Questioning Candidates

Steven E. Clayman
UCLA

Tanya Romaniuk
York University

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The journalistic or news interview is among the more thoroughly researched forms of broadcast talk, and the field is showing signs of diversification. While most studies have focused on general features of news interview interaction – the organization of turn taking (e.g., Greatbatch 1988, Heritage and Roth 1995), elementary forms of questioning and answering (e.g., Clayman and Heritage 2002, Ekström 2009, Harris 1991), and the sensitivity of interview talk to journalistic norms and the broadcasting context (e.g., Heritage 1985, Clayman 2010) – recent work has begun to examine more specialized practices geared to particular categories of interviewee. Interviewing practices have been shown to differ depending on whether the interviewee is a primary actor, expert commentator, or ordinary member of the public (Montgomery 2007, 2010, Roth 2002, Thornborrow 2010), and Roth (2005) has identified a controversial form of "pop quiz" questioning indigenous to interviews with political candidates. The news interview may thus be understood as encompassing a variety of identifiable subgenres comprised of specialized tasks and the practices through which they are implemented, although these practices retain common features characteristic of the general run of interviews conducted by professional journalists with newsworthy individuals.

This paper examines the campaign interview featuring candidates for public office. This type of interview is a variant of what Montgomery (2007, 2008) calls the accountability interview, although it involves political candidates rather than current office holders. Interviews of this sort are a prominent fixture of the campaign season in the U.S., the U.K., and elsewhere. For instance, in the months leading up to the 2008 U.S. presidential election, most of the plausible contenders from both major parties were interviewed on national television. Such interviews appeared on a range of news and current affairs programs on the broadcast networks and cable news channels, including morning, evening, and late-night news shows, weekly news

magazines (e.g., 60 Minutes), and the prominent Sunday morning programs organized around live interviews (e.g., Meet the Press, Face the Nation, This Week).

The campaign interview invites attention for a variety of reasons, the first and most obvious of which is its potential consequentiality. Because campaign interviews occur in close proximity to elections, they offer insight into the candidates at a moment of heightened political engagement, when citizens are tracking the news more closely than usual and actively considering whether and how to cast their ballots. Moreover, they often receive substantial subsequent news coverage that extends their impact. Thus, just as campaign news has been extensively scrutinized because of its import for voting behavior and electoral outcomes, so the campaign interview warrants scholarly attention.

Secondly, the campaign interview is a domain where the journalist's watchdog role is apt to be particularly prominent. While a variety of roles are part of the journalist's professional repertoire (e.g., reporter, interpreter, watchdog), the more active interpreter and watchdog roles rise to the forefront as an election approaches. This explains why journalists, rather than treat all candidates with precise equality, focus disproportionately on those who are plausible contenders, and reserve their most intense critical scrutiny for frontrunners – those who seem most likely to win (Robinson and Sheehan 1983). This pattern suggests that journalists view their mission in the campaign as not merely to passively convey information to the public about the candidates, but to actively vet or screen the leading contenders on the public's behalf.

This paper offers an initial investigation of the campaign interview, focusing on those forms of questioning that are occupied with the task of screening the candidates. In pursuing this task, journalists mobilize many of the same resources of question design that they employ in other contexts. That is, they build their questions and question prefaces so as to (1) set topical

and action agendas for response, (2) encode presuppositions on the subject of inquiry, and (3) display preferences for a particular answer (Clayman and Heritage 2002). In the campaign interview, these general resources are often deployed in context-specific ways so as to illuminate the candidates as potential office holders, shedding light on who they are, what they would do, and their general fitness for elective office. The ensuing analysis is intended to be suggestive rather than exhaustive, identifying some of the issues that journalists are oriented to, and some of the questioning practices through which those issues are addressed, directly or indirectly, in the give and take of actual interviews. And while questioning practices are the main focus of attention here, we also consider how candidates deal with these practices in their responses.

1. Data and Methodology

Data are drawn primarily from journalistic interviews conducted during the general election phase of the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, as well as a variety of campaign interviews from previous elections in the U.S.   These data have been transcribed and analyzed qualitatively from a conversation analytic perspective. Specific transcript excerpts have been reproduced in the paper as specimens of recurrent questioning practices and their variants.

2. Probing Knowledge

One issue that is treated as germane to the campaign interview concerns the candidates' knowledge of public affairs. This issue arises most explicitly during what Roth (2005) has termed pop quiz questions, which ask the candidate about established matters of fact for which

there is a single correct answer. Consider this example, from an interview with George W. Bush

during the 2000 U.S. presidential election campaign. (Here and elsewhere, IR denotes

interviewer.)

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(1) [Roth 2005: 33]

 1  IR:     Can you name the president of Chechnya?
 2  Bush:   No, can you?
 3  IR:     Can you name the president of Taiwan?
 4  Bush:   Yeah, Lee.
 5  IR:     Can you name the general who is in charge of Pakistan?
 6  Bush:   Wait, wait.  Is this 50 questions?
```

As Roth (2005) has observed, because such questions target factual matters that are already part

of the public record, what they seek is not newsworthy in itself; it is newsworthy only insofar as

it reflects on the candidate's knowledge or lack thereof. Correspondingly, in this excerpt the

framing of each question (*Can you name X*) highlights the candidate's ability to supply the

correct answer as the focal issue, and the repetition of this frame casts the line of questioning as a

political "pop quiz." Such questions represent a major departure from the usual pragmatics of

news interview questioning, which normally seeks information and opinion that is not generally

known, not necessarily assessable as correct or incorrect, and hence newsworthy in its own right.

After the third question of this sort (lines 5), Bush himself registers the departure from normal

interviewing and protests the way he is being questioned (line 6).

Bush's protest is indicative of a general problem with pop quiz questioning as a

journalistic resource during election campaigns. By raising established factual matters for which

there is a correct answer, such questions put the candidate on the spot and can be rather deeply

embarrassing for those who "fail" the quiz. Moreover, regardless of the candidate's success or

failure in response, the questions themselves position the candidate as at least potentially

uninformed regarding elementary geopolitical facts. Hence they remain highly controversial and

relatively uncommon (Roth 2005).

Journalists address the knowledge issue more often through questions that, while still

probing, lack the dramatic pass/fail dimension of pop quiz questions. Consider the following

line of questioning to vice-presidential nominee Sarah Palin about what she reads to stay

informed. Although framed as concerned with her worldview (line 1), these questions are also

revealing of her level of engagement with current affairs. Indeed, her inability to name any

specific print news outlets after given three opportunities to do so was later treated as a sign that

she may be less well informed and, perhaps, unfit for the vice presidency.

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(2) [CBS Evening News, 30 Sep. 2008:  Sarah Palin]

 1 IR:     And when it comes to establishing your worldview
 2         I was curious what newspapers and magazines did you:
 3         regularly re:ad (.) before you were tapped. (0.2) for this
 4         to: stay informed and to underst[and the world_
 5 SP:                                    [I've read most of them,
 6         again with a great appreciation for the press, for the
 7         medi[a (    )
 8 IR:        [But like what one specifically.=I'm curious that yo[u
 9 SP:                                                           [Uhm
10         (0.5) All of 'em. Any of 'em that uhm have: h'v (.) been in
11         front o'me over all these years. Uhm [I have a va-
12 IR:                                          [Can you name a few?
13 SP:     I have a vast (.) variety of: (0.2) sources (.) where we get
14         >our news too.< .h Alaska isn't a foreign country where it's
15         kinda suggested it seems like, "Wow, had-=how could you keep w-
16         i:n touch with with the rest of (.) Washington DC may be
17         thinking and doing when you live up there in Alaska?" .hh
18         Believe me: Alaska is like a microcosm of America.
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In a similar vein, the following questions about foreign travel (lines 1-2 below) and contact with

other heads of state (line 8) bear on Palin's general worldliness and familiarity with nations

beyond U.S. borders.

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(3) [ABC Nightline, 11 Sep. 2008:  Sarah Palin]

 1 IR:     D'jya ever travel outside the country prior to your trip-
 2         (.) to Kuwait 'n Germany last year,
 3 SP:     tch .hh Canada (.) Mexico (.) and then .h yeah:.=that trip,
 4         (.) that was the trip of a lifetime. .h to visit our troops
 5         in Kuwait .hh and stop and visit .h our injured sol:diers
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 6          in Germany, .hh That was the trip of a lifetime and it
 7          changed my life.
 8 IR:      Have you ever met a foreign head of state.
 9 SP:      I have no:t, and .h I think if you go back in history, and
10          if you ask that question of .h many vice presidents, they
11          may have the same answer .hh that I just gave you, . . .
```

Her defensive answer to the second question in lines 9-11 (after answering negatively, she asserts that many of her vice presidential predecessors would have given the same answer) displays some grasp of the damaging ramifications of having to answer this question in the negative.

Questions like these develop a portrait of the candidate's knowledgeability, and they do so not only through the responses they elicit but also through the manner in which the questions themselves are designed. In general questions can embody presuppositions about the subject of inquiry, as well as display expectations about the forthcoming response (Clayman and Heritage 2002). These presuppositions and expectations can, in the present context, operate to suggest or imply that the candidate is more or less knowledgeable. The line of questioning in example 2 above exhibits an increasingly skeptical stance toward Palin's reading habits. The first question, a wh- type interrogative ("what newspapers and magazines did you regularly read…" in lines 2-4), presupposes that Palin does in fact read multiple news sources routinely. After Palin fails to name any (while nonetheless claiming that she reads "most of them," lines 5-7), the IR retreats somewhat from this presupposition in his subsequent pursuit of the question ("But like what one specifically…" in line 8), presuming only that she reads a single news source. Palin again declines to offer specifics (lines 9-11), although she works to counter the insinuation that her reading is limited to one source. The third question ("Can you name a few" in line 12) retreats still further from the presupposition. Unlike the previous wh-formatted questions, this one takes the form of a yes/no interrogative, and as such it no longer presumes that Palin reads anything at all. Furthermore, the "can you" frame renders this question perilously close to the "pop quiz"

variety. Perhaps in recognition of the skepticism implicit in this presuppositional retreat, the IR flashes a broad smile, the abrupt onset of which begins just as she completes this question (line 12). Across this line of questioning, schematically rendered below, the IR's stance toward the candidate's presumptive reading habits undergoes a steady shift from "generosity" to "skepticism."

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Q1:   "…what newspapers and magazines did you regularly read…"
Q2:   "…what one specifically…"
Q3:   "Can you name a few?"
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On the other hand, the presuppositional skepticism of the third and final question is counterbalanced and partially mitigated by another aspect of question design, namely the expectation or preference for a particular answer. This question ("Can you name a few?") resurrects the prospect of multiple news sources and is built to invite and anticipate a yes-type answer. The "generous" and hence mitigating import of this design choice becomes clear when contrasted with the alternative - a no-preferring variant of this question (e.g., *You can't name any, can you?*) would have been transparently insulting.

Example 3 above also illustrates the power of question design in suggesting a portrait of the candidate's knowledgeability, although in this case the journalist's stance remains uniformly skeptical throughout. Both questions ("Did you ever travel outside the country…" in lines 1-2; "Have you ever met a foreign head of state" in line 8) are designed as yes/no interrogatives, and as such they are presuppositionally neutral regarding Palin's foreign travel and contacts. But both questions contain a negative polarity item ("ever") which anticipates a no-type answer (Horn 1989), and thus displays an expectation that Palin has not in fact traveled abroad or met other heads of state. These questions combine to convey a skeptical stance, one that treats her as insular and lacking in worldliness.

In the cases examined thus far, the candidate's knowledge is overtly addressed as a primary focus of inquiry. The knowledge issue is by no means limited to explicitly knowledge-focused questions; it lurks beneath the surface of many routine questions of opinion and policy, insofar as supplying an opinion requires factual knowledge of the state of affairs with which the opinion is concerned. Thus, when Sarah Palin is asked whether the U.S. "should try to restore Georgian sovereignty over South Ossetia and Abkhazia" (lines 1-4), furnishing an intelligible answer requires at least some familiarity with the region and recent border skirmishes between Georgia and Russia.

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(4) [ABC Nightline, 11 Sep. 2008:  Sarah Palin]

 1 IR:      The administration has said we've go:t to maintain the
 2          territorial integrity (0.4) of Georgia. .hhh (0.6) Do you
 3          believe the United States (0.4) should try to restore
 4          Georgian sovereignty. (0.2) over South Ossetia and Abkhazia.
 5 SP:      .hhh (0.2) ehFirst off: we're gonna continue good relations
 6          with Saakashvili there >I was able to speak with him the other
 7          day:: .h and (.) giving him my commitment, as John McCain's
 8          running mate .h that we: will be committed .h to Georgia. .hhh
 9          And we've gotta keep an eye on Russia. For (.) Russia to have
10          (.) exerted such pressure, .hh in terms of inva:ding a smaller
11          democratic (.) country, .h unprovoked, is unacceptable. . .
```

Correspondingly, Palin's response (lines 5-11) goes beyond the terms of the question to display her knowledge of key factual details that were not previously mentioned (e.g., the Georgian leader's name in line 6, and Russian actions in 9-11). Thus, questions manifestly addressed to the candidate's viewpoint or perspective also latently provide for displays of relevant factual knowledge.

This latent or tacit function of opinion/policy questions becomes manifest when a problem of understanding arises. Consider the following exchange with Palin regarding "the Bush doctrine."

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(5) [ABC Nightline, 11 Sep. 2008:  Sarah Palin]

 1 IR:      Do you agree with the Bush doctrine?
 2          (1.0)
 3 SP:      tch .hhhhhhh In what respect Charlie,
 4          (0.4)
 5 IR:      tch .hh The Bush- (.) well wh- whadoyou- what do you
 6          interpret it to be.
 7          (0.4)
 8 SP:      tch His worldview,
 9          (0.3)
10 IR:      No the Bush doctrine. Enunciated September:: two thousand two.
11          (.) Before the Iraq war,
12          (0.8)
13 SP:      I believe that what (.) President Bush has attempted to do:
14          is: hhhh rid this wor:ld o:f .hh Islamic extremism:_ terrorists
15          who are hell bent on destroying: .h our nation.=There have been
16          (.) blunders along the way: though. There have been mistakes
17          made. (.) tch And with new leadership (.) and that's the
18          beauty of .h American elections of course,=and democracy, is
19          with new leadership comes opportunity .h to do things better.
20          (.)
21 IR:      The Bush doctrine as I understand it (.) i:s that we have the
22          right of anticipatory self-defense. .hh That we have the right
23          to a preemptive strike against any other country that we
24          think is going to attack us.
25          .hh Do you agree with that,
```

In response to a question about whether she supports "the Bush doctrine" (line 1), Palin displays

uncertainty about what exactly this is. After a long silence and an extended inbreath, she

requests clarification of what is for her an opaque referent ("In what respect Charlie" in line 3).

This request initiates a repair sequence (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977), but the IR departs

from the usual pattern by declining to complete the repair (lines 5-6). More specifically, he

appears to begin supplying the requested clarification ("The Bush-"), but quickly aborts it and

invites Palin to present her interpretation. This counter (Schegloff 2007: 16-19), which turns the

tables and puts the onus for clarification onto Palin, provides the first indication that the

candidate's knowledge is indeed at issue here and is now rather overtly being tested.

Palin makes an initial attempt to clarify what might be meant by the Bush doctrine ("His

worldview," in line 8), one that is upwardly intoned and hence marked as a tentative "try." The

IR rejects this as incorrect (lines 10-11), but he again declines to produce the correct definition,

offering only a hint that emerges in two stages ("Enunciated September 2002. (.) before the Iraq War"). This hint provides a chronology for the doctrine, establishes that it is a formally articulated policy, and implies that it is somehow related to the Iraq War, but Palin is still unable to say what it is. After she produces an overly broad sketch of Bush's foreign policy objectives (lines 13-19), the IR finally supplies what he has been withholding to this point: a specific definition of "the Bush doctrine" (lines 21-24). He then renews his original question (line 25) regarding her support of the doctrine.

Here a line of questioning that was initially focused on a matter of policy is transformed into a proving ground for an overt test of the candidate's factual knowledge. This case underscores the way in which any question of opinion or policy can also, if latently, be revealing of the extent to which the candidate is knowledgeable and conversant on the subject of inquiry.

3. Mapping Ideology

The issue of ideology – where the candidate stands on a continuum of opinion ranging from the moderate center to the extremes of left and right - is rarely thematized in abstract philosophical terms. There are exceptions, as with the following 1988 exchange with Democrat Michael Dukakis regarding his definition of "liberal." Here the candidate's reluctance to provide a clear and unequivocal answer to this question (lines 5-6, 9-10) prompts a series of follow-up questions (lines 7, 11-14, 17-18) pressing for a forthright position statement.

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(6) [ABC Nightline, Best of Nightline, 1990:  Michael Dukakis]

 1 IR:     What is a liberal.
 2 MD:     .hhhh
 3 IR:     In nineteen eighty eight.
 4         (1.4)
 5 MD:     That's maybe a question that (0.2) we ought to ask George
 6         Bush if he had been here.
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 7 IR:     Oh [no I'd like to hear I'd like to hear what your definition is.
 8 MD:        [Because
 9 MD:     Well I think (.) all of us hav:e uh combinations of liberal and
10         conservative about us: uh Ted I'm [not able.
11 IR:                                       [Governor (0.3) forgive me
12         that's been your answer now for three mon[ths.
13 MD:                                              [Yeah but
14 IR:     I'd like to hear what you:: define=what is: a liberal.
15 MD:     Well if (.) if one is a liberal in the tradition of Franklin
16         Roosevelt and Harry Truman and John Kennedy and [(       ).
17 IR:                                                      [Nineteen
18         eighty eight Governor.
19 MD:     Uh:: (.) one is somebody who cares deeply about people.
20         (0.4) Sees concer:ns sees opportunities to: uh make a real
21         difference in the li:ves of real people and .hh works hard in
22         public service to: help make that difference. . .
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Notwithstanding this dramatic example, ideological positioning is addressed more commonly through questions about specific domestic and foreign policy issues.

Interviewers exhibit, in their issue-specific lines of questioning, an orientation to mapping the candidates' ideological boundaries on behalf of the audience. Various supplementary or follow-up questions display this orientation. One recurrent trajectory of questioning involves pinpointing the candidate's position by inviting either a more moderate or more extreme version. For the case of what might be termed moderating questions, following an initial question-answer sequence on some issue, the candidate is invited to pull back and take up a relatively more centrist position. In the following example, Barack Obama is asked whether he will raise the capital gains tax (lines 1-6).

(7) [The Situation Room, 31 Oct. 2008: Barack Obama]

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 1 IR:     Will you ra:ise thuh capital gains tax.thuh tax wh(ere)
 2         people sell stocks or mutual fun:ds, their four oh one
 3         [(k)s .hh
 4 BO:     [Right.
 5 IR:     Will you raise it from fifteen percent,=that capital gains
 6         tax,
 7 BO:     I:-I have said, (.) earlier in this campaign: that I-it
 8         makes sense for us to go from fiftee:n to twenty percent,
 9         .h uh: now: frankly, people aren't exper'encing a lotta
10         capital gains right now. .h uh people are having a lotta
11         capital lo:sses. .h but u-y'(kn)ow I've ta:lked tuh people
12         like Warren Buffett (.) uh: a:nd asked him, y'know- will (.)
13         that mo:dest increase i:n thuh capital .hh gains tax have
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14            an impact .h on thuh re:al e:conomy. on investment. .h
15            business growth. .h A:nd he assu:res me that's not gonna
16            be: an impediment to: capital formation and us .h uh being
17            able tuh- uh: move fo:rward on thee e[conomy (miss)-
18 IR:   ->                                    [Will a middle class
19       -> family be exempted from that increase in capital gains tax,
20 BO:      Well what I've said is small businesses are gonna be
21            exempted, and a:nybody who is making less than two hundred
22            and fifty thousand doll'rs a year,=I've said they're not
23            gonna get their capital gains ta:x increased,=
24            =They're not gonna get-
25 IR:      =So they will be exempt.
26 BO:      They will be exempted from tha:t, (.) as well as any income
27            tax increase, uh any: (.) .h payroll tax increase. .h uh my:
28            attitude is=is that middle class families need a: tax cu:t,
29            and ninety five percent o:f (.) American families and
30            workers are gonna get .h reduced taxes
```

In a complex but broadly confirming response, Obama endorses the tax increase as a position that he's already taken (line 7), and defends it by noting that it would affect few Americans (lines 9-11) and would have little impact on economic growth (lines 11-17). The IR then invites Obama to modulate his position by asking if he would support an exemption for middle class families (lines 18-19). Relative to his previous statement of unqualified support for a blanket tax increase, this question seeks a somewhat more moderate position.

Conversely, with what may be termed marginalizing questions, the supplementary question invites the candidate to take a position that is more controversial or "extreme" than the previously-taken position (Clayman 2009). For instance, when Palin is asked about the teaching of evolution as settled scientific theory (lines 1-2), she expresses support for this (lines 3-7) and for the principle that "science should be taught in science class" (line 10). In the same response, however, she also expresses her belief that "the hand of God" is evident in creation (lines 7-9).

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(8) [CBS Early Show, 1 Oct. 2008:  Sarah Palin]

 1 IR:      Do you believe evolution should be taught as an accepted
 2            scientific principle, or on:e of several theories:.
 3 SP:      Oh I think it should be: eh=taught as an accepted (.) principle,
 4            an- an:d eh=you know I say that also as thuh f- uh daughter of a
 5            schoolteacher=a science teacher, who has really um .hh instilled
 6            in me a respect for science,=It- it should be taught in our
 7            schools, And .hh um I- I won't ever deny: that I:: see the hand
 8            of Go::d i:n .h this beautiful creation that is Ear:th, but .h
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 9           that (.) is not part of: a policy or a local curriculum in a
10           school district, Science should be tau:ght in science class.
11 IR: ->    Should creationism be allowed to be taught anywhere in
12     ->    public schools?
13 SP:       Don't have a problem at all with kids debating all sides of
14           theories, all sides of ideas that they ever-kids do it
15           today, whether it's on paper in a curriculum or not.
16           Curriculums also are best left to the local school
17           districts, instead of big brother, federal government,
18           telling a district what they can and can't teach.
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This expression of religious faith, woven into a response about evolution and the teaching of science, prompts a supplementary question on the teaching of creationism in public schools (lines 11-12). Given that such teaching would be contrary to current practice vis-à-vis the principle of the separation of church and state in the U.S., this question invites the candidate to forthrightly endorse a position that is farther from the center and more controversial than the position she had previously taken.

Another trajectory of questioning involves highlighting the controversial nature of the previously-expressed viewpoint. This highlighting effect may be achieved in a variety of ways. For instance, interviewers may issue a partial repeat of the most controversial or "extreme" component of the previous response. Here, following Palin's assertion that Russia's incursion into Georgia is unacceptable to the U.S. (lines 9-11), the IR targets and repeats one word that Palin had used to characterize the Russian incursion: "unprovoked" (arrowed).

(9) [ABC Nightline, 11 Sep. 2008: Sarah Palin]

```
 1 IR:       The administration has said we've go:t to maintain the
 2           territorial integrity (0.4) of Georgia. .hh (0.6) Do you
 3           belie:ve the United States (0.4) should try to restore
 4           Georgian sovereignty. (0.2) over South Ossetia and Abkhazia.
 5  SP:      .hhh eh=First off (.) we're gonna to continue good relations
 6           with Saakashvili there =>I was able to speak with him the
 7           other day: .h and giving him my commitment as John McCain's
 8           running mate .h that we: will be committed (.) to Georgia.
 9           .hh And we've gotta keep an eye on Russia. For Russia to have
10           exerted such: pressure, .h in terms of inva:ding a smaller
11           democratic (.) country, .h unprovoked, (.) >is unacceptable.=
12           =and we have to [keep
13 IR:  ->                   [You believe unprovoked.
14 SP:       I-I do believe unprovoked.=and we have got to keep our eyes
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15          .hh on Russia, . . .
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Although partial repeats can serve as repair initiations (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks 1977),

IRs frequently use them with falling intonation, and without any apparent confusion regarding

the sense or import of what was just said. Such partial repeats thus appear to be produced for the

benefit of the audience (Clayman 2010), and in the present context they are mobilized in such a

way as to highlight the most extreme component of what was just said.

A similar highlighting effect may be achieved by questions that operate more globally on

the previous response, formulating its overall gist or drawing out its implications. For an

instance of the former, consider this exchange with Sarah Palin regarding Israel. After she

elaborates on the view that "we shouldn't second guess Israel's security efforts" (lines 4-11), the

IR offers a reformulated version (lines 12-15, arrowed) for Palin to confirm.

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(10) [CBS Evening News, 25 Sep. 2008: Sarah Palin]

 1 IR:      You recently said three times that you would never
 2          quote. second guess Israel if-if that country
 3          decided to attack Ira:n. (0.4) Why: no:t.
 4 SP:      .hh We shouldn't second guest is-Israel's (.)
 5          security efforts .h (0.2) eh-because we cannot
 6          (0.2) ever a-(.)afford to send a message thet we
 7          would (.) allow a second Holocaust. for one. .h
 8          Israel has got ta have thee opportunity, and thee
 9          ability, to protect itself. .h They are our closest
10          ally in thuh Mideast. We need them. They need us.
11          And we shouldn't second guess their effort.
12 IR:  -> You don't think thee United States is within its
13      -> rights, to express, (.) its position to Israel? And
14      -> if-if that means second-guessing: or discussing:
15      -> an option?
16 SP:      No, absol-uh-we need to express our r:ight and our
17          concer:ns and um-
18 IR:                   [But you said never second guess them.
```

Although it is offered as a "summary" of Palin's expressed viewpoint, the new version replaces

"we shouldn't second guess Israel" with an assertion that the U.S. is not "within its rights to

express its position to Israel…". This shift from the language of norms (*what we shouldn't do*)

to the language of rights (*what is not within our rights to do*) is a substantial conceptual

reframing, one that acknowledges greater external constraint on U.S. actions, and is thus more controversial within the U.S. context.

In yet another type of variant of the highlighting practice, the IR draws out the controversial implications of a previous response. Thus, after John McCain confirms and justifies his support for using $300 billion in federal funds to buy up and renegotiate "bad mortgages" (lines 1-8), the IR draws out the implications by asking whether McCain's plan constitutes "too much federal involvement in the free market system" (lines 9-11).

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(11) [CNN Situation Room, 22 Oct. 2008: John McCain]

 1 IR:     'Cuz you wanna use three hundred billion of that seven
 2         hundred billio[n (.)
 3 JM:                   [°sur:e° ((nodding))
 4 IR:     to buy up uh what are called these bad (.) mortgages, and
 5         then try to renegotiate them at a reduced price.=.h=so-Is
 6         that t[oo-
 7 JM:           [Not try to, it's exa:ctly what we did during thuh
 8         De[pression. It's not a new invention.]
 9 IR:  ->   [But  is  that  too  much  (.)   fed]eral government
10       -> involvement in thuh>-in thuh-in free-<in thuh free market
11       -> system,
12 JM:     .hh Of course it is. But we are in an extraordinary crisis. ...
```

The supplementary questions in excerpts 7 through 11, although differing in how they relate to the previous responses, share certain common features. In each case the IR declines a lateral change of topic, and dwells on the previously expressed viewpoint or closely related matters for another sequential round (Greatbatch 1986). Moreover, such questions serve either to pinpoint the candidate's position on a continuum of centrality/marginality, or to highlight and dramatize its more controversial aspects.

4. Clarifying Promises

Interviewers recurrently invite the candidates to declare political promises. Unlike the political

issue questions examined in the previous section, which are framed as seeking general

viewpoints and broad policy preferences (e.g., *Do you believe X; Do you think the U.S. should do*

X, etc.), promise-soliciting questions invite the candidates to affirmatively commit themselves to

a specific course of action if elected.

The boundary between policy preference questions and campaign promise questions may

be less than clear-cut, but certain features of question design transparently tip the balance toward

the latter. For instance, the candidate may be asked to assert priority status for a policy (e.g.,

"what's… the first thing that you would do," arrowed).

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(12) [ABC Good Morning America, 31 Oct. 2008:  John McCain]

 1 IR:    What is the one thing, when I was traveling from Dayton
 2        all the way here and asking people various things, the
 3        economy came up over and over again.  And they wanted
 4     -> me to ask you, what, what's the one thing, the first thing
 5     -> that you would do to help them get their jobs back?
 6 JM:    Well, obviously, alternative energy is a big job creator,
 7        offshore drilling, but nuclear power, flex-fuel cars,
 8        hydrogen battery, wind, tide, solar, nuclear power.
 9        We can create seven hundred thousand jobs by building forty
10        five new nuclear power plants. . . .
```

Alternatively, the candidate may be invited to specify an actual timeframe for a policy's

implementation (e.g., "When would you…," arrowed).

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(13) [CNN Situation Room, 31 Oct. 2008: Barack Obama]

 1 IR:    If you're elected president, (.) still a big if righ[t now
 2 BO:                                                        [(right)
 3 IR:  -> Wh-when would you shut down Gitmo. .h thuh Guantanamo naval
 4     -> .h uh: base where the detention center for .h suspected
 5     -> terrorists is.
 6 BO:    I want to: (.) close Gitmo: a::s uh-as quickly as we can
 7        do-(that)
 8 IR:       [What does that mean, ho[w quickly (is that).
 9 BO:                               [>Wul-wul-<(.)
10        Well, as quickly as we can do prudently. Uh: a:nd I am not
11        going to give a: (.) time certain, because I think what we
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12          haveta do is evaluate, (.) a:ll those who are still being
13          held at Gitmo. .h We haveta put in place .h appropriate
14          plans to make sure that they are tri:ed, convicted, and
15          punished to the full extent of the law¿ .h And that's
16          gonna require I think, a review of thee existing cases
17          which I have not had thee opportunity to do.
```

When priorities and timeframes become the focus of inquiry, a commitment to action is on the table.

The greater margin of commitment encoded in such questions is registered and often resisted by IEs, who frequently respond in such a way as to avoid being pinned down. Both of the preceding excerpts exhibit such resistance, albeit in somewhat different ways. In excerpt 12 McCain's response is not fitted to the terms of the question (Raymond 2003). That is, having been asked "What's… the first thing you would do…," he does not say *I would do X* or words to that effect, thereby declining to formulate himself as the agent of any future course of action. Instead, he offers the factual assertion that "alternative energy is a big job creator" (line 6), which in context may be taken to imply a course of action without overtly promising one in so many words.

Obama's response in excerpt 13 is more closely fitted to the terms of the question, although a subtle but nontrivial difference remains. Whereas the hypothetical question is framed in terms of intent ("When would you shut down Gitmo…" in line 3), Obama's initial response is reframed in terms of desire ("I want to close Gitmo…" in line 6) and thereby slightly weakened in its commitment to action. He then declines to reference a specific timeframe, offering only the rather vague "as quickly as we can do prudently" (lines 6-10). Here again, as in the previous excerpt, the candidate avoids firmly committing himself to a course of action.

After a given campaign promise has been solicited and resisted, IRs subsequently exhibit a preoccupation with pursuing a clearer commitment to action. In the preceding excerpt, the IR

issues a follow-up question (line 8: "What does that mean, how quickly is that") targeting

Obama's initial chronological vagueness and pursuing a clearer timetable.   A more extended

line of questioning geared to the pursuit of clarity in campaign promises is exemplified in the

following exchange with Palin regarding "the three principle things you would do to change the

Bush economic policies" (lines 3-4). Palin's vagueness in response prompts two rounds of

follow-up questions (lines 23-25, 35-36) pursuing a clearer economic plan of action.

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(14) [ABC Nightline, 12 Sep. 2008:  Sarah Palin]

 1 IR:     Governor John McCain. and you:, are no:w: talking about thuh
 2         GOP as a party of change. .hhh We've got a very sick economy.
 3         (.) Tell me (.) thuh three principal things you would do.
 4         (0.8) to cha:nge thuh Bush economic policies.
 5 SP:     (.) And you're right our: economy is weak right now:=and
 6         we have got to strengthen it.=And government can play an
 7         appropriate role in helping to: strengthen thee economy.
 8         Our six point one percent unemployment rate is unacceptable
 9         also across our nation..hhh We need to: (.) put government
10         back on thuh side of thuh people (.) and make sure it is
11         not government solely looked at for all thuh solutions, for
12         one. Government has got to get >outta thuh wa:y< in some
13         respects of thuh private sector. Bein' able to create thuh
14         jobs that we need, .h jobs that are going to allow for the
15         fa:milies to be able to afford health care. to be able to
16         afford the-their mortgages. to be able to affo:rd college
17         tuition for their kids. That's got to be the principle
18         here. Reform government. (.) Recognize that it's not
19         government to be looked at to solve all thuh problems. .h
20         Taxes of course (.) I think is one of thee most important
21         things that government can obviously control: and to help
22         with this issue.
23 IR:     What you said to me at thuh beginning, I don't think
24         a:nybody in thuh Bush administration .h would disagree with.
25         What do you cha:nge in thuh Bush e:conomic (.) pr-plans.
26 SP:     We have got to make sure that we reform thee oversight, also,
27         .h of thee agencies, including thuh quasi-government agencies,
28         like Freddie and Fannie, .h those things that .h have created
29         an atmosphere here in America, where people are fearful of
30         losing their ho:mes, .h people are looking at job loss.
31         People are looking at unaffordable health care for their
32         families. .h We have got to reform .h thee oversight of these
33         agencies that have s:uch control .h over Americans'
34         pocketbooks.
35 IR:     So: lemme summarize. thuh three things that you'd change in
36         the Bush economic plans. (0.4) One, two, three.
37 SP:     Reduce taxes. Control spending. Reform thee oversight and
38         thee overseen agencies and committees to make sure .h that
39         America's dollars and investments are protected,
```

Palin's initial response (lines 5-22) offers various homilies to the effect that government can play a role (lines 6-7), but that it should be limited vis a vis the private sector (lines 9-19), etc. In the first follow-up question (lines 23-25), the IR asserts that this is all fully aligned with Bush administration policies, and he goes on to pursue the query about what McCain/Palin would do differently. Palin gets somewhat more specific in her next response (lines 26-34), although only with respect to a single proposal regarding the oversight of government agencies. This prompts a second follow-up question (lines 35-36) renewing the original question about three specific economic proposals. Palin finally produces a three-part list of proposals (lines 37-39), although they remain pitched at a decidedly general level ("reduce taxes, control spending, reform the oversight…").

The pursuit of clarity in campaign promises thus faces substantial resistance, but when successful it can have political consequences that extend beyond the occasion of the interview itself. Not only does it provide a reasonable basis on which voters may decide how to cast their ballots, but it also establishes a public record that may in turn become a benchmark for holding politicians accountable once they are elected. George Bush's unequivocal "read my lips" pledge to hold the line on taxes in 1988, which was turned against him by the Clinton campaign four years later, and Barack Obama's current tribulations regarding campaign promises such as the closing of Guantanamo Bay, illustrate the power of this kind of accountability. Correspondingly, candidates' persistent vagueness in response may be understood as geared to sidestepping such accountability and securing greater freedom to maneuver once in office.

5. Conclusion

It seems clear that when journalists interview political candidates, they do not invent their modes of questioning from scratch; they draw on much the same repertoire of questioning resources that they use in other interviewing contexts. The capacity to formulate questions and question prefaces so as to set topical and action agendas for response, encode presuppositions on the subject of inquiry, and display preferences for a particular answer – all are very much in play here. However, in the campaign interview context these resources are geared to a range of substantive issues – knowledgeability, ideological positioning, policy promises – that bear on the candidate as a potential office holder and an electoral choice at the ballot box. Some of these issues may also arise, at least intermittently, in interviews with individuals who are not running for office, but they receive sustained attention in interviews with political candidates.

One theme that emerges from this analysis is the dual import of question design in developing a public portrait of the candidate. Questions matter not only for the responses they elicit, but also for the varying stances that they themselves exhibit toward the candidate. Even though these questions remain for the most part formally neutral or "neutralistic" in being designed as interrogatives that ostensibly "request information," they nonetheless convey information about the candidate in an embedded or implicit way. They do so by establishing the relevance of the issues that they raise, and also by embodying presuppositions and expectations regarding where the candidate plausibly sits vis a vis those issues (Clayman and Heritage 2002). All of this combines to treat the candidate as, for example, more or less knowledgeable, more or less centrist, more or less extreme. Questions thus have a tangible, albeit presumptive and implicit, "altercasting" import for the candidate's governing identity. This portrayal is, of course, provisional within the interview itself. Candidates can work to counter the identity that has been proposed for them, responding in a way that undercuts the question's relevances,

presuppositions, and expectations. But they cannot entirely erase that portrayal from the minds of audience members or from the public record.

The modes of questioning examined in this paper are by no means exhaustive of those associated with the campaign interview, either as a subgenre in general or as a context for the journalistic screening of candidates on behalf of the public. The first two sets of practices – those geared to the task of probing knowledge and mapping ideology – are perhaps most salient for political newcomers who are not widely known to journalists or to the public at large. Correspondingly, other practices not analyzed here – e.g., probing the successes, failures, and tribulations of the candidate's previous political record – may come into play for political veterans with a more established record of service. It remains for future research to identify and analyze the full range of questioning practices that comprise the campaign interview as a journalistic form.

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