

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskoga jezika i književnosti
i njemačkoga jezika i književnosti

Dora Kovač

Upravljanje temom i problem dominacije u muško-ženskoj komunikaciji u
američkim jutarnjim emisijama

Završni rad

Doc. dr. sc. Goran Milić

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Topic Management and Domination Issues in Male-Female Communication in
American Morning Talk Shows

Bachelor's Thesis

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Abstract

This essay is based on previous research in the field of linguistics and discourse analysis and on analysis of a few excerpts from an American morning talk show *Live! With Kelly and Michael*. This paper focuses on pointing out mistakes in turn talking conversation model that indicate dominance in speech.

After giving a brief summary of terms and definitions that are important for understanding the rules of a successful turn talking conversation model, this paper will examine the frequency of interruptions and other topic management instances as a possible sign of dominance performed by either female or male host of the said morning show.

This analysis starts with the assumption that male co-host will use more dominant and assertive language and posture through conversations.

Key words: dominance, turn talking conversational model, topic management, non-verbal communication, interruptions, assertive language

1. Introduction: The Role of Dominance in the Modern World

The word 'dominance' is in various dictionaries differently explained. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary, the definition of dominance is "the fact or state of being dominant: such as a) sociology: controlling, prevailing, or powerful position[,] especially in a social hierarchy. E.g. male dominance, political dominance, companies competing for dominance in the market."

The next one is found in Oxford Dictionary that says that dominance is power and influence over others, whereas Dictionary.com provides a definition of dominance as disposition of an individual to assert control in dealing with other.

Words that are considered to be synonyms to 'dominance' are control, domination, influence, power, pre-eminence, rule and sovereignty.

In the modern society, the word dominance and its meaning are connoted rather negatively, in whichever aspect it is used, be it political discourse, professional business- or female-male relationships.

Throughout the history, society had fixed typical and 'appropriate' female and male behaviour patterns. Men were considered to be more dominant because their role in the society was perceived to be "more important" than that of a woman, which formed the way each gender communicated, as stated by Lakoff in *Language and Women's Place* (1975). According to Lakoff (1975), women used powerless speech features¹ to maintain subordinate position in society.

Nevertheless, examples of practicing dominance over others in conversation are argued to be widely spread, not only between opposite sexes, but between people of different social, economic status or different positions in professional branches as well. Dominance can be practiced in various different ways in a conversation, one of which is using certain language and words that are often considered to be 'markers'² of dominance. Pamela M. Fishermann argues in her essay *The Work Women Do* (1978) that women do the most work in a conversation when talking to men because of their submissiveness. According to Fishermann, women do more active maintenance and continuation work when speaking to male speakers.

¹ Lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation on declaratives, empty adjectives, etc. (*Language and Woman's Place*, Lakoff)

² A word or a phrase often and widely used to indicate, identify or characterize

They are also more actively engaged in insuring interaction than the men are, which results in asking more questions and using attention beginnings more than their male counterparts do.

This paper focuses on different aspects of language usage in order to provide dominance by either male or female speaker in a conversation. Analysis is based on excerpts of communication between two hosts of an American morning talk-show. Section 1 is an introduction to the topic. Section 2 presents the basic elements of topic management such as interruption and why it is a sign of dominance. It furthermore explains how the change of the topic works and the usage of indirectness in speech. In Section 3 we look at different means of non-verbal communication; paralanguage and kinesics, and explain the main difference between the two. This is followed by the analysis, which starts with the outline of the methodology used in Section 4. Results and analysis are presented in Section 5, followed by the appendix that contains transcripts of the scenes and situations analysed in Section 5.

2. Topic Management

There are some general rules of a successful turn-taking model conversation, such as timing one's utterance to avoid interrupting the other speaker, averting overlap, and maintaining eye-contact. Breaking any of the rules for a successful turn-taking conversation results in practicing dominance in speech. Deborah Tannen in *Gender and Discourse* differentiates two involvement styles in turn-taking conversation, which will also be used in this research paper. The first one is high-involvement style, which manifests in creating little to no pause when turn-taking, using supportive tags like hms, yes, ok., overlapping questions and elaborating on a topic. In high-involvement style, conversation is not disrupted and speaker shows interest in the subject or the other speaker and rapport. It is often confused with interruption.

However, using longer pauses, awaiting TRP³, using no sudden topic shifts and no overlaps are indicators of high-considerateness style.

While writing *Gender and Discourse*, Tannen stated that there is one more style to be considered, and that is cooperative overlap. It happens when a listener is talking along with a speaker, not in order to interrupt him, but to show enthusiastic listenership and participation. (*Gender and Discourse*, Tannen 53)

Similar to cooperative overlap is cooperative interruption; spontaneous emotional reaction on what was said. Cooperative interruptions are considered to be affirmations, repetitions or questions performed in order to clear possible misunderstanding or to support what was just said.

Even though dominance in a conversation can be practiced in many ways, this paper will focus on different styles of topic managements; interruption, overlap, change of topic, and indirectness.

2.1 Interruption as a Sign of Dominance

Interruption is linked to term 'overlap', but there is a slight difference. West and Zimmermann (1975) state that "interruption is every hostile act which violates the first speaker's turn. A device for exercising power and control in a conversation", while "an overlap is an instance of simultaneous speech where a speaker other than the current speaker

³ TRP (Transition Relevance Places) are points in an informal conversation where the turn at talk may legitimately pass from one speaker to the other (<http://www.sltinfo.com/transition-relevance-places/> accessed 17.5.2017)

begins to speak at, or very close to a possible TRP in a current speaker's utterance." (West/Zimmermann 170)

"Interruption is inescapably a matter of interpretation regarding individuals' rights and obligations. To determine whether a speaker is violating another speaker's rights, you have to know a lot about both speakers and the situation. (*You Just Don't Understand*, Tannen 190)

2.2 The Change of Topic

When researching topic management and dominance, it is important to look for the changes of the topic. The more dominant side of the conversation is more likely to change the topic if they do not like it or do not feel like discussing topic that their speaker started. The change of topic is usually started with an interruption or by simply ignoring previous topic and starting a new one.

2.3 Indirectness

Indirectness in communication is slightly deviating from the line of conversation and not explicitly saying what is on one's mind. Even though indirectness is an act of breaking one of Grice's maxims, in *Language and Women's Place*, Robin Lakoff identified two benefits of indirectness, which are defensiveness and rapport. Defensiveness is speaking with the possibility to change or modify already said statement if the speaker does not meet a positive response. The other benefit of indirectness is the rapport, which means "the pleasant experience of getting one's way not because one demanded it (power) but because the other person wanted the same thing (solidarity)". (*Gender and Discourse*, Tannen 32)

Even though Conley, O'Barr and Lind in their essay *The Power of Language: Presentational Style in the Courtroom* state that women's language is a powerless and weak language because they interpreted women's tendency to use indirectness as an evidence of not feeling entitled to make demands, indirectness can also be a sign of power. For example, people of upper socioeconomic status who have help in the house ring the bell in order to get the maid to serve the meal.

Thus, as claimed by Conley, O'Barr and Lind in their essay *The Power of Language: Presentational Style in the Courtroom* indirectness is not in itself a sign of subordination. The interpretation of indirectness depends on the setting, individuals' status and relationship of speakers to each other.

3. Non-verbal Communication as a Sign of Dominance

Speech and its conveyed messages cannot be fully understood without analysing nonverbal communication in speech as well. Through body-language, one can transmit even more information about their stands towards the other speaker and the topic of their conversation than their plain utterances. Humans relied on body-language long before they started communicating by words, but its power did not disappear when language started to develop.

The way a person uses their body in nonverbal communication depends on many factors such as their age, historical era, culture, geographical location, religion, etc. That is why some gestures and body postures are considered positive in one culture and negative in the other.

Two main aspects of nonverbal communication are paralanguage and kinesics. Paralanguage includes vocalizations, using different intonations and modifications of voice while speaking (giggling, speaking with a whiny voice), whistling, hissing, and shushing or hesitations and speed in talking. The term kinesics refers to all body movements.

The analysis of one's speech should never consist of analysing only their utterances, but their paralanguage and kinetics as well. This section will give a brief outline of how important gestures, head movements, posture, eye contact, and facial expressions are in a conversation and how they could indicate dominance.

3.1 Paralanguage

Paralanguage itself indicates something beyond the language. It is an area of non-verbal communication that emphasizes voice nuances as channels of expressing thoughts and feelings in form of vocal qualities such as volume, tempo, tone of one's voice, and intonation. Changing any of these aspects in a sentence can therefore result in modifying or even distorting a meaning of an utterance.

It is arguable, as suggested by David Abercrombie in *Elements of General Phonetics*, that eye movements, posture and hand gestures should be considered paralanguage as well. Paralanguage is mostly used unconsciously and is expressing speaker's emotions.

3.2 Kinesics

The word kinesics comes from the root word kinesis, which means movement, and refers to the movement of hands, arms, body or face.

When analysing speech through ones kinesics and body posture, one should never emphasise just one aspect of kinesics because the whole posture is important to really understand

someone's conveyed thoughts. For example, arms crossed at chest could either suggest practicing dominance in a conversation or not being interested in the conversation, and because of a vast difference between these two messages, the whole picture should be taken into consideration.

According to Peter A. Andersen's *Nonverbal Communication: Forms and Functions*, kinetics has three main types: adaptors, emblems, and illustrators. Adaptors are touching movements that indicate arousal or anxiety, such as clearing throat, twirling hair or playing with a pen.

Emblems are gestures that have a specific agreed-on meaning, such as "thumb up" for "okay", or showing middle finger.

Illustrators provide a visual image of what one's trying to say, for example waving to say hello, wrinkling one's nose to show something has an unpleasant odour or disgusts speaker. Sign language is based on illustrative kinetics.

4. Methodology and Analysis

This part of the paper includes a quantitative analysis of a couple of YouTube videos of a morning TV show *Live! With Kelly and Michael*. It is a TV talk-show with two moderators; Kelly Ripa and Michael Strahan. This chapter is going to put in question differences in female-male speech based on dominance of one of the speakers depending on their sex.

In this part of my research, I paid attention to speaker's body language and counted the interruptions, cooperative interruptions and overlaps, subjects changes, and physical contacts, which can also be considered either as a sign of dominance or search for attention, made either by Kelly Ripa or Michael Strahan.

This part of the paper includes a quantitative analysis of a few conversations between two hosts from a morning talk show *Live! With Kelly and Michael*. We do not have a variety of situations and different conversations, nor the possibility to analyse a 'natural' speech since their conversations are mostly scripted and do not allow straying away from the original topic. Another very important factor to be considered is that they official Youtube channel filtered all videos and conversations longer than a minute or two in the middle of my research and that the show changed one of the hosts (Strahan).

In order to make quantitative analysis, I have chosen a few videos of the said show that displayed conventional signs of dominance, such as interruptions, changes of topic or indirectness and transcribed them. While transcribing certain situations, I paid attention to the usage of body language and posture of both speakers and have provided description of their actions in the analysis of the excerpts.

In every video/excerpt, the hosts sit next to each other, facing the camera, and discuss a subject that they either started themselves or some topic or news that they read on the internet.

4.1 Excerpt 1

In the first excerpt from the video the female host (later Ripa) talks about weather, which the male host (later Strahan) accepts. He proceeds to talk topically but when he loses his track and asks “What?”, Ripa ignores that question and starts a new topic, introducing it with “You know what?” while touching Strahan’s hand in order to get his attention and stop him from getting back to the previous topic, which Strahan also accepts with a constructive overlap saying “What?”.

Michale: What?

Kelly: Yeah, you know.

Michael: What?

(Appendix, Excerpt 1)

After that, he uses one more overlapping supportive tag: “Yeah. Oh yeah.” and laughs at Ripa’s joke. In excerpt 1, Strahan uses markers of typical female speech (Tannen 1990) such as constructive overlaps and accepting the change of the subject, while Ripa has more dominant approach to their conversation as she changes the subject and ignores Strahan’s question. The only thing that is typical for female speech and was used by Ripa was touching Strahan’s hand in order to stop him from talking and turning the attention to her and the new topic she introduced.

Through the whole conversation, Strahan had more relaxed posture than Ripa. He was leaned on the table with his elbows and he turned his upper body towards Ripa every time she spoke, while Ripa stayed in the same position when talking to Strahan. She mostly faced public in the studio or the camera.

In this excerpt, Strahan used two constructive overlaps, while Ripa used none. However, she changed the topic once and made physical contact by touching Strahan’s hand.

4.2 Excerpt 2

The next excerpt is a 33 seconds long conversation between Ripa and Strahan about a woman who faked her own death to get out of a date. They speak topically about the issue of dating and turning one's date down. Ripa interrupts Strahan two times, whilst Strahan interrupts Ripa just once, both interruptions were topical, but each was performed in order to state one's own opinion, since the speakers had two contradictory views on the topic. Ripa uses repetition to get her opinion recognised since Strahan has a completely other view of the topic. She also uses more body language constructive overlapping supportive tags, such as nodding and tilting her head towards Strahan while he is speaking, even though she rarely looks at him. Ripa is speaking to the audience during the conversation. He on the other side, turns his upper body towards her, leans in and looks at her the whole time she is speaking. At the end, Ripa uses repetition three times to voice her opinion, but then she decides to back out of the argument and interrupt Strahan by using irony to 'agree' with his views in order to end the argument.

Strahan does not interrupt Ripa while she reads the story. He listens and pays attention, but when she speaks out her opinion, he keeps interrupting her to voice his own opinion.

They both use paralanguage as a help in voicing their opinion so that they change the pitch and the volume of their voices. Strahan interrupts Ripa by simply speaking more loudly than her and not letting her finish her sentence, while Ripa interrupts Strahan by saying the first word of her sentence louder, making a four seconds long pause after it, and then, after he stopped talking, she resumes the sentence in the normal voice and intonation.

Ripa uses more physical touch in order to gain the attention and take a turn to speak than Strahan does, but she rarely looks at him when she or he speaks.

4.3 Excerpt 3

In the third excerpt, the hosts change three topics by interrupting each other. Youtube clip starts with Strahan talking about a new restaurant he went to and Ripa using supportive tags like ‘mhm, yeah, right, I know’. Later on, Ripa changes the subject. She starts talking about how she went to another restaurant with her friends. Strahan accepts the new topic and uses supportive tags to show that he listens. He lets Ripa finish what she wants to say and then slightly changes the topic of the conversation. Ripa interrupts him three times at the end. First she introduces her opposing opinion by saying ‘ok but’, but Strahan keeps talking so she interrupts him again with ‘yeah, but I’m..’, which did not stop Strahan either so they talk at the same time for 4 seconds before Strahan starts laughing and lets Ripa finish what she wants to say.

Michael: How about this ... if ... how about you take me and Mark and we bro out in front of you ... give ... you can learn ... you can learn how the mind of a - - -

Kelly: ok but yeah but I'm like a guy no but, - - -

Michael: - - - man works

Kelly: - - - That's fine, but I ... trust me, trust me, I have the mind of a man

Michael: (laughing)

Kelly: I'm essentially I a guy. It's like two guys sitting here.

(Appendix, Excerpt 3)

Ripa used more dominance markers. She interrupted Strahan fourteen times, eight of which were constructive overlaps such as ‘mhm, yeah, right’.

Strahan interrupted her twice by making constructive overlaps ‘mhm’ and ‘heard about that’, but when Ripa interrupted him, he would not stop talking, but continued what he wanted to say.

Ripa changed the topic once and before she did it, she touched Strahan’s hand in order to stop him from talking and get the attention, which indeed stopped him so he sipped his coffee as she introduced the new topic.

Strahan's posture seemed more relaxed. He turned his shoulders towards Ripa when she was speaking, however Ripa mostly looked at the cameras and audience as she spoke.

4.4 Excerpt 4

In the Excerpt 4, Ripa does the most talking, which is according to Pamela M. Fishermann (1978) a sign of female submissiveness in conversation. She describes how she was supposed to have a dinner with her new neighbours but she mixed up the dates.

Michael uses only one supportive tag through this conversation. He does not interrupt Ripa, but he puts words in her mouth, which she accepts by repeating them. She did so twice before continuing with her story.

Kelly: ... but I had the night confused in my head.

Michael: You all dressed up...

Kelly: I was all dressed up...

Michael: Cheese played out...

Kelly: Cheese played out, soft music, soft lightning . . .

(Appendix, Excerpt 4)

Strahan looks at Ripa the whole time she was speaking, with his upper body leaned towards her. She, on the other hand, looks mostly at the audience, making the eye contact with Strahan only three times. This time, Strahan's posture seemed tenser than Ripa's. She was turning her upper body from the right to the left, to acknowledge the audience on the both sides of the room, while leaning back and forth and using excessive gesticulation.

Ripa might be showing more submissiveness in this excerpt because she was talking about a mistake she made.

4.5 Quantitative Analysis

This summary will show the quantitative analysis of the interruptions, changes of topic and other elements that act as indicators of dominance in speech made either by female or male host through the whole four excerpts.

Counting the interruptions showed that Ripa interrupted more than Strahan. She changed the topic of the conversation twice. She used indirectness once when not answering Strahan's question, used four repetitions, and interrupted Strahan sixteen times. Eight of Ripa's sixteen interruptions were either supportive or constructive overlaps.

When counting repetitions, one should consider that Ripa made four repetitions through these four excerpts, yet they were used to indicate two opposite sides of dominance. Once she repeated herself in order to state her opinion, which is a marker of dominance, however, the other three repetitions were her repeating sentences that Strahan said for her, which are markers of submissiveness (see Appendix, Excerpt 4).

Ripa relied on her posture and body language in order to get attention more than Strahan since she tried to stop him from talking three times by putting her hand on his. She also used more facial expressions to transmit her emotions than Strahan did, even though she mostly looked at the camera and audience.

Strahan expressed constructive tags through his posture and body language, such as nodding his head when he agreed on something, rather than being vocal about his affirmations as Ripa was. Since he was not vocal about supportive or constructive overlaps, but used many physical affirmations, I did not include it in the table of dominance/submissiveness markers.

	Interruptions	Constructive Overlap	Changes of Topic	Repetition	Physical Touch
Kelly Ripa	8	8	2	4 ⁴	3
Michael Strahan	4	5	1	0	0

Table 1. Quantitative Analysis of Dominance Markers

⁴ One repetition was a dominance marker, other three were submissiveness markers (see above)

5. Summary and Final Conclusion

When writing this research paper, I studied the differences in male and female speech and how different cultural backgrounds, upbringing, and general stances on domination of either gender over another determine the course of the conversation. Even though one cannot apply cultural background or upbringing when analysing speech and dominance in a talk show due to not knowing the background of the hosts, I chose working with the show *Live! With Kelly and Michael* because of two reasons.

It is a TV talk show with two hosts – one female and one male, and according to Tannen's *You Just Don't Understand* men use more dominance markers in a conversation, thus one of the assumptions when starting this research was that Strahan will use more dominance markers in his speech. However, Ripa has, in business terms, a higher rank than Strahan, since she was the host of the show years longer than Strahan, and is more paid for the show than Strahan is.

Taking Ripa's higher status into consideration, before I started the analysis, I supposed there would be an equal exchange of the dominance markers between the two hosts.

Live! With Kelly and Michael is a show that consists of two parts – a part where the hosts read different news and then comment them or they simply talk about their experiences, and an interview with celebrities. I chose to analyse the part of the show where they read different news and comment on them because it gives them more freedom to speak in a way that reflects their personality.

One important fact that needs to be considered when analysing a talk show, especially one like *Live! With Kelly and Michael* that is a morning talk show on national television, is that even though there is a conversation between the hosts, it is still more or less scripted, which makes it hard to take speakers' personalities into consideration when analysing. Furthermore, hosts cannot use paralanguage as freely as one would when speaking privately. In other words, they have to behave in front of cameras. They cannot act and talk spontaneously as they would in privacy. Hence, one cannot expect many dominance markers.

When watching the videos, one could assume that Strahan uses more dominance markers since he is louder and interrupts Ripa easier than vice versa, but the quantitative analysis showed that Ripa used more dominance markers.

In order to conclude if either Ripa or Strahan are more dominant in their conversations, one should analyse more than only four short excerpts and do more than count dominance markers.

“It is not that I deny that men often dominate women and that interruption is one way they often do so; however, my years of painstaking research into the workings of conversation have shown me that one cannot simply count overlaps in a conversation, call them interruptions, and assign blame to the speaker whose voice prevails.” (*Gender and Discourse*, Tannen 54)

6. Appendix

6.1 Excerpt 1

Live! With Kelly and Michael (video uploaded 3/10/16, accessed 5/5/17)

Kelly: It's so unfair because there's so much beauty there so I always say any place where there's sak [sic], such extreme beauty and [pause] and so much to offer, there's always that give and take. There's always that extreme weather that accompanies the extreme beauty.

Michael: Yeah in Florida you have the tornado, the hurricane. You're in [pause] a [pause] in LA you have [pause].

What?

Kelly: Yeah, you know.

Michael: What?

Kelly: The other day I read the wrong date and you would have thought I have murdered someone.

Michael: Yeah. Oh yeah.

Kelly: People were like can't you even get the date right?

I was like I probably could but I don't really care

Michael [laughs]

6.2 Excerpt 2

Woman Fakes Death to Get Out of a Date

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9mXIVLVbX7o>, video published 22/1/2015, accessed 10/5/2017)

2:50-3:23

Kelly: He's the kind of guy I think she in her maybe in every fibre of her being knew doesn't really understand those sort of social cues of I'm not interested

Michael: but c'mon [sic] you don't have to fake kill yourself to get away from the guy.

Kelly: SOMETIMES you have to fake . . . Sometimes you have to fake your own death.

Michaels: You don't have to fake your death.

Kelly: Sometimes you have to fake your death.

Michael: You know, and that's it I'm kinda [sic] bothered by this because though everybody's crying over relationships and she had a man who would love her to death

Kelly: Aaaa yeah exactly, yeah, that's the whole point.

6.3 Excerpt 3

Live! With Kelly and Michael, January 23 2015

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fGtUNUJ4sVU>, video published 23/1/2015 accessed 6/5/2017)

2:44-4:24

Michael: I went to, yeah I went to a new place called café Clover down on a on Downing Street. It was nice it's really good you know what it is it was is created because it was like a great restaurant in the but the food is on the healthier side because it was like - - -

Kelly: oooh . . . yeah

Michael: - - - they said is. By it's by your old house but it's kind of like um you go to a healthy place and it doesn't really feel that sexy or cool it's like the lighting's bad but then you go to

Kelly: yeah

Michael: the unhealthy places and they're all sexy so they combined it made a sexy feeling

Kelly: right yeah

Michael: place where you can eat something like good and it was very very very good so

Kelly: yeah

Michael: we went there and then I went to see on um Lonard you know the band who played at our holiday? I went to see Lavar now that's that ban they're great so I went to

Kelly: of course I love that band. They're great

Michael: now that's that band, they're great so I went to the groove to see them perform

Kelly: yeah, yeah

Michael: perform last night and

Kelly: My it's so funny, my girlfriend who flies in from California and so when you live in New York sometimes you don't experience New York

Michael:

mhm

Kelly: because you live here and so she flew in and she wanted to try this new Ralph Lauren restaurant called polo bar

Michael:

yeah,

heard about that

Kelly: we when we walked in, we walked in, and Mark immediately looked at me and said I'm bringing Strahan back here because he was like this is like it is, it's so great you guys would you would love it.

Michael: How about this if how about you take me and Mark and we bro out in front of you give you can learn, you can learn how the mind of a - - -

Kelly:

ok

yeah but I'm like a

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no but, - - -

Michale: - - - man works

Kelly:

- - - That's fine, but I...trust me, trust me, I have the mind of a man

Michael: (laughing)

Kelly: I'm essentially I a guy. It's like two guys sitting here.

6.4. Excerpt 4.

(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4_dpUrWNA, video published 16/2/2014, accessed 4/9/2017)

1:30-2:14

Michael: So how are you?

Kelly: Great! I had the best night ever, last night. We . . . I think I told you the story. The night before I thought my neighbours were coming over for cocktails. Our new neighbours. And then we were supposed to go out to dinner. But I had the night confused ... because ... ahm ... I don't know why ... but I had the night confused in my head.

Michael: You all dressed up...

Kelly: I was all dressed up...

Michael: Cheese played out...

Kelly: Cheese played out, soft music, soft lightning, scented candle, I mean, I rolled out the red carpet ... ahm ... and then it turns out I had the wrong night so...

Michael: yeah

Kelly: So ... I guess my neighbour's daughter was listening to the show and said: "Are you having dinner with your new neighbour?"...

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