. (76) ▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: Be careful. (77) ▪ **JIMMY FALLON**: Yeah exactly. (78)

h. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) features:

Features / components	Examples
Positive politeness	▪ **JIMMY FALLON:** Completely. **(41)** ▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE:** Yeah. **(42)**
Negative politeness	▪ **JIMMY FALLON**: I was wondering if you... (96) **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: I'd love… (97)
Seeking agreement	▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: "The …." won't return my calls. *[Laughter]. (101)* **JIMMY FALLON:** Yeah, that's true. (102)
Show empathy	**JIMMY FALLON**: Okay. All right. (94)
Claim common knowledge of the world	▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: Be Vice President? (87) ▪ **JIMMY FALLON**: Yeah. Be President? (88) ▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: Who knows, Jimmy. (89)

	▪ **JIMMY FALLON**: Yeah. (90) ▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE:** It's an amazing world. (91) ▪ **JIMMY FALLON**: Crazier things have happened, (92) ▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE:** But it's an amazing world. (93)
Power	<u>**1- Who controls the floor?**</u> JIMMY FALLON (the host). <u>**2- What metaphors are used?**</u> **"**Pros and cons" & "hot tub**".** <u>**3- Who asks questions?**</u> JIMMY FALLON (the host). For examples: • **JIMMY FALLON**: When did you start? (45) • **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: Well, when I started …. (46) <u>**4- Who talks more?**</u> both <u>**5- Who uses private topics?**</u> both. For instance: • **JIMMY FALLON**: I have a question. … (23) • **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: Right. (24) • **JIMMY FALLON**: last name is Christie. (25) • **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: Right. (26) • **JIMMY FALLON**: we've got to call him Chris. (27) • **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE:** Right. (28) • **JIMMY FALLON:** That's cruel. (29) • **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE:** Well, yeah, parents have a sense of humor. (30) • **JIMMY FALLON**: Chris Christie. (31) • **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: Well, there is a story about it. (32) • **JIMMY FALLON**: What is it? (33) • **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE:** Well. My grandfather's name was James Christopher. My uncle's name was …. (34) • **JIMMY FALLON**: That it's Chris Christie. (35) • **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: Right. So, I got home, ... (36)

	6- Who interprets reality? GOVENROR CHRISTIE (the guest). For example: • **JIMMY FALLON**: Like you didn't like the tunnel thing there because …. (70) • **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: It was too expensive... (71) **7- Who gives directions?** JIMMY FALLON (the host). *By questions*.

i. Speech Acts:

Features / components	Examples
1- Directives	▪ **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE:** Do you know what we do? [laughter] (16)
2- Commissives	▪ **JIMMY FALLON:** I will not make that joke again.(17)
3- Expressive	▪ **JIMMY FALLON**: I like that. (56)
4- Declarative	▪ **JIMMY FALLON:** Chris Christie has canceled a ... (12)
5- Representative	▪ **JIMMY FALLON**: Like you didn't like the tunnel ... (70) **GOVERNOR CHRISTIE**: It was too expensive, … (71) **JIMMY FALLON**: Yeah. And you know it always goes over budget. (72)
Apology	▪ **JIMMY FALLON:** "I apologize" 2 " I am sorry" 3

Appendix B

By Aracely Rodriguez