

Enabling Institutional Messaging: TV Journalists' Work with Interviewee Responses

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INTRODUCTION

In public broadcasting, the primary goal of interviewing an expert is to inform and educate the audience for the benefit of societal interests (Clayman, 2013). Previous work on news interviews has noted that this type of public discourse not only involves the host and the expert, but also an overhearing audience (Clayman & Heritage, 2002; Hutchby, 1995); moreover, the host is positioned as the “tribune” of the people (Clayman, 2002), tasked with the responsibility to maximize the public’s understanding of and knowledge about what may concern them. While the audience as the third party in the question-answer sequence in news interviews has received considerable attention in the literature, less is known about how the interviewer works with the health expert’s responses to questions in order to facilitate the audience’s understanding of health initiatives. In this paper, we examine how the interviewer designs a follow-up turn to (1) provide background or supplemental information which contextualizes the interviewee’s prior response and to (2) reformulate the expert’s explanation from the perspective of the general public, thereby facilitating the audience’s understanding of initiatives pertaining to public health.

BACKGROUND

Previous conversation analytic work has shown that the question-answer (Q&A) format is a hallmark of news interview talk: The question turn is pre-allocated to the interviewer whereas the answer turn is pre-allocated to the interviewee. Because news interviews operate through a pre-allocated turn-taking framework, the interviewer’s action is restricted to questioning or eliciting information, while the action of interviewee is restricted to answering and giving information (Clayman, 2013). Also of note is that third-turn tokens such as sequence closing thirds are generally absent from news interview.

While the news interview is largely constituted of elaborated Q&A sequences (Clayman, 2013), we observe that the interviewers in our dataset do at times go beyond this Q&A turn-taking structure. And while in general journalists refrain from evaluative comments to maintain neutrality (Clayman, 1988; Heritage, 1985), the interviewers can in fact operate on the health expert’s response before initiating a new question. In this paper, we examine the interviewer’s follow-up turns that perform an action on the previous answer turn retroactively. Importantly, we also show how these turns contribute to institutional messaging.

DATA AND METHOD

In this paper, we draw on six interviews between TV broadcasters and public health experts, who are representatives of a philanthropic foundation in the US. These interviews

were broadcast on local TV stations and are also retrievable from YouTube and available to the general public. An important goal of the interviews is to provide the representatives of the foundation a platform to promote the foundation's nationwide health mission to the general public. The videos of the six interviews were transcribed in their entirety based on the conversation analytic (CA) conventions developed by Jefferson (2004). After an initial line-by-line analysis, we were intrigued by how the interviewer handles the interviewee's responses, and we decided to conduct a closer examination of the interviewer's follow-up turns using CA. More detailed information on the data, method, and transcription conventions can be found in the [Forum Introduction](#).

ANALYSIS

In what follows, we present cases to show that the interviewer exploits the sequential position between the receipt of an answer and the launching of the next question. The follow-up turns can be used to (1) provide background or supplemental information related to elements in the interviewee response for the audience (Extracts 1 and 2) and to (2) make elements in the interviewee's response more relatable to the local audience (Extracts 3 and 4).

Providing Background or Supplemental Information

The first extract is taken from the beginning of a news interview, after the health expert has just been introduced and welcomed. The interviewer (IR) begins by introducing the working relationship between the local TV station and the interviewee (IE)—the health expert. He launches the first pair part of the question-answer sequence in lines 9-13, where he asks the health expert to first explain to the audience their past collaboration, and then discuss a town called Camden.

Extract 1

- 08 IE: yeah thanks for having me.
09 IR: we worked together uh over Jersey City {((*finger*
10 *pointing at BOB*))->[tell] folks< what that was }
11 [°oh°]
12 and {((*finger circling*))-we'll bring it over to
13 Camden.} {((*finger pointing*))-[what] was that.=
14 IE: [that-]
15 =that was fun that was an opportunity for the
16 foundation to: .h launch and talk about its really
17 ambitious plan to: .h build the (mission title)
18 in: New Jersey and the nation.=an' so it's
19 really an opportunity just to kind of start talking
20 about what that waz: an' bring in some really
21 important .hh thought leaders around tha:t an'
22 it was just a great event.
23 IR: → tch. an' the (mission title) is uh: uh we should

- 24 → talk about it as being led by (foundation
25 → name). .h a:nd I would say full
26 → disclosure you're under writing programming,
27 → .h on our partners- [for part]ners at NJTV[and]
28 IE: [°mhm°] [°right°.]
29 IR: → for us as well. promoting, and dealing with this
30 (mission title). what I:Z it and why is it important.

The expert's multi-unit turn answer begins with his assessment of a project, *it was fun*, in line 15, and is followed by his introduction of the foundation's plan *to build o: .h build (mission title) in: New Jersey and the nation* in lines 17-18. The expert finishes his turn with another assessment in line 22, *it was just a great event*. The focal lines of this extract begin in line 23, where the interviewer responds to the answer the health expert has just given.

Instead of launching a new question, the interviewer's next turn orients to a specific element mentioned in the answer: *an' the (mission title) is uh:*. The interviewer first prefaces his follow-up turn with the token *an*, which allows him to extend and add on to the prior turn, then shines the spotlight on the health mission, a key idea mentioned in the health expert's multi-unit turn answer. The interviewer then abandons the turn and restarts it with *we should talk about it as being led by (foundation name)*. Given that the interviewer introduces the health expert by first mentioning their past collaboration, this follow-up turn serves as a disclaimer, clarifying that the health mission is in fact solely led by the foundation.

In lines 25-27, the interviewer continues his turn and discusses the expert's responsibility and connection to the TV station, *and I would say full disclosure you are underwriting, programming, for partners on NJTV... promoting and dealing with this (mission title)*. Since the TV station's and the health expert's roles and responsibilities are presumably known to both the interviewer and the health expert, we can see that this follow-up turn is designed to provide the audience more supplemental information regarding the health expert and the TV station's working relationship. In so doing, the interviewer is also positioning the health expert as an authoritative interviewee, which simultaneously provides a question preliminary for the next interview question in line 30.

Extract 2 follows right after the first extract. The question in line 30 asks the expert to explain what the mission is and its importance.

Extract 2

- 29 IE: for us as well. promoting, and dealing with this
30 (mission title). what I:Z it and why is it important.
31 IR: mm. I think the (mission title) is a ↑logical,
32 .h next step where the foundation has: bee:n
33 driving towards.=the (foundation name)
34 has been very interested in understanding
35 .hh ho:w u:h where we work, play, live and
36 learn affects our health. u:h and our health
37 chances. .h and our health opportunities and
38 so .hh in the >social determinants of health<
39 there's a piece there also but this ↑culture of
40 health really brings in that idea of .h >you

- 41 know< how do we create these opportunities
 42 e- equal opportunities for all individuals to:
 43 .hh make choices and take oppor↑tunities an-
 44 an' change how they ↑live [so] they live
 45 IR: [mm]
 46 IE: healthier lives.
 47 IR: → and we're doing this program literally (.) right
 48 → after President Obama,
 49 IE: ((*nods*))-mm.
 50 IR: → {((*arm stretched*))-hm} comes to Camden to
 51 → talk about some (.) positive things going on
 52 → {((*hand moving side to side*))-between the police
 53 → and the community,}[(but-)] and that's part
 54 IE: [°right°.]
 55 IR: of (mission title), [BUT]
 56 IE: [right] right.
 57 IR: ((*hand point to IE*)) m- more precisely. .h
 58 [the] health- the health of- of the folks in
 59 IE: [right-]
 60 IR: Camden particularly the younger people.
 61 IE: right. right. I mean- so it's great that you talk
 62 about the younger people in Camden because
 63 I uh, .hh I kind of >get my< [start in Camden]
 64 IR: [you know what]
 65 I'm talking.=
 66 IE: =I [know Camden.]
 67 IR: [so what's you] connection to [Camden.]

After the health expert explains the foundation's mission, the host takes the next turn in line 47, and once again prefacing it with *and*, extending the health expert's previous answer. Note that since the health expert provides an institutional definition of the health mission, which could be somehow elusive to the audience, what the host adds on could be seen as a concrete example of a positive outcome of the health mission. By saying *and we're doing this program literally (.) right after President Obama comes to Camden to talk about some positive things going on between the police and the community* (line 47-50), the host is not only connecting the health mission with the TV program, he is also highlighting the success of the mission by mentioning the positive feedback from President Obama, one of the most recognizable names in the country. Here in the follow-up turn, the host elaborates the expert's answer by providing the audience evidence of the success of the foundation's health mission to facilitate their understanding.

In the first two extracts, we observe that the interviewer's third turn is prefaced by *and*, and it supplies information related to a specific idea in the interviewee's responding turns. The follow-up turn allows the interviewer to shine the spotlight on a particular item in the interviewee's immediately prior response. Additionally, the supplemental information not only operates retroactively on the answer, it also functions as a question preliminary to help the interviewee transition to the next question more smoothly.

“Disaligned” Candidate Understanding and Co-Authoring

Besides *and*-prefaced follow-up turns from the interviewer, we have also located some instances of the interviewer doing “disaligned” third turns as a way to display candidate understanding or do co-authoring to facilitate the interviewee’s responses.

Prior to Extract 3, the interviewee starts introducing his new position as the president of the foundation. As he continues to introduce the background of the foundation (lines 99-101), the interviewer jumps in with more background information on the endowment of the foundation (lines 102-104) with another *and*-prefaced turn.

Extract 3

- 98 IE: [YEAH] it's really- it's really pretty incredible
99 but it's the nation's lar:gest philanthropy,
100 focused on health. improving health and health
101 care, for people in America.=
102 IR: =(looks down, takes a piece of paper, reads))-and
103 by nation's largest uh research is accurate.=
104 =ten billion dollar is [what] their endowment is
105 IE: [yeah.]
106 IR: right?=
107 IE: =yeah.
108 IR: → uh started by:: (0.2) [Wo]ody Johnson's grandfather.=
109 IE: [sh-]
110 IR: =[°syl syl°]
111 IE: =[that's right.] that's right. he was-
112 IR: → the coach of the- the owner of the Jets.
113 IE: yea- he was the head of Johnson Johnson, an::d
114 he believes strong:ly, .hh that corporations have
115 a responsibility to their community, to their
116 employers, .hh uh to their- to their ↑customers.
117 and so (.) when he died, he left all of his- his
118 sto:ck, he- >you know he had some trust set
119 up<.=but he left, a billion dollars in J and J tock,

The interviewer now formulates the identity of the founder as *Woody Johnson's grandfather* (line 108) and then elaborates on Woody Johnson's title as *the owner of the Jets* (line 112) with what looks on the surface like a collaborative completion of the interviewee's turn in line 111 that was cut off at *he was-*. However, the interviewee's subsequent response, in which a telling on Woody Johnson's grandfather is initiated with a locally subsequent *he-*, makes it clear that the interviewer's focus on Woody Johnson was not matched by the interviewee. This on the surface looks as if the interviewer were disaligning with the interviewee's course of action of introducing the foundation and its founder, but the interviewer's formulation is done in such a way that speaks to the audience's familiar terrain, namely, the owner of the Jets rather than a wealthy individual who started the foundation.

perspective or familiar terrain, indirectly facilitating the promotion of the health expert and, by extension, the foundation's agenda.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have examined how the interviewer can exploit the space between the receipt of an answer and the launching of the next question. Following an answer, the interviewer can use a follow-up turn to (1) insert or provide background or supplemental information, which helps contextualize the interviewee's prior response for the audience, elaborates the interviewee's previous turn, and facilitates the interviewee's explanations; and to (2) reformulate the expert's explanation from the perspective of the general public, thereby facilitating the audience's understanding of initiatives pertaining to public health.

Our analysis contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how the participants orient to designing talk for the viewing public and how the finesse in the interviewer's follow-up design plays a role in effectively informing and educating the audience regarding public health. In his analysis of courtroom interaction, Drew (1992) discusses "the power of summary" as the attorney can "pull together evidence and draw conclusions" (p. 507)—a sequential advantage resulting from the pre-allocated question-answer format of the courtroom. We hope to have shown, through our analysis, that a similar interactional practice can also be observed in news interviews: The interviewer can indeed go beyond the pre-allocated question-answer framework and operate on an answer for the benefit of the audience.

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