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 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 was: an’ bring in some really
21 important .hh thought leaders around that: 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 name). And I would say full disclosure you’re under writing programming.
25  →  programming, for partners at NJTV.
26  →  what I:Z it and why is it important.
27  →  promoting, and dealing with this (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: .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: 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 (mission title). what I:Z it and why is it important.
30  IR:  mm. I think the (mission title) is a logical next step where the foundation has: been driving towards the (foundation name)
31  →  has been very interested in understanding how where we work, play, live and learn affects our health. and our health chances. and our health opportunities and so in the social determinants of health there’s a piece there also but this culture of health really brings in that idea of you
know< how do we create these opportunities
e- equal opportunities for all individuals to:
.hh make choices and take oppor↑tunities an-
an’ change how they ↑[live [so] they live
[mm]
IE: healthier lives.
IR: → and we’re doing this program literally (. ) right
→ after President Obama,
IE: ( (nods))-mm.
IR: → {((arm stretched) )-hm} comes to Camden to
talk about some (. ) positive things going on
→ {((hand moving side to side) )-between the police
→ and the community, }{ (but- ) } and that’s part
IE: of [mission title], [BUT ]
IR: [ ‘right’.]
IE: [ right ] right.
IE: ((hand point to IE)) m- more precisely. .h
[ the ] health- the health of- of the folks in
IE: [ right-]
IR: Camden particularly the younger people.
IE: right. right. I mean- so it’s great that you talk
about the younger people in Camden because
IE: I uh, .hh I kind of >get my< [start in Camden]
IR: [you know what ]
IE: I’m talking.=
IR: =I [know Camden. ]
IE: [ 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

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

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.
In the final extract, we see the same interviewer and interviewee getting into more details of the foundation’s programs and funded projects to improve public health. Prior to this, the interviewer seems to be questioning the scale of the foundation’s goals as moving towards *huge social economic change*, to which the IE responds with a concessive stance that he only *starts next week* (line 192), followed by an example of combating childhood obesity that the foundation has devoted a large sum of money to (lines 196-197).

Extract 4

188 IR: [>you’re talking ]about [huge social economic
189 IE: [I have a
190 IR: change.<]
191 IE: [lot ]to learn.
192 I start next week, and I’ve a lot to learn about
193 what’s going on =but some is done through-
194 .h through the programs that we fund. so there’s
195 a lot of focus on childhood obesity for example.
196 the foundation pledged a billion dollars over
197 a ten year period. that’s real money.
198 IR: → so does that mean giving people food money?
199 IE: [no what that- ]
200 IR: → [to eat healthy?]"mhm."
201 IE: what that’s doing is- a lot of that money is- is
202 working in the schools, and teaching children,
203 .hh you know putting- putting programs around
204 physical activity physical fitness. .h putting
205 programs in to make sure school lunches are
206 healthy. .hh getting it that component of- of-
207 of the- you know live learn work play [ uh- uh-]
208 IR: [“mhm.° ]

The interviewer’s candidate understanding is delivered with a summative *so* and an understanding check *does that mean* (line 198). And it turns out that his “understanding” is a plain, straightforward *giving people food money* with an increment *to eat healthy* (line 200), which seems to oversimplify the complexity of the foundation’s various funded projects and programs. This candidate understanding invites the health expert to reject such an oversimplified characterization of the foundation (line 199) and creates an opportunity for his further elaboration on what the foundation can really do to help with the childhood obesity epidemic. As evidenced in lines 201-207, the health expert provides a list of actions detailing how the money will be spent as an indirect way to reject the interviewer’s proposal of *giving people food money*.

In the final two excerpts, we observe that the interviewer uses his third turn to display a candidate understanding and co-authoring which in the local sequential context may not completely align with the interviewee’s response content or course of action. However, we do consider the nature of this practice within the context of the interview as not really disaligning, because these turns in fact enable the health expert to clarify the specific details of the health mission. Recall that the overhearing audience motivates turn designs (Clayman & Heritage, 2002), the interviewer’s follow-up questions are thus designed from ordinary viewers’
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.

REFERENCES


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