SOCIOLINGUISTIC COMPARATIVE APPROACH TO THE NOTION "POPULARITY": THE UK VS. THE US

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The article focuses on revealing the essence of the notion "popularity" in the linguistic perspective based on the research of the lingual and non-lingual behavior of influencers, in this case they are talk show hosts. The comparative approach applied to the research contributes to the distinguishing of the differences between the British and American influencers. "Popularity" as an object of linguistic research is increasingly attracting the attention of scholars studying the linguo-cognitive, communicative-pragmatic, linguo-semiotic, sociolinguistic, linguistic, and gender aspects of its verbalization. Lingual and non-lingual resources play an important role in the process of formation of the popularity. It is created by verbal, non-verbal and super-verbal communicative means as a result of an individual's activities in order to produce the desired response in the mass audience. The research aims at the distinguishing of the most prominent characteristics of popularity demonstrated by influencers, particularly – talk show hosts. It is also aimed at the establishing the characteristic traits the discursive personalities in the UK and the USA are to obtain in order to gain popularity in the society. The reasons for being recognized as influencers in the UK or the USA are investigated. Verbal, nonverbal and extra-linguistic means of "popularity" creation on the examples of the influencers' performances are characterized. This research proved that the US talk show hosts are more popular in the world as influencers than the UK ones; to gain popularity in the American society, influencers are to demonstrate friendliness, good sense of humor, and extraordinary personality traits. To be popular in the British environment, an influencer is to be personable, amusing, comical, and witty. The main qualities of popularity are presented in the article on the basis of the examples demonstrating the specific lingual and non-lingual means in the speeches of well-known influencers in Great Britain and the United States.

Key words: *influencer, non-verbal communicative component, popularity, sociolinguistics, super-verbal communicative component, verbal communicative component.*

Problem statement. Nowadays, with the flourishing of the social media, the popularity can be evaluated within the level of influence on the audience. It is claimed that about 40% of the world's population use social media, and many of these billions of social media users look up to influencers to help them decide what to buy and what trends to follow (Social media influencers). An influencer is a person who can influence the decisions of others because of their relationship with their audience and their knowledge and expertise in a particular area, e.g. fashion, travel, or technology (Belova, 2021, p. 15).

Popularity of the influencers as a trend in social networking, advertising, marketing predetermines the **relevance** of the research. The **object** of the research is presented by verbal, non-verbal and super-verbal communicative components, employed by a talk show host-influencer. The **subject** of the study concerns lingual (verbal, non-verbal) and non-lingual behaviour of influencers (talk show hosts) in social media predetermining their popularity in the UK and the US societies. The **aim** of the study is to distinguish through the lingual and non-lingual behavior the most prominent characteristics of the talk show hosts-influencers which presuppose their popularity. The study is **based** on Instagram accounts of the most popular talk show hosts and their shows on YouTube.

The analysis. The focus of linguistic research lies in the study of such notions as "charisma" (Albert, 2019; Bedos-Rezak, 2018; Petlyuchenko & Chernyakova, 2019), "image" (Kiselyova, 2011;

Simon-Vandenbergen, 1996; Valdebenito, 2013), while the notion of popularity has not been revealed much yet in the sociolinguistic perspective. With the high-speed development and expansion of the social media (Newton, 2011; Page, 2012) the popularity of an individual nowadays is based on the number of followers in social media.

The expansion of the social media presupposed the appearance of influencers (Belova, 2021; Nikiforova, 2018) who have gained the wide world popularity and are considered to be an implification of popularity in the global society. The discursive personality of an influencer is formed with the help of "stance (as a mental position)". Stance is treated as a dynamic, situationally bound discursive construct, in which individual (personal) and interactive (interpersonal) spheres of linguistic realization are distinguished (Englebretson, 2007; Ushchyna, 2022, p. 129).

The notion of "popularity" through linguistic point of view is depicted in the interaction of verbal, non-verbal and super-verbal components of communication (Skrynnik, 2021; Soloshchuk, 2020; Soloshchuk, 2022) in an influencer's behavior.

The research methods include the pragmalinguistic analysis for identifying the key verbal components which characterize individuals as popular influencers; the pragmasemantic analysis for describing the structural-semantic and pragmatic features of the implementation of an image of a popular influencer; the analysis of nonverbal components of communication; the elements of quantitative calculations.

Important non-lingual criteria for influencing people are: the right niche, medium, regularity and consistency of posts, relevance of the story, accessibility of the content. The choice of the right niche is highly important for a successful influencer; it is important to find the area which can demonstrate the influencer's knowledge to advantage. Most influencers these days are bloggers and micro-bloggers (Table 1). Such distinction is presupposed by the choice of the medium – own online blog, Instagram or Snapchat, which are the best ways to connect with followers and chat about the niche area. As one of the first steps, influencers present an attention-grabbing biography that describes them and their special area in a newsworthy, entertaining, and unique way *(e.g. chat show host, wine blender, gin distiller, book writer – @grahnort – Graham Norton)*, thus, making sure that people who read their biography will choose to follow them.

Based on the list of TOP 15 talk shows TV hosts of the UK and the US made for an entertainment website that offers news in the fields of televi-sion, films, video games, and film theories Screen Rant by Harry Kettle and published on April 21, 2020 (15 Best Talk Show Hosts From US & UK), in the article it is suggested to classify the personalities of TV hosts according to the following 5 prominent general characteristic features most often used for their description (Table 2).

1) funny (e.g. Jimmy Fallon (US), Trevor Noah (US), James Corden (US), Alan Carr (UK), Russell Howard UK), Michael McIntyre (UK));

2) friendly (e.g. Jimmy Kimmel (US), Seth Meyers (US), Ellen DeGeneres (US), Jimmy Fallon (US), Jonathan Ross (UK));

3) extraordinary (e.g. Conan O'Brien (US), James Corden (US), Sean Evans (US), Russell Howard (UK), Michael McIntyre (UK));

4) witty (e.g. John Oliver (UK), Stephen Colbert (US), Russell Howard (UK), Jonathan Ross (UK));

5) personable (e.g. Graham Norton (UK), Russell Howard (UK)).

The research shows that the UK TV hosts are as funny as the US ones (3 UK and 3 US); the US TV hosts are friendlier than the UK ones (4 US and 1 UK); the US TV hosts are more extraordinary than the US ones (3 US and 2 UK); the UK TV hosts are wittier than the US ones (3 UK and 1 US); and the UK TV hosts are more personable than the US ones (2 UK and 0 US) (Table 2).

Being funny for the TV host is lingually characterized by the frequent usage of

- jokes:

(1) ELLEN: Are you excited for Halloween, everybody? [audience cheer and applause]. Yeah. It's fun for adults but it's really, really all about the kids. And I don't have kids of my own... That's why our nanny always looks so bored... (The Ellen Show, 2014)

- comic news:

(2) JIMMY: Apparently Verizon customers have been receiving spam texts from their own phone numbers [audience laugh lightly]. It's weird when you get a text from yourself at 2:00 a.m. that says "Me up?" [audience laugh]. Meanwhile, AT&T customers are like, "Ha ha, that's what you get for a company that has cell service." [Jimmy points at the audience with his index finger] [audience laugh] (Fallon, 2022).

The use of non-verbal components *(points at the audience with his index finger)* increase the effect of the verbally expressed comic statements.

Friendliness of the TV hosts reveals itself in the way they greet the audience and the guests of the show:

(3) RUSSELL: Welcome to the show! Now, fair to say, it's been a strange old year so tonight we'll be looking back at the best bits from the show in

the last 12 months as we witness the world descend into madness. Enjoy! [stretches his arms to the audience] (Howard, 2021).

When greeting the audience Russell Howard uses the welcoming statement *(Welcome to the show*!); parenthesis *(fair to say)* as the support of the sincerity and genuineness of his words; compassion for the audience *(it's been a strange old year);* the usage of the pronoun *we* which insinuates acting together as a whole *(we'll be looking back at the best bits from the show*; *we witness)* as tactics for realizing the strategy of convergence and a welcoming wish *(Enjoy!).* The latter is accompanied with the non-verbal welcoming component *(stretches his arms to the audience)* to confirm the sincerity of the verbal expression.

(4) MICHAEL: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome our Unexpected Star of tonight's show, it's Stuart. He is originally from Manchester. He now lives in London, and he is actually a pilot for British Airways [audience cheer]. Oh, he's a very dashing pilot. He thinks he's coming to a fear of flying course, which he's actually helping run, and that is just around the corner from this theatre. And we can now go to it live (McIntyre, 2021).

When greeting the guests of the show the TV host makes the guest feel at home by stimulating the audience to welcome the guest *(please welcome);* he introduces the guest to the audience using the epithets *(Unexpected Star)* characterizing the guest as a very-awaited well-known person; the TV host presents the guest's name, origin and occupation *(it's Stuart. He is originally from Manchester. He now lives in London, and he is actually a pilot for British Airways);* gives the evaluative opinion of his occupation / profession *(he's a very dashing pilot).* The audience, in their turn, greet the guest non-verbally *(audience cheer).*

A talk show host is considered extraordinary when he has his own style and way of making the guests feel comfortable at the show:

(5) MICHAEL [to the guest of the show]: We are going to take you backstage; we've got a whole huge performance that's set up for you. Wow! You're going to close tonight's show. This will be not only for the 2,500 people here tonight, but the millions watching at home. But... Right... you must know that each and every one of us here are so behind you and willing you to do well [audience cheer and applause]. So, if you'd like to come over here, this is actually your outfit [gives the suitcase] for later. I've got you a few toiletries, so if you take that [gives toiletries in a travel version]. Also, of course, everybody in the room you were just in, you can see there, they are all, of course, actors, none of those people are real. So, as you've forced us so many times to do it, will you perform the most unnecessary of all walks and, please, slowly make

Table 1

Range of Influencers' Popularity

	UK		US	
	name / Instagram account	number of followers	name / Instagram account	number of followers
official accounts	Alan Carr @chattyman	1 m	Ellen DeGeneres @theellenshow	117 m
	Graham Norton @grahnort @thegrahamnortonshowofficial @grahamnortonbooks	571 t 1 m 2875	Jimmy Fallon @jimmyfallon	21,4 m
			Trevor Noah @trevornoah	7,4 m
	Russell Howard @russellhoward	528 t	James Corden @j_corden	6,1 m
	Jonathan Ross @mewossy	160 t		
			Jimmy Kimmel @jimmykimmel @jimmykimmellive	2,5 m 3 m
			Seth Meyers @sethmeyers	700 t
			Stephen Colbert @stephenathome	665 t
			Sean Evans @seanseaevans	509 t
fans accounts	John Oliver @johnoliverforpresident	31,9 t	Conan O'Brien @conan_obrien	1811
	Michael McIntyre @michaelmcintyresbigshow	21,1 t		

Retrieval date for Instagram information: 13.04.2022

your way all the way, and someone will meet you? Ladies and gentlemen, it's our Unpexpected Star of tonight's show, Stuart Beech! (McIntyre, 2021)

The unique style is displayed through hospitable attitude to the guest, particularly, by supporting him *(But... Right... you must know that each and every one of us here are so behind you and willing you to do well);* highlighting the importance and uniqueness of the guest at the show by assuring the guest that the whole performance was made for him *(we've got a whole huge performance that's set up for you),* by emphasizing the big number of people watching the show *(This will be not only for the 2,500 people here tonight, but the millions watching at home),* his special mission at the show *(You're going to close tonight's show).* The use of politeness strategies *(please)* and the exaggerated positive attitude to the guest by calling him a Star *(it's our Unpexpected Star of tonight's show)* demonstrate the positive face of the host. At the non-verbal level the extraordinary style of a host can be presented with the constant support of the audience by cheers and applauses *(audience cheer and applause).* Unique style of a talk show host is also displayed through unusual super-verbal components of communication, like, for example, providing the guests with the needed things for the show *(So, if you'd like to come over here, this is actually your outfit [gives the suitcase] for later. I've got you a few toiletries, so if you take that [gives toiletries in a travel version]).*

Unique and unusual gestures, face expressions or copying the celebrities' style can also reveal such characteristic trait of a popular TV host as extraordinariness:

(6) RUSSEL: He's just had a six-week holiday, what's he retiring from? Waving, cutting ribbons? What's his problem? [shouts using obscene words and funny miming criticizing the actions of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle] (Howard, 2021).

Copying the non-lingual behavior of famous people *(criticizing the actions of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle)* and miming can characterize a talk show host as the one having his own style and knowing the way to the audience's heart.

Such characteristic trait a talk show host as wittiness is presented through sharp comments in such spheres as politics / economics / environment / society / political leaders, etc.

(7) JOHN: But you also cannot understate just how brazen it is for the president of the Philippines, a nation over 80% catholic, to call the pope a son of a whore. That is a big deal! (Oliver, 2022)

The sharp comment over the brazenness of the president of the Philippines emphasizes the ignorance and rudeness of the president through an implicit offence of the nation *(to call the pope a son of a whore)* and the emphasis of the truth of the statement through giving the accurate data *(a nation over 80% catholic)* confirm the wittiness of the talk show host.

The wittiness of the host can be expressed towards the guests as well as for producing a comic effect:

(8) JONATHAN: Ladies and gentlemen, three handsome and successful, I would say young, but that would be a lie, men! (Ross, 2022)

Table 2

Prominent General Characteristics Describing Talk Show Hosts

characteristics	*witty*	*funny*	*friendly*	*extraordinary*	*personable*
hosts	John Oliver UK; Stephen Colbert US; Russell Howard UK; Jonathan Ross UK	Alan Carr UK; James Corden US; Trevor Noah US; Jimmy Fallon US; Michael McIntyre UK; Russell Howard UK	Jimmy Kimmel US; Seth Meyers US; Ellen DeGeneres US; Jimmy Fallon US; Jonathan Ross UK	Conan O'Brien US; James Corden US; Sean Evans US; Russell Howard UK; Michael McIntyre UK	Graham Norton UK; Russell Howard UK
total rate	3 UK 1 US 4	3 UK 3 US 6	1 UK 4 US 5	2 UK 3 US 5	2 UK 2

Retrieval date from the website: 23.03.2022

Pic. 1

Pic. 2

Jonathan Ross uses a witty comment in the greetings of the guests about their age *(I would say young, but that would be a lie)* which is understood by the guests and the audience as a joke but not an offence. Demonstrating wittiness talk show hosts are aimed at entertaining the audience, and it usually confirms a phatic function.

TV hosts may be classified as personable due to the peculiarities of their appearance (Pic. 1, 2) and their work experience. These factors are considered to be extra linguistic components of communication. The right choice of clothes (formal suits, elegant shirts and ties), hairstyle and behavior pinpoint the attractiveness of an individual and enhance his or her popularity rate in the society.

Work experience plays an important role in shaping an individual's popularity. For example, Graham Norton (Pic. 1) expanded his horizons into becoming a judge on RuPaul's Drag Race UK, in addition to commentating on the Eurovision Song Contest (15 Best Talk Show Hosts From US & UK). He has been noted for his innuendo-laden dialogue and flamboyant presentation style (Norton). Moreover, Norton has written two memoirs, "So Me" and "The Life and Loves of a He Devil". In 2016, he published his debut novel, "Holding", which garnered positive reviews for its empathy, strong plotting and characterization. It was followed by the bestselling "A Keeper" which tells of a New York-based academic returning to her Irish hometown after the death of her mother. Norton's third novel, "Home Stretch" is a moving exploration of guilt and the search for a place to belong (Waterstones). Another example of a personable talk show host is Russel Howard (Pic. 2) who won "Best Compère" at the 2006 Chortle Awards and was nominated for an Edinburgh Comedy Award for his 2006 Aberdeen Festival Fringe show (Howard).

Conclusions. In the modern world the notion "popularity" experienced meaningful alterations being transmitted into the area of social media. Nowadays the popularity can be estimated through the number of followers, and individuals who gain popularity are called "influencers". Influencers often have a large following of people who pay close attention to their views. They have the power to persuade people to buy things, and influencers are now seen by many companies as a direct way to customers' hearts. Brands are now asking powerful influencers to market their products. TV hosts and talk show hosts are the bright representatives of the influencers.

According to the data of Instagram popularity, US TV hosts turn to enjoy much more popularity than UK TV hosts (the highest number of followers for the US hosts – 117 million (Ellen DeGeneres (US)), while the highest number of followers for the UK hosts – 1 million (Graham Norton (UK)) according to the data on April, 13, 2022).

Top influencers-TV hosts' popularity in the UK is based on such characteristics as being personable (via appearance, experience, career and personal achievements); funny (via jokes, comic news, miming) and witty (sharp comments for producing a humorous effect but not for offending a person). Whilst in the US the top influencers-TV hosts' popularity is based on being friendly, funny and extraordinary (via presenting own style, saving positive face, hospitality, miming, copying celebrities).

The **perspectives** of further research in this area lie in the analysis of popularity taking into account other (than TV hosts) social roles or occupations of personalities, gender factors, and belonging to other (than the UK and the US) cultures of personalities under research.

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СОЦІОЛІНГВІСТИЧНИЙ ПОРІВНЯЛЬНИЙ ПІДХІД ДО ПОНЯТТЯ «ПОПУЛЯРНІСТЬ»: ВЕЛИКА БРИТАНІЯ ТА США

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Стаття фокусується на розкритті сутності поняття «популярність» з точки зору лінгвістики на основі дослідження мовленнєвої та немовленнєвої поведінки інфлюенсерів – ведучих ток-шоу. На сьогодні поняття «популярність» зазнало змін у його значенні та масштабно розповсюдилось у сферу засобів масової інформації та сфери розваг. Порівняльний підхід, застосований у дослідженні, розкриває відмінності між інфлюенсерами у суспільствах Великобританії та США. «Популярність» як об'єкт лінгвістичного дослідження все більше привертає увагу вчених, які досліджують лінгвокогнітивний, комунікативно-прагматичний, лінгвосеміотичний, соціолінгвістичний, лінгвістичний та гендерний аспекти його вербалізації. Важливу роль у процесі формування популярності відіграють мовленнєві та немовленнєві засоби комунікації. Популярність створюється вербальними, невербальними та надвербальними засобами спілкування у результаті діяльності особистості з метою викликати бажану реакцію у масової аудиторії. Дослідження має на меті визначити основні характеристики популярності; якими рисами характеру мають володіти мовні особистості-інфлюенсери у Великій Британії та США для набуття популярності у суспільстві; дослідити де саме, у Великій Британії чи США, ведучі ток-шоу є визнаними інфлюенсерами; схарактеризувати вербальні, невербальні та надвербальні засоби створення популярності на прикладі виступів інфлюенсерів, а саме – ведучих популярних ток-шоу у Великій Британії та США. У ході дослідження виявлено, що ведучі ток-шоу США користуються більшою популярністю у світі в якості інфлюенсерів, ніж ведучі Великобританії; встановлено, що для набуття популярності у американському суспільстві інфлюенсери мають володіти такими якостями, як доброзичливість, гумористичність та оригінальність. Щоб набути популярності у англійському суспільстві, інфлюенсер має бути статним, веселим та кмітливим. Основні якості популярності виведені у статті за допомогою прикладів, що демонструють мовленнєві та немовленнєві засоби у виступах відомих інфлюенсерів Великої Британії та США. Виходячи із цього дослідження, популярним напрямком є дослідження популярності на прикладах людей з іншим видом діяльності, окрім ведучих ток-шоу, із урахуванням гендерного та культурного показників.
__Ключові слова:__ вербальний комунікативний компонент, інфлюенсер, надвербальний комунікативний компонент, невербальний комунікативний компонент, популярність, соціолінгвістика.