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Social Problems, Vol. 35, No. 4, Special Issue: Language, Interaction, and Social Problems (Oct., 1988), 474-492.

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Displaying Neutrality in Television News Interviews*

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This paper examines the nature and practice of journalistic neutrality in television news interviews. The aim is to describe the underlying speaking practices through which neutrality is regularly conveyed by news interviewers in interaction with their guests. Data are drawn from a variety of U.S. news interview programs, emphasizing Nightline and The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour. Three procedures are analyzed: 1) embedding statements within questions, 2) attributing statements to third parties, and 3) mitigating. While interviewers use these procedures routinely, they also invoke the first two in specifically hostile environments, suggesting that they serve a significant defensive function. Throughout this analysis, attention is also directed to the actions of interviewees to determine how they may preserve or undermine the interviewer's neutral stance. I conclude that neutrality is not inherent in interviewers or their actions considered in isolation, for the visibility of this "trait" is a collaborative achievement in which interviewees play a significant role.

As professionals, journalists are expected to be objective. In pursuit of this aim, they are supposed to keep their personal opinions out of the reporting process, thereby remaining officially neutral (Westerstahl, 1983). This paper examines the nature and practice of journalistic neutrality in television news interviews. The news interview has recently gained prominence as a medium of news output, and it is attracting increasing attention from social scientists (Heritage, 1985; Greatbatch, 1986a, 1986b, 1988; Harris, 1986; Jucker, 1986; Clayman, 1987. For an overview, see Heritage, Clayman, and Zimmerman, 1988). Most of this work approaches the interview as a form of spoken interaction and thus examines the recurrent communicative practices that constitute it. Similarly, here I consider how interview participants organize their interactions to make "neutrality" an observable attribute of interviewers' conduct. These practices for displaying neutrality contribute to the objective posture that news interviewers are expected to maintain.

The approach I have taken departs from prevailing social scientific approaches to the objectivity of news. Most research begins by stipulating some definition or standard of objectivity in advance; actual news output is then compared against the operationalized standard to assess the degree of objectivity or bias. One problem with this approach is that divergent and sometimes conflicting definitional frameworks (e.g., "factually accurate" versus "balance between competing points of view"; see Hackett, 1985:252-53) make the findings somewhat arbitrary, for the same data could be characterized as "objective" or "biased" depending on the definition chosen.

A further problem with operationalized standards is that they fail to capture how objectivity is practiced within the setting of newswork, that is, how journalists themselves display objectivity in and through their ordinary work practices (cf. Anderson and Sharrock, 1979). Reporters are held accountable for being "neutral" and "objective" by observers on several fronts (Tuchman, 1972, 1973; Phillips, 1977; Gans, 1979:182-213; Fishman, 1980:109-33). To satisfy these potential critics, newsmen must operate with some practical sense of what

* Several colleagues contributed both criticism and encouragement as this paper was being developed. My thanks to Roberta Astroff, Larry Cohen, Roberta Braun Curtin, Jim Greenley, Harvey Molotch, Tom Wilson, and Don Zimmerman. For reading and commenting in detail on earlier drafts, I am grateful to John Heritage and especially Doug Maynard. Correspondence to: Department of Psychiatry, Clinical Sciences Center, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI 53792.

constitutes recognizably "objective" newswork. But these indigenous standards and practices remain relatively uninvestigated, particularly in the television news interview (but see Heritage, 1985; and Greatbatch, 1988).

One way of attempting to gain access to these practices is to interview journalists about what they consider to be objective (e.g., Phillips, 1977). But even if their responses could be considered truthful, we cannot know how such characterizations of objectivity are implemented in practice, how these practices might vary in different situations, and with what consequences.

In this paper, I examine actual interviewing methods to determine how interviewers conduct themselves so as to attend to the constraint that they appear neutral. While a variety of interlocking practices may be relevant to this issue (cf. Heritage, 1985; Greatbatch, 1988), I have chosen to focus on those cases where news interviewers produce more or less explicit evaluative statements. Insofar as interviewers are concerned to appear neutral, they should produce such statements in ways that seek to preserve a neutral posture, but the precise nature of these procedures remains to be specified. Accordingly, the aim is to discover interviewers' own routine methods for conveying "neutrality" in their work.

But interviewers do not function in a vacuum. Their actions are embedded in and are consequential for an ongoing course of social interaction. Hence, other participants—the interviewees—may be examined to determine how they respond to specific actions by interviewers and in particular whether they deal with them as essentially neutral or biased. It will be shown that interviewees, by virtue of their concrete participation in the encounter, necessarily contribute to the overall sense and appearance of interviewer conduct, suggesting that received notions of neutrality (e.g., as a trait that interviewers possess) may have to be reconsidered. The visibility of this journalistic "trait" is in many respects a collaborative achievement.

Data

As part of a larger research project, I recorded a variety of network television news interview programs in 1985. The primary corpus amounts to approximately three hours of actual interviewing time, with four full interviews drawn from *Nightline* (ABC), three from *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* (PBS), and one from each of the networks' major Sunday programs: *Face the Nation* (CBS), *Meet the Press* (NBC), and *This Week with David Brinkley* (ABC). Across these programs, news interviews are broadcast essentially as they happen.

The interviews were transcribed according to a system developed by Gail Jefferson. A brief outline of the transcription symbols can be found at the beginning of this special issue (for a more thorough discussion, see Atkinson and Heritage, 1984:ix-xvi). The transcripts are intended to preserve the verbal and prosodic details of speech as it naturally occurred, but they have been partially simplified here for ease of presentation.

This primary corpus was drawn nonsystematically from a much larger set of video and audio recordings including three full weeks of *Nightline* and *MacNeil/Lehrer*. While only the three-hour corpus mentioned above was selected for detailed transcription and analysis, less detailed commercially prepared transcripts were obtained for the balance of the collection. This secondary corpus was employed on an ad hoc basis for exploratory purposes and to verify the generality of particular phenomena.

Embedding Statements Within Questions

When news interviewers interact with prominent persons, they ordinarily ask questions.

Accordingly, interview discourse is characterized by the "preallocation" of questions to interviewers (henceforth IRs) and answers to interviewees (henceforth IEs) (Greatbatch, 1988). As Heritage (1985) and Greatbatch (1988) have observed, this limitation on IRs' talk appears to be bound up with the need to display neutrality. By restricting themselves to the task of questioning, IRs elicit the opinions and perspectives of others and thus refrain from overtly offering their own comments.

Achieving a neutral "questioning" stance is a more complex matter than might be apparent at first glance, however. Even a cursory examination of IRs' turns at talk will reveal that they are not limited to simple questions; their talk frequently contains utterances that are grammatically formatted as statements (Greatbatch, 1988). Moreover, such statements are often evaluative or opinionated, and they sometimes disagree with or otherwise challenge the IE's point of view. Regularly, however, IRs design their statements to be continuous with questions, so that each turn can be seen in its entirety as engaged in the activity of questioning. The visibility of questioning is thus achieved through specific discourse practices that combine statement-formatted and question-formatted turn components into coherent social actions.

As a first step in analyzing this process, consider that some questioning turn components would be ambiguous and incomplete without accompanying statements. This is true in the case of interrogative prefaces (at arrows number 1 below) produced before a statement (beginning at arrows number 2):

[1] [Nightline 6/5/85:9]

IR: Mister Forbes, would you agree that ← 1
 this kind of huge growth in companies where billion dollar corporations ← 2
 are absorbing other billion dollar corporations tends to decrease, not
 eliminate, but decrease competition?

[2] [MacNeil/Lehrer 7/22/85a:13]

IR: What about his point though Doctor that ← 1
 there cannot be any peaceful change as long as there's violence, as long as ← 2
 people are killing each other.

These prefaces are only understandable in conjunction with the statements that follow. Indeed, the questions that they initiate are syntactically incomplete until the statements are produced. Each statement is thus embedded within and is an essential part of a larger questioning action.

The same type of connectedness may occur in reverse order when statements (beginning at arrows 1) precede a questioning item (arrows 2).

[3] [Nightline 6/6/85:3]

IR: Let's take the other half of the problem though Doctor Yalow I mean Even ← 1
 once you've removed the uranium you're still left with a lot of liquid ← 2
 radioactive waste
 are you not? ← 2

[4] [Nightline 7/22/85:4-5]

IR: As Peter Sharp said in that pi~~g~~ce it is a lot easier to impose a state of ← 1
 emergency than it is to lift it. 'hhh You still have the root cause when you
lift it. And black leaders in that country have made it very clear that this
 kind of situation there's no way of stopping this kind of situation unless
 there is an end to apartheid. It seems to me that by doing this by eh
 imposing I guess this kind of repression you really set up a system where
 you can do nothing it seems to me when you lift it except to change thuh
 system that exists there (.) thuh basic system.
 'hhhh Is that unfair? ← 2

In 3 the statement precedes a tag question; as with the interrogative prefaces examined above, tag questions are syntactically joined to adjacent statements. Example 4 is somewhat different, for a series of statements is followed by a syntactically complete question. But this question is similarly unintelligible in isolation from the preceding statements due to the presence of a pronoun ("that") referring back to them.

The continuity between statement-formatted and question-formatted turn components goes beyond the use of one to make the other intelligible. Some questions may be understandable apart from the surrounding discourse, yet the statements that precede them are still hearably involved in the task of questioning. Hence, connectedness also involves delicate substantive relationships between turn components, where statements are designed to perform necessary groundwork for, and thus lead up to, an eventual question. Next I examine some standard prefatory tasks that statements can perform.

Reporting an Occurrence

Some statements (beginning at arrows 1 below) report a recent occurrence that establishes the relevance of the subsequent inquiry (arrows 2).

[5] [Nightline 7/22/85:8]

((Discussing the government-imposed state of emergency in South Africa with a black leader from that country))

IR: Two m~~g~~mbers of your organization (.) supposedly arrested today ← 1
 Do you feel in some danger when you go back ← 2

[6] [Face the Nation 12/8/85:5]

IR: Doctor de Vita I know that the Institute has been SWAMPed with phone ← 1
 calls ever since Doctor Rosenberg published his findings in the New
 England Medical Journal
What do you want to say. to all the people in the country who are ← 2
desperate, who don't have anywhere else to go, with their cancers, or even
 people in the earlier stages. What would you like to say to them about
where you are in this treatment. Only eight people a month, is that all you
 can take

Both statements are specifically designed to establish this relevance. This is achieved in part by including temporal formulations ("today" and "ever since.") that mark the occurrences as recent, portraying them as relevant to report and, correspondingly, appropriate objects of inquiry at this particular time. Furthermore, both occurrences concern matters with which the IEs are intimately involved. In 5 the arrested persons are formulated as "members of your organization," which ties the event to the IE as an organizational co-member. The IE in 6 was

previously introduced as chief of surgery at “the institute” mentioned and is director of the research program that developed the new cancer treatment about which the “desperate” people are phoning. These statements thus lead up to the questions that follow by establishing the timeliness of the inquired-about matters and indicating that they are germane to the IE.

Posing a Puzzle

Other statements (arrows 1 below) set up a puzzle, after which a question (arrows 2) is issued to seek information relevant to its solution.

[7] [Nightline 7/22/85:1]

IR: Mister Ambassador I've heard a lot of explanations given as to why the ← 1
state of emergency was imposed, but I'm not sure I understand them.
Tell me what your feeling is as to why this was done and why now. ← 2

[8] [This Week With David Brinkley 12/8/85:2-3]

((The IE is Representative Dan Rostenkowski, chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, which drafted a new tax reform bill.))

IR: Mister Chairman this tax reform when it first got rolling was defended in ← 1a
large measure in terms of simplicity.
We're gonna simplify the tax code.
You have refused to kill the mortgage interest deduction on second homes, ← 1b
you have even preserved something called, and you could if you wanted
to explain it to me, the gravestone exemption, which I gather is a
depreciation for granite quarries,
Is this really any simpler and isn't this just another example of different ← 2
logs rolled in different ways

In 7 the puzzle is presented as a matter of the IR's own personal state of ignorance. The puzzle in 8 is generated in a more complex manner by building a contrast between the rhetoric of tax reform (arrow 1a) and the IE's apparent performance (arrow 1b) in designing the actual tax reform proposal. The IR first notes that tax reform was supposed to “simplify the tax code.” He then lists various deductions and exemptions that the IE has refused to eliminate. The unexplained discrepancy between rhetoric and performance then becomes the focus of inquiry (arrow 2). In this instance the puzzle works to indirectly criticize the IE's conduct by implying that he has betrayed the promise of tax reform.¹ But this criticism is not mounted in a direct or “exposed” manner (cf. Jefferson, 1983), for it is embedded within a larger questioning action.

Displaying a Perspective

Finally, the initial statement (1 below) may exhibit a perspective or an assessment of some situation, after which the question (2) solicits the IE's own perspective as an alternative.

[9] [MacNeil/Lehrer 7/22/85a:2]

IR: Reports today are of course that the violence has continued ← 1

1. The use of question-preliminary contrasts is a stable and recurrent strategy for constructing a “tough” or “challenging” line of questioning. This appears to be related to a similar phenomenon examined by Drew (forthcoming) in courtroom cross-examinations, one difference being that in the courtroom context such contrasts may also be built up through successive questions that elicit contradictory answers, while news interviewers generally incorporate such contrasts within their own questioning turns.

What have you heard whether or not the state of emergency is in fact ← 2
working

[10] [Nightline 6/3/85:12]

((The IE is Pat Buchanan, who had recently been appointed by President Reagan to the position of White House Director of Communications.))

IE: . . . I'm a journalist, and I think I've got some ideas as a staff aid, I've been that before, but a stage manager's not one of my occupations.

IR: Well you're not a journalist now. ← 1
What is your function there. ← 2

In 9 the assessment is presented as a viewpoint that originated elsewhere, so that the IR is merely speaking on behalf of an anonymous third party. By way of contrast, the assessment in 10 is not deflected in this manner. Moreover, it directly disputes the IE's previous statement, and it does so in a particularly pointed manner. While the question in 9 is designed to provide for the possibility of a response that diverges from the assessment (notice that it includes a reference to both alternatives: "whether or not"), in 10 the query does not appear to be as open to disagreement. Yet both assessments are followed by questions that solicit the IE's own perspective, thereby making the prior statements retrospectively seeable as designed to establish some contrastive groundwork against which the IE's own perspective should be understood. They are thus embedded within turns whose primary task is to solicit the perspective of the IE.

In sum, IRs frequently produce evaluative statements, many of which disagree with, criticize, or otherwise challenge an IE (see also Greatbatch, 1986b:104-08). Yet because of the various discourse practices outlined above, the participants—as well as the audience—can see such statements as an integral part of a larger questioning action occupying the entire turn at talk. Accordingly, regardless of how opinionated or argumentative these turns might also appear to be, their primary or "first-order" business remains that of questioning.

"Questioning" as an Interactional Achievement

Thus far, the argument has been based on an analysis of *completed* turns, and has indicated how an initial statement or statements may be seen in retrospect as having been preliminary to a question. But as Greatbatch (1988) has shown, IEs demonstrably treat such statements as preliminaries *as they are produced* in that they systematically decline to speak until a recognizable question is completed. Considering extracts 3-10 once more, notice that each contains more than a single utterance or grammatical unit; the completion of each unit constitutes a place where turn transition may properly occur in ordinary conversation (Sacks et al., 1974). Yet the IEs regularly refrain from speaking at those points, and they continue to do so even though the IR has not done any special work to gain access to an extended turn; there are no story prefaces (Sacks, 1974) or action projections (Schegloff, 1980) to indicate that an extended turn is in progress. This is underscored in extract 4 below, which has been retranscribed to highlight points at which speech has been withheld (arrowed).

[4] [Nightline 7/22/85: 4-5]

IR: As Peter Sharp said in that piece it is a lot easier to impose a state of
emergency than it is to lift it. ←
'hhh You still have the root cause when you lift it. ←
And black leaders in that country have made it very clear that this kind of
situation there's no way of stopping this kind of situation unless there is an
end to apartheid. ←

It seems to me that by doing this by eh imposing I guess this kind of repression you really set up uh system where you can do nothing it seems to me when you lift it except to change the system that exists there ←
 (.) thuh basic system. ←
 'hhhh Is that unfair?

IE: I would think it's unfair what is being said . . .

The absence of talk by IEs is thus not a mere chance occurrence, and it has important implications for the collaborative nature of this form of neutrality. As a purely physical matter, IEs enable IRs to produce turns of this type by withholding speech. But in addition, they are in effect ratifying the neutrality proposed by this turn structure. By declining to talk at relevant junctures, IEs exhibit an analysis of each successive statement as indeed the preliminary component of a not-yet-completed action. This has the effect of ratifying, if only in an implicit and provisional sense, their character as neutral question components. The questioning character of the resulting turn must therefore be regarded as the interactional achievement of both IRs and IEs, who collaborate to produce turns that are structured in this way.

This point should become clearer by examining a contrasting instance in which an IE does *not* wait for a question to come, but responds to a statement immediately upon its completion (06-07).

[11] [Face the Nation 12/8/85:18]

- 01 IE: Could have a situation here where you're putting out
 02 a bacteria in the environment, and in the long run
 03 it could develop a niche and prevent effective
 04 rainfall patterns on thuh planet.
 05 An it-
 06 IR: |But| YOU don't know that.
 07 IE: But you see the other side doesn't} know either until we . . .
 08 |Do you? }

Here IR's turn (06) is initially designed to openly challenge IE by asserting that he lacks knowledge of the matter in question. IE responds without delay (07), thus treating the challenge itself as a complete action. Moreover, IE's speech helps to *constitute* it as a nonquestion by hindering the production of additional turn components. This move is resisted by IR, who proceeds to overlap IE's turn with a delayed tag question (08). It is designed to be continuous with her prior challenge, and thus "recompletes" that earlier turn (Sacks et al., 1974:718-19). With this addition, IR introduces materials with which to render her turn hearable in retrospect as having been intended as a question "all along." Yet this move is at best only partially successful, for it is markedly softened while spoken in overlap, features which make it difficult for observers to hear. And IE treats it as inconsequential by continuing to speak unfettered; he does not allow the tag question to be produced in the clear, and does not acknowledge, retrieve, or respond to it in any visible way. In effect, he "deletes" it by acting as if it never occurred (Jefferson and Schegloff, 1975). Hence, multi-utterance questions cannot be effectively produced unilaterally; the IE's tacit cooperation is required. And judging by the unproblematic manner in which these turns are regularly produced, such cooperation is routinely granted.

"Questioning" in Hostile Environments

While the procedures examined thus far ensure that IRs' turns will be recognizable as questions, this is merely a baseline or first-order characterization (cf. Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Greatbatch, 1988). They may also be characterized in other ways: "accusatory," "lead-

ing," or "argumentative" (cf. Harris, 1986). Consequently, these turns can be subjected to a variety of hostile criticisms from IEs and, it should be noted, from the wider audience of overhearers. However, the fact that they may still be correctly characterized as "questions" can be an important resource for defending against such attacks when they arise.

In the next extract, the activity of questioning is overtly invoked in response to a criticism of this sort. The criticism concerns a question that was asked some ten minutes earlier. At that point, IR asked a medical advisor to the Three Mile Island investigating commission if he agreed with reports linking that nuclear accident to an increased incidence of cancer in the surrounding area.

[12] [Nightline 6/6/85:12-13]

- IR: Are you prepared to accept some of the charges that are being made BY people on the scene . . . Are you prepared to accept some of the conclusions that they are drawing about the cause and effect of that meltdown whatever radiation did seep into the atmosphere and what they are seeing now as a heightened incident of cancer
- IE: Oh I know what you're referring to now. All right
(answer continues)

Here IR reports an assessment (that the accident resulted in an increased incidence of cancer) on behalf of a third party ("people on the scene"), and packages it within a larger questioning turn, such that the IE is asked to display his own point of view on the matter. Ten minutes later, a different IE criticizes this action (03-08,11).

[13] [Nightline 6/6/85:21]

- 01 IR: Doctor Yalow let me put it in very simple terms. If it's
02 doable, if it is easily disposable, why don't we.
- 03 IE: Well frankly I cannot ANswer all these scientific questions
04 in one minute given to me. On the other hand there was
05 one horrible thing that happened tonight that you have in
06 addition extended. And that is the NOtion that there is
07 an increased incidence of cancer associated with the Three
08 Mile Island accide:nt
- 09 IR: No = no = no I
10 raised the- I raised the QUESTION and-
11 IE: And it is ABSolutely not so.]
- 12 IR: Well fine. Then tell us how you know it is not so.

IE first refuses to answer IR's question (03-04), and then proceeds to accuse him of spreading misinformation about the relationship between the Three Mile Island accident and cancer (05-08). She refers to this as a mere "notion" that "you have in addition extended," and characterizes this turn of events as "horrible." In response (09-10) IR first emphatically denies the accusation ("No = no = no"), and then supports the denial by characterizing his prior action as having been a question. The assumption underlying this defense seems to be that if he was only asking questions, he could not be responsible for spreading a falsehood. Questioning is thus defensively useful here because of the neutrality it proposes. Notice that IE attempts to override this move with a continuation of her accusation (11), and she does so at a "recognition point" (Jefferson, 1973); that is, precisely at a point at which it becomes evident that IR's turn is going to be defensive (rather than, for instance, inviting IE to critique the objectionable "notion" in question). Interestingly, though, IR takes just this course of action shortly thereafter (12), reassuming the role of questioner and bringing an end to the accusation sequence.

Attributing Statements to Third Parties

IRs do not always embed their statements within questions. They sometimes allow them to stand freely to accomplish a variety of nonquestioning actions. While most of these are functionally related to questions (see Clayman, 1987:64-76), some are not; some function to challenge or undermine an IE's position. Rather than "merely" eliciting information, a challenge constitutes an overt commentary on the adequacy of the latter's views. However, through various alternative procedures IRs can continue to sustain a neutral stance in such instances. And as we shall see, these procedures are also used for statements embedded within questioning turns to further exhibit their neutral character.

One such device is analogous to Goffman's (1981:124-59) idea of altering "footing" in talk. Goffman observes that the terms "speaker" and "hearer" are too gross to capture the variety of ways that coparticipants may be engaged in an interaction over its course; these engagements amount to distinct interactional footings. Speakers, for example, may adopt a variety of footings in relation to their remarks. They do so through various "production formats" (1981:45) that distinguish between the "animator," "author," and "principal" of what is said. The "animator" is the person who presently utters a sequence of words. The one who originated the position or point of view and perhaps also composed the specific words in which it is encoded is the "author." Finally, the "principal" is the person whose viewpoint is now being expressed in and through the spoken words. It is not uncommon for a single speaker to embody all three identities simultaneously as he or she speaks; IEs do so routinely.

[14] [Meet the Press 12/8/87:5]

IR: Are you opposed to that?

IE: I haven't made up my mind but I think so. ←

As the current speaker, IE is self-evidently "animating" the words in his turn. He also appears to have composed them (author) to express his own attitude (principal). He thus takes up all three identities through his turn.

The situation is very different for IRs, who frequently act only as animators when they speak (see also Greatbatch, 1986b:106-07; Harris, 1986:67-68; Jucker, 1986:134-36).² They commonly shift to this footing when producing nonquestioning challenges (see 16 below) and question-preliminary statements (see 15) by attributing them to a third party. This enables them to speak on another's behalf, and thereby place some distance between themselves and their more contentious remarks. In each of the following extracts the IR produces an assessment (arrows 1b) but ascribes it to someone else (arrows 1a).

[15] [MacNeil/Lehrer 7/22/85a:5]

((The IE is the South African ambassador to the United States, and is explaining why the South African government recently imposed a state of emergency.))

IE: . . . And we would just want to avoid any possible situation that might lead to more violence.

IR: Finally Mister Ambassador as you know the critics say ← 1a

that the purpose of the state of emergency the real ← 1b
purpose of the state of emergency is to suppress political dissent. those who are opposed to the apartheid government of South Africa. Is that so

IE: I would have to take issue with that prgmise because . . . ← 2

2. This is analogous to the use of quotation marks in print journalism (see Tuchman, 1972) and thus appears to be the interactional version of a widespread journalistic device.

[16] [MacNeil/Lehrer 7/22/85a:13-14]

((The IE is a prominent black leader in South Africa, and is explaining recent violence by blacks in that country.))

IE: . . . the African National Congress has petitioned, has campaigned peacefully, for more than forty years now in an attempt to amend the constitution, in an attempt to get POWersharing for the black majority. They have been totally unsuccessful. And one has to take this into account when one speaks about the present spate of violence South Africa.

IR: Peace has not worked ← 1b

he says Mister Ambassador, ← 1a

IE: Well he's referring to a period of time in the far distant past. What I'm concerned about and what we should be concerned about Doctor Motlona and myself, is here and now . . . ← 2

The responsible party may be a specific individual, as in 16, where a co-present IE is cited. But it may also be a collectivity, such as the "critics" invoked in 15; even "people" in general can be cited (see 20 below). IRs thus have considerable latitude in terms of whom they may identify to take responsibility for what is said.

This attributional flexibility provides IRs with the ability to pursue different kinds of activities through their assessments. First, they may follow up on an IE's statement by "presenting the other side" (see 15). The footing shift at this juncture enables IRs to introduce points of view that counter those of the IE without personally endorsing what they are reporting. They may also generate disagreement between co-present IEs representing opposing sides of an issue (see 16). Hence, after one IE has finished speaking, IR may formulate the gist of that response or some aspect of it and address it to a co-interviewee to solicit a contrasting response. Here the footing shift enables IRs to generate and manage an informal debate between IEs without collaborating with either side (cf. Maynard, 1986).

IRs sometimes go to extra lengths to exhibit neutrality by renewing the animator footing at specific points. In the following, the IR begins (at arrow 1a) by attributing an upcoming assessment in its entirety to "the ambassador." This footing is later renewed within the assessment itself (arrow 1b) just prior to a specific word—"collaborator"—which is re-attributed to the ambassador.

[17] [Nightline 7/22/85:17]

((Discussing violence among Blacks in South Africa))

IR: Reverend Boesak let me pick up a point the ambassador made. ← 1a
 What assurances can you give us that talks between moderates in that country will take place when it seems that any black leader who is willing to talk to the government is branded as the ambassador said a collaborator ← 1b
 and is then punished.

IE: The ambassador has it wrong. It's not the people . . . ← 2

Notice that by dealing with this descriptor in this manner, the IR sets it apart from the rest of the statement as particularly contentious, just as he further distances himself from it. He thus goes to extra lengths to disavow any personal attachment to strategic items within the assessment, even after indicating that the assessment in its entirety belongs to someone else.

In other instances the footing shift appears comparatively "weak," as when the IR attempts to append a third party attribution in mid-utterance, after the assessment had been partially produced.

[18] MacNeil/Lehrer 6/10/85a:4]

((Discussing the U.S. decision to continue to honor the SALT II arms control treaty with a Reagan administration official.))

IR: How do you sum up the message that this decision is sending to the Soviets?

IE: Well as I started to say it is a- one of warning and opportunity. The warning is (.) you'd better comply to arms control agreements if arms control is going to have any chance of succeeding in the future. Unilateral compliance by the United States is just not in the works . . .
 ((four lines omitted))

IR: But isn't this- uh:: critics on the conservative side of ←
 the political argument have argued that this is: abiding by the treaty is:
unilateral (.) observance. (.) uh:: or compliance. (.) by the United States.

IR begins to respond to IE's assertion by producing an interrogative preface ("but isn't this-"). As demonstrated in the previous section, these are commonly used by IRs prior to assessments of various sorts. In this instance, however, employing the standard format for correcting errors (see Jefferson, 1974), IR aborts the turn at this point—notice the abrupt cut-off of speech denoted by the hyphen—and restarts it on a different footing, such that the assessment is attributed to "critics on the conservative side of the political argument." This revised version is no longer formatted as a question, the interrogative preface having been omitted; it is now a free-standing statement, one that disputes the IE's preceding statement but does so on someone else's behalf. As Jefferson (1974) has observed, error correction is not only directed to problems of accuracy and grammatical coherence, but is also aimed at repairing "interactional errors," that is, mistakes in the attempt to speak appropriately to particular recipients in particular circumstances. The issue here is clearly not the truth or coherence of the turn, but its properly neutral footing.

The success of the footing procedure turns on the way it works to sustain a neutral stance. First, IRs present the viewpoint as having originated elsewhere; in Goffman's terms, they overtly reject "authorship". This specified origin, however, indicates nothing about whether or not the IR personally endorses the opinion. But in addition, the IR refrains from commenting on the opinion thus reported, neither endorsing it nor rejecting it.³ Of course, the IE and other overhearers may suspect that the IR actually agrees (or disagrees) with what is reported. But by deflecting authorship onto a third party and withholding any outward endorsement, the IR does not furnish solid grounds to support such a suspicion.

The Footing Shift in Interaction

Consider now how IEs respond to footing shifts. They frequently seek to rebut the animated assessment but ordinarily refrain from treating the target of their rebuttal as expressing the IR's personal opinion. To this end, three alternative courses of action are employed with roughly the same frequency. First, they may overtly ascribe the target of their rebuttal to

3. On this point, it is notable that in other contexts speakers can and do take steps to affiliate with/against statements that ostensibly originated elsewhere. For instance, in the following, the speaker first animates an assessment that was originally spoken by her husband. She then exhibits her own alignment toward it, which amounts to an agreement with qualifications.

C: And he says that my place is home with the children.
 I agree. But I need a rest.

The point is that the act of affiliating with/against a reported opinion is not merely an analytical possibility; it demonstrably happens with some regularity (see also Maynard, 1984:62-63). That it does not happen in IRs' talk can thus be regarded as a phenomenon.

the same third party as indicated by the IR. Thus, in extract 17 the IR attributes his assessment to a co-interviewee (arrows 1a,1b) (“the ambassador”), and the IE does the same prior to his rebuttal (arrow 2) (“The ambassador has it wrong. . .”). A similar pattern occurs in 16 (see arrows 1b and 2). Second, they may treat the prior assessment anonymously, for example, by referring to it without attributing it to anyone in particular. This occurs in extract 15 at arrow 2, when the animated assessment is referred to as “that premise”; noticeably absent here is a possessive pronoun that would attach it to the IR (see also extract 19 line 13 below). Finally, they may simply produce a contrasting assessment. In this way, they construct a rebuttal without exhibiting any official orientation to whose position is being rebutted. Across all of these response types, IEs decline to deal with the target assessment as expressing the IR’s personal point of view.

IEs may continue to treat animated assessments in this manner even when IRs markedly enhance their credibility. In the following, IR upgrades the credibility of an assessment by listing multiple third parties as its co-authors, thus suggesting that “everyone” agrees with it.

[19] [MacNeil/Lehrer 7/22/85a:22]

- 01 IE: . . . And if we can get out of that cycle [of violence]
 02 exactly to break that cycle, I think it’ll be in the
 03 interest of everybody to get then to the point of dealing
 04 with peaceful reforms.
 05 IR: But all the people around the world, the common market
 06 foreign ministers today, the Secretary General of the
 07 forty seven member British Commonwealth, members of the
 08 banned African National Congress, our guest Doctor Motlana,
 09 all say that- and the American statement we’ve just heard,
 10 that the reason for the violence that the state of
 11 emergency is designed to stop, the reason for that
 12 violence, is the policy of apartheid.
 13 IE: Now if that is being said and for the argument it’s being
 14 accepted, then to do so: an to deal with it in a peaceful
 15 manner, you have to get away from the point of violence.

IR enumerates a list of five parties, beginning with a prefatory comment on the universal scope of the list at line 05 (“all the people around the world”), and proceeding to specify various individuals and collectivities, who “all say that- . . . the reason for the violence that the state of emergency is designed to stop . . . is the policy of apartheid.” Notice that after naming the fourth party IR had apparently completed the list and began the statement (09), but he breaks off (“all say that-”) to add a fifth before proceeding. By suggesting that “everyone” agrees with an assertion, IR in effect strengthens its claim to truth, because a belief that is held by all is not the idiosyncratic artifact of a particular observer’s point of view; it is an objective fact (Pomerantz, 1986). And IE appears to attend to this proposed facticity in his rebuttal in that he does not attempt to dispute the assertion itself (13-15); he allows it while resisting its larger implications. But while IR strengthens the reported assessment, he does not go so far as to personally endorse or affiliate with it, and IE responds to it as belonging to no one in particular by referring to it in the passive voice at line 13 (“if that is being said”).

Footing shifts are thus remarkably “successful” as displays of neutrality, in the sense that co-present IEs generally ratify the neutrality that these shifts propose. Furthermore, as a consequence of such ratification neutrality can once again be regarded as collaboratively achieved. By responding as they do, IEs exhibit an analysis of the prior assessment as not necessarily expressing the IR’s personal point of view, sometimes overtly treating it as belonging to someone else. Assumptions about third-party ownership thus get built into the next

turn at talk. This necessarily contributes to the overall appearance of neutrality by preserving its visibility across the interaction.

The Footing Shift in Hostile Environments

As with the device of questioning, footing shifts can perform a defensive function. Hence, they also appear in contexts where IRs' actions come under criticism. Consider the following extract from an interview with Pat Buchanan, who recently had become Director of Communications for the Reagan administration. The IR shifts footing in response to Buchanan's accusation that he has "demeaned" the president. The accusation is occasioned by IR's initial question (lines 05-09) concerning a much-quoted line from a Reagan speech that morally equated the Nicaraguan contras with the founding fathers of the United States. IR asks Buchanan if he wrote that line for Reagan. Before asking the question, however, he indicates in a preliminary statement (lines 01-04) that he is interested in whether or not Buchanan's own ideology is influencing the tone of White House rhetoric. While this statement is not reported on anyone else's behalf, neither is it asserted unequivocally; it is merely presented as a possibility to be explored. The following exchange ensues.

[20] [Nightline 6/3/85:5-6]

- 01 IR: Arrright. Let's talk a little bit about Pat Buchanan,
 02 his ideology, and how that is reflecting itself now in what
 03 we're seeing coming out of the White House. Or to what
 04 degree you're simply a reflection of the President. That
 05 line about the moral equivalent of our founding fathers
 06 you're talking about the- (er-) the President was talking
 07 about the Contras there was that your line?
 08 IE: No, that was the President's own line Ted, I
 09 didn't put it into his speech.
 10 ((18 lines omitted))
 11 Nobody puts words into the mouth of Ronald Reagan. He
 12 goes over every single speech he delivers, and when
 13 he delivers it those words are what he believes. And I
 14 think it is really uh- it demeans the President to
 15 suggest that someone say Pat Buchanan or anyone else
 16 is running down there at night sneaking phrases or lies
 17 into speeches and the Pres'dent doesn't know what he's
 18 saying.
 19 IR: No Pat I don't think anyone's suggesting that, I think what
 20 people are suggesting is that the President of the United
 21 States perhaps more than any other man or woman in the
 22 country is terribly terribly busy cannot possibly write
 23 every speech of his own, or for that matter go over every
 24 speech line by line as you suggest. And when that happens,
 25 then people in positions such as your own can sometimes get
 26 some of their own ideas across.

IE first denies authorship of the line (lines 08-13), attributing it to Reagan instead, and then accuses IR of "demeaning" the president (14-18) by suggesting that "someone say Pat Buchanan or anyone else is running down there at night sneaking phrases or lies into speeches and the President doesn't know what he's saying."

When IR denies the accusation (lines 19-26), he does so by reformulating his prior statement to defuse its "demeaning" character, while producing it on a different footing. This

revised version is attributed to people-in-general (19-20); the IR says that he doesn't think that "anyone's suggesting that" and talks instead about "what people are suggesting." Through these words he invokes the identity of the professional journalist as public spokesperson, one whose job is to speak on behalf of the citizenry when interacting with government officials. Hence, insofar as his prior question could be heard to express a point of view, this footing deflects ownership of this viewpoint away from the IR personally and onto "people" in general. Furthermore, insofar as the expressed view could be heard to "demean" the president, responsibility for this action is similarly deflected.

Mitigating

The final procedure to be considered here is also the least common of the three. When producing an evaluative statement, the IR may take steps to mitigate its force; that is, to make it appear less violative and more acceptable than would otherwise be the case (cf. Goffman, 1971:108-09). Unlike footing shifts and questioning turn types, this procedure does enable IRs to openly express their own opinions. However, they portray such moves in the mildest of terms, as temporary actions undertaken with caution, and thus as not significantly interfering with the overall quest to remain neutral.

One way of accomplishing this is to employ a version of what Schegloff (1980) has referred to as an "action projection," or an utterance that projects the character of a subsequent action in advance of its actual production.

[21] [Nightline 7/22/85:3-4]

((The IE is Herbert Beukes, the South African ambassador to the United States. He had previously said that recent violence in South Africa was perpetrated by blacks against other blacks.))

IR: Arright lemme talk about this question then for a moment ←
of violence of blacks against blacks. We live here in the United States in a country that was founded on a revolution and I suppose looking at that revolution that occurred in our country back in the eighteenth century, I suppose the British could've said there was violence occurring at that time and they could've dismissed it saying this is violence of Americans against Americans. But the point was there was violence at that time between what we now call Patriots and people in this country who were considered to be allied with the British. And so when there is violence of blacks against blacks it may be ocCURring that way but nobody questions what's causing it. What is causing the anger and the violence in South Africa is apartheid. And that is something over which your government obviously has control.

IE: Charlie, I will not quarrel with you that an important aspect, an important issue here is the question of dealing with the political situation.

[22] [Nightline 6/6/85:17-18]

IR: Alright you explain to me if you would how is it that so many of these plants that have been under construction, BAD construction, VAST overruns, tenfold overruns, hqw does that happen.

IE: Well there are a couple of other factors that are involved in that cost equation. One was they added safety requirements that were not thought necessary earlier or were not identified earlier,
(15 lines omitted)

Now those things are major cost additions.

- IR: Let me give vent to a little of my natural born cynicism ←
 here. Back then when they were first putting together the specs and the architectural drawings for these plans, they believed then, genuinely, that they had all the safety devices they needed, I'm sure they reassured you, they reassured us, the public, that they had everything they needed, what worries people I guess is that we keep hearing how safe everything is an then later on we find out that well maybe we did need a little bit more.

These preliminary utterances (arrowed) each convey information about the subsequent talk. The action projection in 22 is more explicit in warning that something like an expression of the IR's own point of view is about to take place, as IR indicates that he will "give vent to a little of my natural born cynicism." Although both of the projected turns contain mitigating shifts of footing, they are also elaborate assessments that challenge previous talk. It thus appears that these action projections are functioning as "pre-delicates" (Schegloff, 1980:131-34) in that they are a means of leading into delicate or violative actions.⁴ Furthermore, they present such actions as temporary aberrations by indicating that their duration will be brief. In 21 IR says that he will only be talking "for a moment"; similarly, in 22 he says he will only be giving vent to "a little" of his "natural-born cynicism." IRs thus orient to the need to resume their formally neutral stance even as they depart from it temporarily.

The final instance is not an action projection, although it is placed in a similar position—prior to the assessment item (lines 09-11)—and appears to do the same mitigating work.

[23] [Nightline 6/6/85:2-3]

((Discussing nuclear waste))

- 01 IE: . . . Certainly the scientific community believes that it can
 02 be dealt with rather readily. The reason why reactor fuel
 03 is staying at the site of the reactor is not that they don't
 04 know what to do with it. They do know what to do with it.
 05 But at the moment our country is not doing reprocessing.
 06 And before one would want to PERmanently dispose of these
 07 materials, one would want to remove the VALuable plutonium
 08 and uranium from them.
 09 IR: Lemme stop you right there and uh we're doing unequal
 10 combat here, but that's fine because I wanta hear what you
 11 have to say, my understanding is that the reprocessing
 12 process is so expensive that at least from an economic
 13 point of view it's not viable.

The IE here is a nuclear physicist, and is speaking on behalf of the community of scientists (line 01). She makes the case that nuclear waste presents no real problem, for it will eventually be reprocessed and then disposed of (01-08). IR counters (11-13) with a statement suggesting that reprocessing is not economically viable. However, this view is preceded by an utterance that downgrades it vis à vis the IE's own point of view (09-11). Thus, IR's statement that they're "doing unequal combat" (09-10) appears to be an indirect reference to the fact that IE is a scientist whose opinions on nuclear waste are more technically grounded than his own. This orientation continues and is elaborated within the assessment itself (11-13), which is prefaced with "my understanding is . . .," a subjectivity marker implying a contrast with "your expert version." By minimizing the significance of his own views, the IR treats them as

4. Action projections may perform other tasks as well. In particular, they enable a speaker to gain access to an extended turn at talk. For a detailed discussion, see Schegloff (1980).

subsidiary to those of the IE, which are presented as properly occupying center stage. Furthermore, the statement that he “wants to hear” what she has to say (10-11) establishes the relevance of the IE’s point of view as something that will be resumed momentarily.

As a method of displaying neutrality, mitigating is qualitatively different from the procedures examined previously. Unlike embedding statements within questions and attributing statements to third parties, this procedure does enable IRs to openly express views that can be regarded as their own. (On this point, notice that in 21 the IE overtly treats the prior assessment as belonging to the IR: “Charlie, I will not quarrel with you . . .”). Furthermore, mitigating indicates by its very nature that the associated action is something less than proper. This may explain why it is comparatively uncommon; a more frequent use of the procedure would undercut its basic claim.

Discussion

News interviewers employ three distinguishable procedures to display neutrality when producing evaluative or controversial statements. A rough coding of 250 turns reveals that at least one and frequently more than one procedure is employed in 97 percent of the cases. Of the eight anomalous turns, four were possibly not complete because an IE interrupted them. The four remaining cases appear to constitute the only more or less direct statements of opinion in the entire corpus (see Clayman, 1987:236-46 for an examination of some of these cases). Thus, it seems fair to say that these procedures, while not universal, are pervasively employed by interviewers as a primary means of sustaining the institutional identity of one who impartially elicits the views of others.

It would be incorrect to take these procedures to constitute a *definition* of neutral interviewing. As we have seen, an interviewer’s conduct can be called into question even when he or she has employed one or more of the procedures. Neither does it mean that interviewers are actually *not* neutral or that these are nothing more than strategies employed to conceal what are in reality the interviewer’s personal beliefs. For as we have also seen, interviewees generally take such actions to be essentially neutral. What is to count as neutral is thus in part a matter that the participants methodically address and resolve in the course of the interview itself. From this perspective, the procedures examined in this paper constitute interactional devices through which interviewers can advance a local posture of neutrality. Interviewees can, in a variety of ways, either preserve or undermine this posture. Accordingly, the successful achievement of neutrality is an interactional matter in which interviewees play a constitutive role and which the parties to an interview jointly accomplish as an observable state of affairs.

While interviewees generally cooperate to preserve interviewers’ neutrality, they may also act to undermine it. This limits the extent to which interviewers can use these procedures “strategically,” that is, to mask their own biases with impunity. They cannot say *anything* and pass it off as neutral, for they are constrained by reference to how the interviewee chooses to act in response.

When interviewees attempt to undermine interviewers’ neutrality by criticizing their actions, interviewers may defend themselves by invoking their adherence to the discourse procedures of neutrality. Hence, while these procedures do not guarantee a benign hearing of interviewers’ turns, they can be useful as a second-order defense against overt criticisms should they arise. This supports Tuchman’s (1972) claim that the practices associated with objectivity perform a crucial defensive function. In news interviews, such a defense is useful not only to protect against libel and other formal attacks, but also to respond to informal criticisms arising within the interview itself.

The practices examined here are responsive to the divergent normative expectations

placed on interviewers' behavior. There is a long-standing controversy among journalists concerning the proper place of source accounts in the construction of news (Roshco, 1975:39-57; Schudson, 1980:160-95). Some hold that in the absence of some special reason for doubt, the statements of authoritative spokespersons may be used as a basis for generating news content. Indeed, it is generally seen as objective to ground each contentious assertion in an authoritative source (Tuchman, 1972). But it is also recognized that sources are interested human beings who may be selective or misleading in their remarks. Hence, it has also been argued that source accounts should not be accepted at face value; a properly objective reporter should attempt to independently assess their validity or at least seek out contrasting perspectives. This controversy persists in the discourse about news interviewing, although in somewhat different terms. Some insiders, such as Robert MacNeil, hold that the interviewer's primary job is to enable prominent spokespersons to communicate their views (MacNeil, 1982:310; Donahue, 1984). Yet the opposite point of view has been expressed by Sam Donaldson (1987) and Ted Koppel (in Alter, 1985), who stress the need for more critical and adversarial forms of interviewing (see also Nix, 1974).

But the analysis need not end with the observation that interviewers experience role strain. This paper has begun to describe the specific practices through which, in interaction, interviewers design and assemble their actions so as to manage the conflicting demands placed upon them. The procedures examined here enable interviewers to perform the complex task of being interactionally "adversarial" while remaining officially "neutral," that is, to introduce viewpoints that contradict those of the interviewees, not as a matter of personal expression, but as a way of further soliciting interviewees' own views. It is by means of these procedures that interviewers can sustain the accountability of their conduct before a large and diverse array of critical observers.

These practices are not unique to the news interview context. At least some of them appear in other social settings, including informal conversation (cf. Goffman, 1981; Maynard, 1984:55-76). This is no doubt because speakers in a variety of situations may want to adopt a neutral posture, and the procedures outlined here would seem to be generally useful for this purpose. Hence, these should be regarded as context-free devices (Sacks et al., 1974:699-700) for accomplishing a generic attribute of social action. But the fact that they are used pervasively in the news interview speaks to the manner in which these general practices can be adapted and specialized to maintain a neutral stance for professional journalistic purposes.

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