THE INTERACTIONAL ORGANIZATION OF NEWS INTERVIEWS IN CANADA

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Over the years the news interview has acted as an important forum for the generation of news.[1] Many media analysts have studied the content of individual news broadcasts and the institutional frameworks in which news is produced (Glasgow Media Group, Tuchman, and Golding and Elliott), but few have investigated the basic interactional practices which constitute the news interview. Until recently, determining how interviewers (IR's) and interviewees (IE's) organize their interactions with one another has meant consulting the anecdotal reports produced by professional broadcasters, including Frum, Gabereau and Gzowski; politically informed commentators, such as Wedell and Whale; and authors of broadcasting manuals, such as Yorke.

The Research Problem

My paper examines this neglected aspect of news production in Canada from a conversation analytic perspective. This approach yields new insight into the interactional practices that constitute the news interview. I am interested not in the specific details of individual styles of interview conduct (Beattie) but in the general properties of news interview interaction. The preliminary analyses outlined in this paper are based on a corpus of materials I collected, i.e., tape recordings I made of a variety of news interviews that were broadcast on CBC AM radio, during the second week of November of 1988.[2]

Analysts who adopt the conversation analytic perspective try to describe the procedures speakers use, i.e., orient themselves to, when they organize their conversational interactions (see Atkinson and Drew 34-61).[3] Originally developed as a mechanism for analyzing ordinary conversation, conversation analysis can be applied to interaction that occurs in a range of settings, including classrooms (Mehan), courtrooms (Atkinson and Drew), medical interviews (West and Zimmerman), and news interviews (Heritage, and Clayman).

At the center of this approach is the view of language as a vehicle for accomplishing social action. What interests the analyst is how language is used by speakers to achieve a variety of ends (Sacks 26-27). What this means is uncovering the seen but unnoticed procedures used by speakers to produce their own actions and to interpret the actions of others (Heritage 110 and 241).

The concept of "adjacency pairs" has unlocked a number of formal procedures used to inform interaction (Schegloff and Sacks 295-96). The idea here is that certain activities, including extending greetings or bidding farewell and asking questions and giving answers, are organized in pairs. Normally, the production of the first member of the pair, i.e., the first pair part, projects as well as requires the production of the second complementary action. Adjacency pairs, then, function as a "normative" framework, i.e., they shape the expectancy as well as the understanding of the interactants (Heritage 247).

An analysis of the turn-by-turn procedures by which these activities are accomplished will result in an understanding of how, moment by moment, a range of sequentially organized discourse activities, e.g., asking questions and giving answers, initiating and changing topics, opening and closing a conversation, are accomplished (Heritage 280-92).

I analyze such interactional procedures in two ways. First, I produce detailed transcripts of the talk in question and then I look for the regularities that unfold. Second, I demonstrate how these regularities are "oriented to" by the participants involved (see Schegloff and Sacks 273). I try to show that participants use the same patterns in producing and reproducing the regularity in question.

Results

For reasons of space, this paper focuses on three of the basic activities that were examined in this study: (a) Opening the Interview, (b) Displaying Objectivity, and (c) Closing the Interview.

a. **Opening the Interview**. Opening sequences, like interactional openings generally, serve two purposes. First, the participants are identified in opening. Second, the type of interaction to follow is indicated in the opening. As Schegloff put it, this is the place where the type of conversation being opened up can be constituted by the parties to it (25).

News interview openings thus project an agenda for the subsequent interview. The agenda indicates the topic to be discussed and the perspective from which the interviewee will comment on it.

In this way the opening sequence makes available all the materials needed to appreciate the relevance of particular questions, to assess the significance of interviewee's responses to the interviewer, and to anticipate the general drift of the interview. Consider the following opening sequence, which is typical in terms of its basic components (see appendix for "Transcript Conventions"):

[1] [Morningside 15/11/88]

IR: This morning they may be::coming afraid of
1-->   losing their years their professors are on
        strike the strike is now in its second full
        week .hhh
2-->   Joining me now from halifax sandy young who's
        past president of the dalhousie faculty
        association .hhh and
3-->   robbie shaw who's the former vice-president
        of finance and administration at dalhousie.
        .hhh Gentlemen good morning.

We can identify three components here. First, we see the "agenda projection," which overtly indicates the type of activity to follow. In this instance, it provides a formulation of the topic (see item 1: the professors at Dalhousie are on strike) and indicates something about what will be done with the topic (see items 2 and 3: two professors will tell us what they think about the topic).

Second, we notice the statement of background information. Here the background information is supplied by the intervierwer, but it may be presented by means of recorded material. In this instance,

the statement (although short) indicates the stress surrounding the issue.

Third, each of the interviewees is introduced. In this instance, the introductions include information about their status, i.e., the perspective from which the interviewees will be commenting on the topic.

I should comment on two features of interview opening. First, the preliminary remarks are addressed exclusively to the listening audience. Second, in addition to resolving identification problems (the introduction of interviewer and interviewee), the preliminary remarks project the agenda of their subsequent interview and provide background information. Usually the interviewer's identity is established at the very outset of the program:

[2] [As It Happens 4/11/88]

IR1: I'm alan maitland.
IR2: I'm michael enright.
This is (.) as it happens.
((music))
IR1: Tonight=
IR2: =Hearts and minds. How the campaign of '88
has become an emotional tug-of-war over fre::e
trade.
.hhh Our pundits tell all.

The audience distinguishes interviewers and interviewees by the discourse identities they adopt, i.e., as those who ask questions and those who provide answers.

Let me say a few more words about this component. The introductory component generally consists of utterances which describe the interviewee. Frequently, the interviewee is named and given some kind of title.

[3] [Basic Black 12/11/88]

IR: One of my favorite ne::wspaper pastimes fer
(.) a good long while has bin reading

1--> globe and mail reports out of moscow. That's
because up until just a short while ago
lawrence martin was the globe's man in moscow
.hhh and lawrence martin went out of his way
to bring you a moscovi::te in the street feel
for the soviet way of life. Not just kremlin
gossip his stories were just as likely
to emanate from a soviet subway station or a
2--> meat market .hh or a hockey arena .hhh which
is why we've invited lawrence martin to basic
black this morning to have a peek at hockey
night in moscow.
Welcome lawrence.

We hear this person-description as "introductory" in the sense that the person (Lawrence Martin) is spoken of as a participant in the interaction (see item 2). Moreover, the prefatory remarks (see item 1) indicate the perspective he will be offering on the topic. These components serve to present the description as more than idle commentary; in fact, they usher the person into the interview.

b. **Displaying Objectivity.** As we have seen, interviewers are required to design their turns as questions. This practice appears to be a function of the need to display objectivity. Interviewers may depart from the routine of producing simple questions, but their non-questioning turn components can be heard as in some way part of the question. While initial utterances may be formatted as statements, they are fitted to the question as prefaces to and thus an integral part of the question that follows. Consider the following extracts:

[4] [Morningside 15/12/88]

IR: I note some activity from the government this
morning and I don't know if thats means th (.)
th (.) the settlement is more likely now th
than it (.) its has bin or is this a good
turn d'ya think.

[5] [Gabereau 4/12/88]

IR: Well take a book uh a little book called am
I the only one which is uh dennis foon and
brenda knight and uh .hhh it's about sexual a
(.) sexual abuse and they're (.2) cas::e
histories so to speak
        [ ]
IE: Yes
IR: .hhh and uh I mean would you have published
that ten years ago.

In these instances, the initial statement-formatted components can be heard as utterances preparing the way for a question, i.e., by providing background information that makes the specific question relevant. Thus, the turn as a whole is understood as question-asking.

It can be argued that these attempts to maintain the appearance of "questioning" are bound up with the need to avoid injecting a personal opinion into the interview process. Consider the following extract.

[6] [The Entertainers 30/10/88]

IR: .hhh I saw a new canadian movie last week (.)
1--> it's called martha ruth and edie. It's a
good picture about the three ladies in th
the title three ordinary canadian women three
different stories from three classic canadian
short stories. Guilt by betty lambert .hh
california aunts by cynthia flood and how I
met husband by alice munro. Eight women
combined to write and direct the picture but
the whole thing was the brain child of deepa
mehta saltzman .hh and she's here in the
studio to talk about it. Deepa .hhh the
stories you use the kinda canadian stories
most of us were force fed in high school it's
interesting because you didn't grow up and go
through high school here so you didn't
discover these stories till you were an adult.

2-->   What was it about the three stories that
grabbed your attention.

By restricting themselves to turn styles that are at least minimally recognizable as questions, interviewers like the above demonstrate that they are "eliciting" information from others.

As Clayman has pointed out, interviewers use another set of devices to sustain an "objective" stance in non-questioning situa- tions, e.g., in soliciting information and formulating prior responses. This set of devices is analogous to what Goffman describes as shifts of "footing."

Goffman argues that the terms "speaker" and "hearer" fail to capture the variety of ways in which the parties to an interaction participate in that interaction. Speakers, he points out, adopt a variety of footings in relation to their remarks. These are "animator," "author, and "principle." The animator is the person who utters a sequence of words; the "author" is the person who coins them; and the "principle" is the person whose position or point of view is expressed in and through the words that are spoken. It is not uncommon for interviewers to reject one or more of these footings, and thereby distance themselves from their remarks. These shifts of footing usually occur during the production of non-questioning turns. Consider the following sequence:

[7] [The House 12/12/88]

IR: .hhh politicians have such a terrible
credibility rating I'm sure you're .hhh well
aware of that .hhh maybe just a (.) either
step above or below journalists
[   ]
IE: Well that's uh that's arguable.
IR: .hhh but uh pierre trudeau uh held on to power
saying zap you're frozen and introduced wage
and price controls .hhh brian mulroney came to
power saying social programs were a sacred
trust .hhh now you're making promises about
the trade deal and people are saying why

should we trust you why aren't you a
politician just like all the others shouldn't
we bewar::e.

Here the interviewer produces an assessment designed to challenge the interviewee's position. However, the assessment is attributed to someone else, i.e., people generally ask the question: Why should we trust John Turner? In Goffman's terms, while the interviewer adopts the footing of the "animator" she rejects the footing of the "author."

By means of this device, then, the interviewer demonstrates that she methodically orients herself to at least one conception of objectivity, namely, she eliminates her own personal opinions from the interviewing process.

c. **Closing the Interview**. Two problems must be overcome when ending any sort of spoken encounter (see Schegloff and Sacks). I will talk about ending ordinary conversation first and then I will say a few words about ending the news interview.

One difficulty is to end the encounter in a way that is recognizable as a closing of the conversation. To stop talking altogether is no solution to the problem, since this silence may be heard as a "pause" in the conversation.

This problem, Schegloff and Sacks argue, is posed by the operation of the turn-taking mechanism for conversation. It will be remembered that this mechanism consists of options, e.g., current speaker selects next speaker, next speaker self-selects, and current speaker continues, by which next turns are allocated to specific speakers at transitional places. Speakers may not take up a given option when it becomes available; silence is generated as successive options are declined. The implication is that, unless the option cycle is suspended, any silence will be hearable as silence in the conversation, i.e., hearable as speakers declining to take the next turn, rather than as choosing to end the conversation altogether.

The problem, then, is to suspend the option cycle so as to provide a recognizable closing of the conversation. The solution that is routinely employed is to exchange conventionalized formulas, such

as "goodbye/goodbye." This terminal exchange, when issued by each speaker, exhibits a mutual orientation to the encounter's completion and thus accomplishes what the absence of talk does not: this exchange renders the conversation recognizably closed.

The terminal exchange is only a part of the closing procedure, however, for its use raises another problem. At any point in conversation, speakers may want to raise additional matters. These matters have been described by Schegloff and Sacks (300) as "unmentioned mentionables." These matters are a function of the unconstrained character of ordinary conversation.

Thus, when a speaker initiates a terminal exchange at this point in the exchange he interferes with another speaker's ability to realize his as-yet-unspoken agenda.

The other problem is to establish a "warrant" for initiating the terminal exchange as an appropriate next action, that is, as an action which does not infringe on speakers' rights to initiate further talk on topic or to initiate new topics.

This problem is solved by uttering a pre-closing exchange, the simplest being a pair of "passing turns," such as "so," "well," or "ok." These are turns at talk, but only in a minimal sense because they lack topical content.

Hence, speakers who utter these passing turns indicate that they have nothing more to add to the conversation. They have run out of things to say, as it were. When all the speakers take a passing turn like this they mutually demonstrate that they have completed their conversational business. This signal is the warrant for initiating the terminal exchange.

The pre-closing exchange, then, is designed to respect speakers' rights to introduce new lines of talk. When one speaker gives up a turn and thereby initiates a pre-closing sequence, another speaker may add something to the previous topic or initiate a new topic, i.e., reopen the conversation. Thus, the pre-closing section gives each speaker opportunity to initiate additional conversation if he or she chooses to do so. Only when every speaker has declined this option may the closing be initiated.

It should be obvious by now that news interview closings differ from ordinary conversation closings in a number of respects. As we have seen, turn content is not open to negotiation. Also, turns are restricted primarily to questions and answers, which are preallocated to interviewerss and interviewees respectively. These restrictions combine to shape the format for termination.

1. The terminal utterance in a news interview is ordinarily produced by the interviewer. It usually consists of "thank you" addressed to the interviewees. The following extracts are typical.

[8] [Morningside 15/11/88]

IR: Gentlemen thank you for doing this
        morning.

[9] [As It Happens 9/11/88]

IR: Brian, thank you (.2) for talking about our
        friend.
IE: It was my pleasure.

Such thank-you's may be returned by an interviewee, as in extract [9]. However, they need not be reciprocated, as extract [8] demonstrates. In most instances the interviewer quickly moves on to other business.

2. (a). It can be shown as well that the terminal component is usually preceded by one or more pre-closing items which prepare the way for termination. These occur in two distinct forms. In some instances, as in the following, it is produced by the interviewer as a preface to the terminal component.

[10]   [The Radio Show 12/11/88]

IR: Allright uh peter gzowski it's been good uh of
        you uh to talk with us on your uh saturday
        afternoon uh your day off. . . .

"Well" and "allright" function as generic coherence markers. These tokens set off the previous exchange from what follows.

2. (b) Alternatively, the closing preface may project termination in a direct and unequivocal manner. In whatever form, closing prefaces are initiated by interviewers just prior to the terminal component. Normally, interviewees offer no response. Interviewers simply produce the closing preface and launch into the terminal "thank you."

The pre-closing component can take another form. Instead of issuing this component as a preface to the terminal component, the interviewer projects the forthcoming closing in some prior questioning turn. These "closing projections" may be explicit, as when the interviewer announces in some fashion that this will be the last question of the interview.

[11]   [Inside Track 12/11/88]

IR: Well we're sorry about that (.4) and before
       you go we want to know what he wore on the
       back of his t-shirt.

In some instances, the closing is made up of a closing projection and a closing preface as pre-closing components.

Concluding Remarks

The data I studied suggest that the organization of the news interview is shaped by the interactional as well as the institutional constraints that are posed by the context in which the interaction takes place. In saying this I reaffirm one of the conclusions reached by Heritage and Clayman. My analyses of the turn-by-turn procedures by which the requisite activities are accomplished yield an understanding of how it is that this social institution is composed, moment by moment, of particular social actions and organized sequences of them. I would argue that studying how the above procedures affect the way the listening audience makes sense of interview talk would be a fruitful area for further investigation.

NOTES

This project was inspired by and is heavily indebted to the work of Harold Garfinkel, John Heritage, Don Zimmerman, and Steven Clayman, as will be evident to readers familiar with the study of naturally occurring conversational interactions.

[1] As Heritage and Greatbatch have argued, until the middle of the 1950's the broadcast interview (in the United Kingdom especially) was of little importance as an instrument of journalistic inquiry or as a medium of political communication. Until this time broadcast journalists on Canada understood broadcasting the spoken word as a matter of reading the printed word aloud (Whale).

[2] The programs selected for this study—they had to be aired nationally—utilized the interview as the essential vehicle for news production. I judged that on the AM network for the period in question 34 out of 96 programs per week (or 35 percent) were organized around interviews and that on the FM network 27 out of 87 programs per week (or 31 percent) were organized around news interviews. I taped 15 interviews for a total of 2.15 hours of interviewing time. The interviews thus collected are fairly representative of "soft" as opposed to "hard" news output (see Tuchman). I transcribed these interviews (to preserve the details of the conversations) so that I could illustrate the formal procedures used by IRs and IEs to organize their interactions with each other and generate news accounts for the listening audience.

[3] Sacks et al. point out that forms of talk can be arranged along a continuum in terms of their turn-taking structure. Ordinary conversation, with its locally managed system of turn taking, can be placed at one end. Ceremonies, whose turn-taking systems specify order as well as size and content of turn, can be placed at the other. Obviously, news interviews can be placed near the "ceremonies" end of this spectrum.

TRANSCRIPT CONVENTIONS

The notational conventions employed in my transcripts are taken from a set of conventions developed by Gail Jefferson. The most recent version of these conventions can be found in Atkinson and Heritage (ix-xvi). The symbols are designed to capture the verbal as well as the prosodic details of speech as it naturally occurs.

(word)	Parentheses surrounding a word indicate uncertainty about the transcription.
(0.8)	Parentheses around a number on a line or between lines indicate silence, in tenths of a second.
((cough))	Items in double parentheses provide characterizations of events not fully transcribed.
[	Open brackets indicate the onset of simultaneous talk between utterances.
]	Closed brackets indicate the ending of simultaneous talk between utterances.
=	Equal signs indicate the "latching" of utterances or words with no intervening silence.
?,.	Punctuation marks indicate intonation contours. They do not indicate grammatical status, e.g., a question.
out	Italics indicates emphasis.
WORD	Upper case indicates especially loud sounds relative to the surrounding talk.
::	Colons mark the prolongation of the preceding sound.
.h	The letter "h" preceded by a period indicates aspiration in the course of a word, commonly laughter. Without the period, the "h" indicates outbreath.

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