From talk to text: newspaper accounts of reporter–source interactions

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If there is one truism in contemporary media research, it is that news stories are assembled in large measure from the observations and accounts of legitimated institutional sources. But what has been less fully appreciated is the fact that source accounts are frequently produced through forms of spoken interaction. Recently, however, researchers have begun to investigate the interactional organization of various newsworthy forms of talk including news interviews (Clayman, 1988, 1989; Clayman and Whalen, 1988–89; Greatbatch, 1986a, 1986b, 1988; Heritage, 1985; Jucker, 1986; Schegloff, 1988–89), congressional hearings (Molotch and Boden, 1985; Halkowski, 1988), and political oratory (Atkinson, 1983, 1984a, 1984b; Grady and Potter, 1985; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986).[1] This research calls attention to the interactive character of much news source material, and raises the question of how such material is processed and incorporated into finished news stories on television and in print. For instance, little is currently known about quoting practices, and in this regard several basic questions remain unanswered. When do source quotations preserve the local interactional context in which a given statement was originally spoken? Insofar as it is preserved, what additional information is made available to the audience, and how might it be used by them to make sense of the focal statement?

This paper will begin to answer these questions for the case of newspaper accounts of reporter–source interactions. When newswriters incorporate interview and press conference material into their stories, they commonly report only the public figure's remarks, even though these are frequently elicited by some reporter's question. Yet sometimes the preceding question is preserved (either reproduced verbatim, paraphrased, or

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referred to), and on occasion even longer stretches of talk are reported. The aim of this paper is to determine what makes a question quotable, and to specify the impact that quoted questions have on the sense and import of subsequent political speech. In essence, I will show that by reporting temporally unfolding sequences of talk rather than single statements, newswriters are putting the public figure's interactional conduct and demeanour on display before the audience of newsreaders, rather than merely the content of their remarks. This can have major consequences for what audience members may eventually make of the viewpoints and policies that the speaker is attempting to express. Moreover, I will argue that exhibiting interactional conduct through such quotation sequences, rather than describing it in vernacular terms, is one means by which reporters can defensibly maintain a formally objective or 'objectivistic' (Robinson and Sheehan, 1983) stance.

To focus on such matters is to treat the organization and intelligibility of news discourse as a topic of interest in its own right. This departs from prevailing approaches to the language of news, where such matters tend to be subordinated to an overriding interest in ideology. Hence, linguistic choices such as the selection of alternative lexical items (e.g. 'terrorist' versus 'freedom fighter') and the selection of syntactic structures (e.g. the use of the passive voice) are generally of interest only insofar as they operate as vehicles for wider ideological and societal reproduction (e.g. Davis and Walton, 1983; Glasgow Media Group, 1980; Hartley, 1982: 63–74; Kress, 1983, 1985; Pisarek, 1983; Trew, 1979a, 1979b). While some have cautioned against the reification of meaning implicit in this approach (e.g. Hall, 1982: 79–80; Harris, 1988), most researchers tend to presume that there is an identity between particular linguistic forms and corresponding ideological meanings, such that these forms can be used as an index of the world view brought to the news by reporters and reproduced in audience members. Correspondingly, research has focused on discrete units of discourse at the level of the sentence, while larger intersentential levels of organization have been overlooked (but see van Dijk, 1988). This focus creates methodological difficulties for any attempt to attribute ideologies to newswriters on the basis of their linguistic choices. Whatever their ideological predispositions, newswriters are in the first instance engaged in constructing coherent narratives. Hence, any particular linguistic choice may be guided, not by ideological factors, but by more local concerns internal to the development of the narrative. Hence, as others have observed (e.g. Harris, 1988), reporters' ideologies cannot be mapped onto isolated linguistic choices in a straightforward manner, at least not without a deeper understanding of the intrinsic structure and organization of news discourse.

Parallel difficulties arise with respect to the effect that linguistic forms are presumed to have on audiences. The studies cited above tend to view

such forms as bearing preconstituted ideological meanings which impose themselves upon audience members. What is left out is a serious consideration of the reader's active contribution in fashioning whatever sense the message is then taken to have. This is perhaps to be expected in analyses with a textual focus, but it is not inevitable; the role of the audience is sidestepped in part by focusing on isolated linguistic units rather than units in relation to their contexts. But just as newswriters' linguistic choices can have local textual rather than exogenous ideological determinants, such choices are also analysed and interpreted by audience members in the light of their location within the surrounding discourse. It is a well-established principle that the meaning of verbal, gestural, and other communicative displays depends upon the contexts in which they are used (e.g. Garfinkel, 1967; Wittgenstein, 1958; see Levinson, 1983 for an overview), including the context of other such displays (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973; Schegloff, 1984). Hence, particular linguistic forms may not have the unitary ideological effects that researchers presume, for their specific sense awaits the reader's own analysis of each item in relation to its context, a prominent aspect of which is the environing narrative discourse.

The primary contribution of language-oriented media research has been the exploration of a largely unexamined empirical domain; the formal properties of news discourse, as opposed to its manifest contents, are now receiving significant attention. But by treating discrete discourse units as vehicles for ideological reproduction, researchers have neglected a more general and analytically prior issue: to describe how the sense of such items, *whether ideological or not*, is methodically achieved and constituted by parties to the mass communication process. In pursuit of this aim, research must move beyond single sentences to examine how items are actually used by newswriters in the course of constructing coherent stretches of discourse. The linguistic item-in-its-narrative-context should replace the isolated item as the primary unit of analysis. The present paper examines the 'embedding' of source statements in their interactional contexts as a way of gaining access to fundamental and heretofore unnoticed forms of discourse organization.

First, however, an analytic framework will be proposed for studying the structure of interactionally generated news-source quotations. This framework will then be applied to an empirical case: newspaper accounts of reporter–source interactions.

The structure of interactionally generated source quotations

Newspaper and television news stories regularly contain verbatim or paraphrased statements from a variety of sources. While some of these are derived from written texts, many are culled from interactional situations,

with interviews, press conferences, public speeches, and congressional hearings being prominent examples. In a study of front page stories in the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, Leon Sigal (1973: 121) found that approximately 70 percent acquired their information through such oral channels (see also Epstein, 1973: 154–63; and Gans, 1979: 138–42).

Reporters have two general options for incorporating interactionally generated statements into their stories. They may quote single statements in isolation from the ongoing stream of interaction in which they were produced. For the case of reporter–source interactions, this seems to be the more common way of operating (Cohen, 1987: 78, 102; Geis, 1987: 114). But reporters also have the option of including aspects of the interactional context of source statements; for example, the preceding utterance to which it was addressed, or the subsequent response it elicited from other parties to the encounter. In accounts of political speeches, for example, Atkinson (1984a: 132–43) found that newspaper and television coverage frequently includes, in addition to the speaker's statement, some reference to the audience's response to it, which may involve the occurrence and duration of applause. Similarly, quotations from interviews and press conferences may reproduce an interviewee's statement together with the question that elicited or followed it.

It might be tempting to view the latter option as more 'accurate' or 'professional'. Rather than taking statements out of context and perhaps distorting them, reporters should retain the context of talk to provide a more complete picture of what was said. For a variety of reasons, however, this view is overly simplistic. Any verbatim or paraphrased quotation, unless it reproduces the entire interaction, will necessarily involve some selection from it. Hence, even when the actions surrounding a given statement are reproduced (e.g. the question that preceded a given answer), the larger interactional context of *those* actions remains unavailable. Furthermore, while a statement may be quoted in isolation, this does not necessarily mean that it has been fundamentally distorted. The intended sense and import of source statements may be clarified through the reporter's narrative; they need not use the surrounding talk to accomplish this task.

Accordingly, these should not be understood as 'bad' and 'good' methods of quoting, but structural alternatives available to reporters employing interactionally generated information. The analytic problem is then to examine when one option is chosen rather than the other, and to explicate the consequences that follow from each alternative. An initial observation that can be made in this regard is that when the statement of a single speaker is reproduced, it is presented as *a detached commentary on some state of affairs*. Alternatively, by preserving aspects of the local interactional context, a given statement is presented as *an action produced within an ongoing course of social interaction*. The latter option can have

major implications for the sense of the focal statement, for what it can be understood to be 'doing'. Research on spoken interaction has repeatedly demonstrated that turns at talk are produced and understood with reference to the ongoing sequence of actions in which they are embedded (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973; Schegloff, 1984; Heritage, 1984: 242). Hence, where an utterance occurs in the course of talk, and how it is co-ordinated with that talk, endows it with many subtle and nuanced layers of meaning, not only in terms of the semantics of specific words but also the social actions being visibly accomplished in and through them.

An important resource for analysing quotation sequences can be found within the tradition of conversation analysis. Conversation analysis has been concerned with describing the 'sequential' or turn-by-turn organization of naturally occurring spoken interaction.[2] This research has generated a corpus of detailed knowledge about sequential patterns characteristic of ordinary talk, and the interpretive consequences that follow when speakers pursue different courses of action in given sequential contexts. These findings can serve as a resource for analysing quotation sequences because they suggest how particular actions may be analysed and understood when they appear in their sequential contexts in print. Moreover, relevant conversation analytic research can point the investigator toward non-trivial details of conduct that are likely to be noticed and recognized by readers. If prior research has shown that particular interactional moves are understood and responded to by parties in face-to-face interaction, then the investigator has a methodological warrant for proposing that these moves are apt to be similarly understood by the mass media audience. The textual analysis can thus be grounded in findings from the study of ordinary language use in naturalistic settings of interaction. This approach is unlike other forms of research with an exclusively textual focus, as well as audience research that relies primarily on subjects' self-reports. It proceeds from the assumption that 'an adequate understanding of how texts are produced and responded to may remain elusive so long as the issue is pursued without making close comparative reference to how talk works' (Atkinson, 1983: 230).[3]

In the following, I will use the findings and insights of conversation analysis to illuminate the structure of quotation sequences in newspaper accounts of reporter–source interactions. Whenever possible, I have taken steps to ground my analytic claims in established knowledge about the organization of talk. I have also combined descriptions of sources' conduct with suggestions about the divergent moral judgements that readers can make on the basis of such conduct. The analysis is based on 100 articles from a variety of newspapers, with the bulk obtained from the *Los Angeles Times* during 1986 and 1987. Articles were selected if they contained interview or press conference material, and this was determined when an article included (1) some explicit reference to the fact that the source

statement was made in an interview or press conference, or (2) a quotation containing at least one complete question–answer sequence. The latter suggests that a reporter–source interaction is taking place, at least when trials, hearings, and other forms of interrogation can be effectively ruled out.

Some functions of quoted questions

As forms of talk, interviews and press conferences consist largely of questions and answers allocated to reporters and their sources, respectively. Yet newspaper accounts of these encounters often quote answers or their components without the questions that elicited them. For example:

[1] [*Los Angeles Times* 24/6/86: I,1]

Flexible on 'Star Wars' — Reagan

. . . In an Oval Office interview with the *Times*, the President talked optimistically about eventually reaching an arms reduction agreement.
→ 'Whatever way is necessary to get an agreement, we'll do', he declared.

This pattern might be expected, given that the manifest aim of such encounters is to solicit the views of prominent spokespersons. Why, then, are reporters' questions sometimes preserved in the printed account? One obvious explanation has to do with potential ambiguities within the source's statement; as a general principle, statements can be semantically ambiguous when considered apart from the interactional contexts in which they were originally spoken (Schegloff, 1984). Statements can, of course, be clarified by other means, such as summarizing or paraphrasing what is being said and meant; in the previous example an initial paraphrase serves to clarify the verbatim quotation that follows. Nevertheless, quoted questions can also perform this disambiguating function. Consider the following.

[2] [*Los Angeles Times* 17/12/86: I,24]

Warned Casey 3 Times on Iran Funds, Furmark Says

(01) . . . When asked about his knowledge of the arms deals, Furmark said,
(02) 'I knew what was going on in a general sense'.

Here a paraphrased question (at line 01) provides for the subsequent statement's intelligibility (02) by indicating that it concerns 'arms deals'.

But in addition to semantic clarification, the practice of quoting the question also serves a variety of more specialized communicative functions that cannot be so easily performed by other means. Questions are unique

in their power to define adjacent statements as actions produced in interaction with others; a variety of more specific meanings can thus be conveyed as a consequence.

1. The statement as an 'answer': exhibiting an external impetus for its occurrence

In news interviews and press conferences, public figures are formally restricted to the task of answering reporters' questions. Yet most people presumably recognize — and empirical research confirms (Greatbatch, 1986a) — that politicians and other spokespersons have a certain amount of leeway in this regard, for they are sometimes able to introduce other unsolicited material into their turns. Moreover, the press conference format usually provides spokespersons with the opportunity to make an initial statement before opening the floor to questions. This has implications for how isolated statements may be understood by readers. In the light of their own common-sense knowledge of these encounters, readers may analyse such statements as having been offered 'voluntarily' (see example [1] above). And of course it is likely that many other readers will not even notice or attend to the fact that a quoted statement was originally spoken in an interview or press conference situation. Insofar as this obtains, isolated statements can be analysed as voluntary actions undertaken in accordance with speakers' own internal motivations.

In contrast, when some reference is made to the preceding question, it becomes evident that the statement is in fact an 'answer', and was thus elicited rather than volunteered. This is highlighted in the following example.

[3] [*Los Angeles Times* 26/11/86: I,14]

Acted Correctly on Iran, Reagan Says

→ . . . Under questioning at the press conference, Reagan said that the decision to withhold information about the operation from Congress was legal.

'I was not breaking any law in doing that', he said. 'It is provided for me to do that. I have the right under the law to defer reporting to Congress . . .'

Here Reagan is characterizing the practice of withholding information from Congress as legal and proper. By pointing out that this was said 'under questioning', the newswriter calls attention to the fact that the legality issue was not raised by the President as part of his own agenda, but was broached by an unspecified reporter at the press conference. (Compare this with the free-standing statement quoted in example [1] above.) Notice that the substance of the question is not preserved here;

what is preserved, and is thus treated as significant, is the simple fact that a question prompted the President to say what he said.

So one basic job that questions can perform is to exhibit an external impetus for the source's statement. The significance of this externality is that it alters the extent to which a statement can be heard to reflect the source's own interests and motivations. Since any question establishes a topical agenda to which the speaker should respond (Greatbatch, 1986a), quoted questions indicate that the topic at hand was raised by someone other than the source. Specifically, a reporter is implicated as responsible for the current line of talk.

But while quoted questions show that the general topic was imposed externally, the source's statement may nevertheless be transparently self-interested in character. In the previous example the President's answer works to defend the propriety of his actions and can thus be regarded as self-serving, even though he did not raise this issue himself. However, in other instances statements are portrayed specifically as having been extracted in the face of resistance; as something the source was pushed to admit contrary to his or her preferences. This occurs when, in addition to the question, the source's sequentially prior statement is also preserved, resulting in a three-part sequence (statement + question + answer) where the third part can be seen as a reluctant equivocation or 'backdown' from a previous position (cf. Maynard, 1985).

[4] [*Los Angeles Times* 16/12/86: I,22]

Panel Calls Regan; He Will Testify

1→ . . . Speakes also declared of North and the President's former assistant for national security affairs, Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter: 'We would like for them to testify.'

2→ But when asked whether — as he has stated in the past — such testimony should be consistent with their constitutional rights against self-incrimination, Speakes added:

3→ 'Well, they would have to take the advice of their attorney, of course.'

Speakes' initial bold assertion that 'we would like for them to testify' (at arrow 1) is challenged in terms of its constitutionality (2), after which Speakes takes a position that is much more cautious by comparison (3). Here the third part is recognizable as a 'backdown' in the context of the previous parts. In other instances, the 'backdown' character of the final statement may be made more prominent by characterizing it as having been 'conceded' or 'admitted' in response to the intervening question (italicized below). This way of characterizing the source's talk contrasts with unmarked terms like 'said' or 'declared' (e.g. extract [4] arrow (1) above) by implying that the statement diverges from a previously expressed position.

[5] [*Los Angeles Times* 15/11/86: I,12]

Administration Aides Offer Conflicting Accounts of Iran Deal

1→ . . . Regan denied that the President had violated his own policy of opposing the shipment of arms to a terrorist country.
2→ But, *under questioning, he conceded* that
3→ Reagan 'decided to bend his policy in a minimal amount in order to . . . establish a relationship with Iran.'

These interactional sequences thus reveal more than an external impetus for the general topic addressed in the final statement. They also show that the statement *in its specifics* was produced 'reluctantly', contrary to the speaker's first instincts.

This has a number of further interpretive implications for the statement and its speaker. First, the final statement can be seen as 'truer' than the preceding version. The initial version, representing one person's partial, subjective, and perhaps interested point of view, is subjected to an adversarial line of questioning by an independent party, and is then qualified or revised. The resulting sequence of actions resembles a kind of dialectic in miniature, in which both parties are shown to have contributed to the production of a final version that now appears relatively closer to the truth.

A further consequence of this action sequence is that it provides readers with resources with which to make warranted inferences about the source's moral character and underlying motives. On the basis of this information, readers may choose to view the source as less than fully candid. The final admission is made, but only reluctantly, and is a qualification of a previous assertion which can now be seen to have been somewhat inaccurate, overstated, or misleading. If the final statement had been allowed to stand on its own, the source would appear comparatively frank and forthcoming, willing to say things that do not simply reflect a predictable official line. In its interactional context, however, it becomes apparent that the source had to be prodded or pushed to this point. Accordingly, a more evasive or perhaps slightly dishonest persona is exhibited, and readers are invited to make inferences — supportive or damaging — about the motives that might lie behind such conduct.

Of course, these characterological and motivational inferences could be made explicit by the newswriters. The author of example [5] could have straightforwardly asserted that Regan was evasive and misleading in his remarks, and was presumably attempting to suppress the administration's hypocritical conduct regarding Iran. However, such assertions would be contentious and objectionable to many readers, and could threaten the reporter's objective stance. But by reproducing strategic interactional sequences from the encounter, journalists can avoid making such conten-

tious assertions, while providing readers with the behavioural details from which they can arrive at such conclusions 'for themselves'.

II. Relating the answer to the preceding question: the reply as prompt or delayed, confirmatory or rejecting

We have seen that quoted questions can function to make statements recognizable as 'answers', and thus as elicited rather than volunteered. A variety of additional meanings can simultaneously be conveyed because readers will analyse and interpret each answer in the light of the specific relationship that obtains between it and the preceding question.

1. The timing of the response. One way that answers are related to or co-ordinated with prior questions is in terms of their sequential timing. When newswriters incorporate the preceding question, they then have the option of noting whether the source replied quickly or after some hesitation. And this can have significant interpretive implications. Consider the following.

[6] [*Los Angeles Times* 15/12/86: I,27]

Both Political Parties Courting Him
State Sen. Kopp — He's a Man of Independent Means

. . . So far, the courtship has been all one-way. Asked what he owed Senate GOP leader Nielsen and other Republican leaders who donated to his campaign,
→ Kopp *replied without pause* 'Friendship, which I give with pleasure.'

The question here is seeking to determine whether Senator Kopp, the only officially non-partisan member of the California State Senate, has become unofficially beholden to Republicans who contributed to his campaign. In his reply, Kopp claims that he owes only 'friendship' to his contributors, and the newswriter points out that this was spoken 'without pause'. This simple temporal detail makes the reply seem particularly genuine and sincere. To understand why this is so, a brief discussion of the conversation analytic concept of *preference* is in order (for a more elaborate discussion, see Heritage, 1984: 265–80).

Conversational activities frequently occur in standardized pairs, such as questions and answers, invitations and acceptances/declinations, assessments and agreements/disagreements, and so on. It should be evident from this list that many of these paired actions have alternative second pair parts, and research has shown that these are ordinarily produced in different ways. Agreements, for example, are regularly produced directly and without delay, while disagreements tend to be delayed by various intervening items, including pauses preceding their delivery (Pomerantz,

1984). These prompt/delayed turn formats have been termed *preferred* and *dispreferred*, respectively, and they characterize the manner in which various alternative second pair parts get produced. Moreover, when these 'normal' turn formats are not implemented, their absence is noteworthy and inferentially elaborative. Thus, in invitation sequences, acceptances are ordinarily produced in the preferred format; so when an acceptance is delayed, it appears 'reluctant' or 'half-hearted', and can convey the impression that the party would 'really' rather decline (cf. Heritage, 1984: 268). A similar equivocality is exhibited when other ordinarily preferred responses are delayed (e.g. agreements, request grantings, etc.).

To return to our example, the reporter's initial utterance is grammatically formatted as a question, but it is mildly accusatory in its import (cf. Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Rosenblum, 1987), for it raises the possibility that Kopp's avowed independence has been compromised. The accusation of covert political indebtedness establishes the relevance of either a denial or an admission; Kopp chooses to deny the accusation, thus producing a response that is ordinarily preferred (Atkinson and Drew, 1979: 112–14). By noting that Kopp replied 'without pause', the newswriter indicates that this particular denial was indeed produced in the normal preferred turn format. If Kopp had paused before responding, and if this were noted in the quotation, his denial would appear suspect. The uncharacteristic delay could generate a range of inferences: that the possibility of political indebtedness had enough truth in it to require serious deliberation before responding, or that Kopp had to manufacture a denial to replace a truthful — and damaging — admission. Given this interpretive framework, the writer can convey the strength and sincerity of Kopp's words by pointing out that he replied 'without pause'.

2. *The response as confirmatory or rejecting.* In spite of its clear informativeness, newswriters do not refer to the timing of source responses very often. Example [6] is the only instance of this sort in the present data. A more common way that answers can be related to preceding questions is in terms of agreement or disagreement. Some questions — particularly of the yes/no variety — have propositions embedded within them, which the recipient is asked to confirm or reject. These might be termed 'interrogative proposals' in that they function to nominate or put forth some point of view in an interrogative format, resulting in 'answers' that have at least some of the properties of agreement/disagreement (Sacks, 1987). Accordingly, when such questions are quoted in newspaper accounts, the subsequent statement becomes recognizable, not merely as an 'answer', but as an answer that either confirms or rejects a reporter's proposal. And as we shall see, this has the consequence of conveying for readers something of the atmosphere or tenor of the encounter as it unfolded.

A straightforward example of a confirmatory response is the following.

[7] [*Los Angeles Times* 2/3/87: I,1]

Muskie Amazed at President's Memory Lapses

. . . When asked if Reagan's failure to recall important meetings involving the Iranian arms-sale policy worried him, Muskie said: 'Of course that worries us. I mean, to have the President not focusing and not recalling what he did on these significant occasions is worrisome.'

Here a question is paraphrased as suggesting that the President's memory lapses might be worrisome to Muskie, a proposal that Muskie confirms strongly (note the 'of course' preface). In contrast, the source's response may also reject or counter the proposal embedded within the question.

[8] [*Los Angeles Times* 3/11/86: I,1]

Secret Talks, New Flexibility Led to Release

. . . Asked whether the Administration was giving in to the kidnappers' demands, he replied: 'Absolutely not'.

If the writer had paraphrased only the source's statement in either of these instances, the result would have simply contained the source's positive (as in example [7]) or negative (as in [8]) declaration. However, in its sequential context it becomes evident that each was said to either confirm or reject a reporter's interrogative proposal.

The immediate consequence of this quoting pattern is that it provides readers with information about the local atmosphere of the encounter, in particular its co-operative or adversarial character (cf. Maynard, 1985). Interrogative proposals that are subsequently confirmed can be seen, at least in retrospect, as friendly or co-operative; that is, they depict the reporter as helping the source to make his or her point by formulating propositions that the source finds agreeable (cf. Heritage, 1985: 106–8). In some instances, the asker of subsequently confirmed queries can be seen to have even done part of the sources' own rhetorical work for them by selecting some of the words used to get the point across. For example, in [7] above the term 'worried' was chosen by the reporter to characterize Muskie's feelings about the President's poor memory, and Muskie strongly confirms this characterization, using variations of 'worried' twice in his reply. As a consequence, Muskie was freed from having to search for an appropriate descriptor himself. In other confirmatory instances, the source may take the reporter's version further by intensifying or upgrading it. In [9] below 'zoo' is upgraded by the source to 'circus', and in [10] 'been aware' is upgraded to 'knew more about it than we did'. Both responses are said to have been accompanied by laughter (italicized), thus accentuating the strength of the confirmation.

[9] [*Los Angeles Times* 12/12/86: I,26]

Goetz Trial Jury Selection to Begin Today

. . . Asked if the trial might be a 'zoo' because of the intense media interest, Baker *laughed and said*: 'A circus would be more like it. A zoo connotes just animals. A circus connotes everything.'

[10] [*Los Angeles Times* 12/12/86: I,19]

Inquiry Raising Questions Over Role of CIA and Casey

. . . Asked whether Casey might have been aware that some of the contras' financial support came from Saudi Arabia, one rebel official *laughed and said*: 'Casey knew more about it than we did.'

In short, subsequently confirmed interrogative proposals are co-operative in character, and their preservation in print functions to exhibit the friendliness of the encounter at that point.

In direct contrast, subsequently rejected proposals (e.g. [8] above) can be regarded as adversarial in that they put forth assertions that the source must negate or rebut in order to develop his or her point. Moreover, such proposals often have a criticizing or accusatory character, as when they concern some transgression on the part of the public figure. For instance, in extract [8] the proposal concerned 'whether the Administration was giving in to the kidnappers' demands', which is commonly regarded as a reprehensible thing to do, particularly when formulated as 'giving in'. Hence, by rejecting this proposal, the speaker is defending the Administration against a damaging accusation. The adversarial quality of these exchanges may be exhibited through the speakers' words alone, as in extract [8] above; the writer of that story leaves it up to the reader to see the sequence of utterances as having a discordant character. But this quality may be made more prominent by characterizing the source's response in discordant terms (in contrast to unmarked terms like 'said' or 'replied'; see [7–8] above). Consider the following.

[11] [*Los Angeles Times* 10/12/86: I,20]

Cabinet Officers in Europe to Ease Allies' Fears

→. . . He *sharply rejected* suggestions that the matter reflects disarray in US foreign policy.

'I think what you have here is a strategic initiative, some parts of which didn't go as orginally planned. . . . This is one very small element of the total foreign policy of the United States.'

By characterizing the source's statement as a 'rejection' of the 'suggestion' regarding disarray in US foreign policy, the writer calls attention to its disagreeable character and places it in the prominent turn-initial position.

Moreover, the 'sharply' descriptor conveys a sense of the source's emotional state as he produced the rebuttal; some irritation, annoyance, or mild anger is implied. It thus becomes evident that the encounter is discordant at this point, and the source is being put on the defensive.

By taking this quoting strategy a little further, the source's position can be made to appear under attack in a more general sense. This is accomplished by noting that a critical issue was raised repeatedly during the press conference, resulting in the same rejecting answer.

[12] [*Los Angeles Times* 18/11/86: I,8]

Waite Denies Knowing of Arms for Iran

. . . There have been hints that Waite may have been used by Washington officials as a convenient cover to conceal the secret US–Iranian arms transfers.

→ *Under repeated questioning*, he denied prior knowledge of any such deal.

[13] [*Los Angeles Times* 13/8/86: I,1]

Reagan Supports Western Effort to Help South Africa

→. . . *Responding to repeated questions* about his politics, the President defended his continued refusal to impose strong sanctions against the Botha government and labeled the African National Congress 'the one group' in the country that favors such sanctions.

Readers can see, on the basis of this information, that numerous reporters have converged to raise similar questions. Accordingly, the source's rejecting answers are shown to represent a viewpoint that is under attack, not merely within a single exchange, but in the more global sense of being the object of a barrage of critical questions.

While the immediate consequence of this quoting strategy is to convey a sense of the tenor of the encounter, further understandings will depend in part upon what readers choose to make of this information in the light of their own prior knowledge of public affairs. Readers may, for example, choose to see the reporter's question as a reasonable response to the intrinsic nature of the public figure's position. From this perspective, friendly or co-operative questions indicate that the source's position is essentially valid and proper; conversely, adversarial questions stand as evidence that the source's viewpoint is somehow problematic (e.g. incorrect, immoral, or whatever) and thus worthy of cross-examination. To a reader operating in this manner, then, quoted questions reflect on the character of the public figure's position, either bolstering it or depicting it as objectionable. But other readers may see such questions as indicative of reporters' ideological biases. Within this framework, friendly or hostile questions have little to do with the validity or propriety of the source's position, but are a product of the reporter's own predisposition to be

supportive or critical. The actual analysis of any particular reader will probably depend on their beliefs and attitudes regarding the public figure, media personnel, and the issue under discussion. But whatever the outcome, such analyses are set into motion by question–answer sequences that convey basic information regarding the local atmosphere of the encounter as it unfolded.

III. Nonanswers

Reporters' questions also figure prominently in accounts of nonanswers. Newswriters have various ways of showing that a spokesperson 'did not answer', and these commonly involve some reference to the preceding question. For example, it may be overtly stated that the source 'refused' or 'declined' to comment on the inquired-about matter without actually reproducing the declination as it was spoken.

[14] [*Los Angeles Times* 22/11/86: I,31]

Twice Discussed Overture Toward Iran, Shultz Says

. . . Later, asked specifically whether he was present when a decision was made, Shultz declined to answer.

But rather than state that no answer was given, the writer may follow the question with a quote of whatever response it did receive (arrowed).

[15] [*Los Angeles Times* 19/11/86: I,18]

Carter, Ford Criticize Reagan for Arms Transfer

. . . Weinberger wrote 'this is absurd' across the document . . .
Asked to respond to Weinberger's action, Speakes said only,
→'I don't want to comment on any secret memo.'

And by preserving the question, even a mere silence or a nonverbal action such as a smile can become recognizable as a nonanswer (however implicitly communicative it might also be). For example:

[16] [*Los Angeles Times* 5/8/86: I,12]

Helms Accuses State Dept. Aide of Smear Tactics

. . . asked specifically whether the Senate Intelligence Committee's request for an FBI probe followed an appearance before the panel,
→Redman merely smiled enigmatically.

The nonanswering character of a smile is not intrinsic to it, but is made visible in part by virtue of its sequential position, subsequent to a question

(Schegloff, 1968). Note, though, that this is further exhibited in [16] by characterizing the smile as having an 'enigmatic' quality.

Finally, newswriters may indicate that although the source provided some information, it was less than a complete answer. For instance, in the following the speaker's minimal answer is quoted, after which it is noted that he 'refused to amplify'.

[17] [*Los Angeles Times* 4/8/86: I,4]

Baldridge Calls Vetoed Bill to Curb Imports a 'Job Loser'

. . . When asked why the United States does not serve notice on European producers that it will not match their subsidized sales as long as they continue, Baldridge said there had been 'private talks with the Europeans about this',

→but he refused to amplify.

Nonanswers appear with great frequency in accounts of interviews and press conferences. This might seem puzzling, since nonanswers by definition do not reveal any official information on the topic under discussion. But while they may not contain explicit declarations or pronouncements, they are informative precisely because of the interactional context of which they are a part. In the context of a particular line of questioning, a nonanswer can be suggestive regarding the source's motives for withholding information. We know from studies of talk in interaction that questions and answers constitute a tightly organized sequence, with answers following questions as a matter of course (Schegloff, 1968; Schegloff and Sacks, 1973). When an answer is not readily forthcoming, interactants notice its absence and will frequently take steps to account for the unexpected turn of events. Accordingly, it is reasonable to assume that when newsreaders witness a similar nonanswering action, they will also search for a way of understanding or accounting for it; in so doing, they may also make inferences about what the 'true' answer might have been.

As readers work to solve this puzzle, one resource that is available to them is the news text itself, which can contain clues suggestive of a solution. For example, the quotation will sometimes include the source's own account for not answering. This may involve a claimed lack of knowledge (as in [18]), or a more complex account such as protecting persons involved in the inquired-about matter (as in [19]).

[18] [*Los Angeles Times* 9/12/86: I,25]

Casey, Poindexter Misled Him About Arms Sale — Shultz

. . . When asked by reporters on the flight here if Casey and Poindexter had lied to him, Shultz said: 'I don't know what happened. Maybe they had

told it to stand down [discontinue] and it got started again. I don't know, I don't have the information.'

[19] [*Los Angeles Times* 12/12/86: I,18]

End Iran Secrecy, McFarlane Urges

. . . Administration officials have flatly refused comment on all matters surrounding the still-captive hostages, saying that any publicity could endanger the release and even the safety of remaining hostages.

Alternatively, the story may contain information that casts doubt on the source's account. A dramatic instance is the following, in which Reagan's explanation for not answering — he claimed he had lost his voice — is made to appear implausible. To be sure, the voiceless claim is manifestly unlikely, but the article goes to great lengths to demonstrate this.

[20] [*Los Angeles Times* 12/3/87: I,22]

(01) 'Voiceless' Reagan Meets Press
(02)
(03) Washington (AP) — for the second day in a row, President Reagan
(04) ducked questions from reporters on Wednesday by claiming he had lost
(05) his voice. However, a White House spokesman said Reagan had not
(06) lost his voice.
(07) As Reagan posed for pictures with congressional leaders around
(08) a table in the Cabinet Room, a reporter asked his view of a poll
(09) saying that two-thirds of Americans were skeptical about his
(10) explanation of the Iran-*contra* affair.
(11) 'I've lost my voice', the President said, offering the same
(12) explanation he had used to avoid questions on Tuesday.
(13) He repeated that statement when a reporter asked whether aid
(14) to the contras had been doomed by the Iran-*contra* affair.
(15) Reagan found his voice briefly when a reporter noted there were
(16) no women seated around the table. 'It's just our bad luck', he
(17) replied.
(18) White House spokesman Mark Weinberg, asked later if Reagan had
(19) lost his voice, said: 'No. His voice is fine.'

First, in the headline (01) the 'voiceless' term is put in quotation marks, which downgrades its facticity by portraying it as merely someone's interpretation of what happened (Tuchman, 1972). The lead sentence (03–05) goes on to characterize this as a mere 'claim', and implies that it was invoked strategically to 'duck questions' (04). The article then contains several bits of evidence to support this interpretation. First, after quoting the question-answer exchanges in which Reagan claimed to have lost his voice (07–14), the newswriter recounts a contradictory exchange in which Reagan 'found his voice briefly' (15–17). In addition, an insider is quoted as saying that Reagan's voice is actually fine (18–19). Notice that while all of this works to cast doubt on the President's account, no alternative account

is given beyond the suggestion that Reagan is 'ducking questions'; why he is doing so remains unexplicated.

Accounts of nonanswers may, however, go further to propose an alternative explanation derived from some other source, or to suggest what the source's 'truthful' answer might have been. The following is an account of an extended interview with Chief Justice Warren Burger. Burger was appointed to the court by Richard Nixon, yet the rulings of Burger's court facilitated Nixon's resignation. The article reports that the interviewer — Bill Moyers — asked Burger to comment on Nixon (03). He begins to respond, but 'stops abruptly' (04), after which there is a 'long, uncomfortable pause' (05). The story then reports an interpretation of the incident that Moyers offered later (09–14).

[21] [*Los Angeles Times* 9/7/86: IV,9]
(01) Burger's day in Moyers' Court
(02)
(03) . . . when asked for his personal reflections on Nixon,
(04) the Chief Justice begins tenuously, then stops abruptly.
(05) Then there is a long, uncomfortable pause, and an awkward shot
(06) of Burger nervously drumming his fingers on his chair. Finally,
(07) Moyers mercifully breaks the silence
(08) What are we to make of this puzzling sequence?
(09) 'He just stopped', Moyers said later. 'He just looked into
(10) the camera for a long time. I think that was his answer (about
(11) Nixon). I think that it's revealing that all this time later,
(12) that he cannot figure out what happened to the Nixon Presidency,
(13) that it was troubling to do what he did to bring down the
(14 President.'

In this instance, Moyers' interpretation focuses less on providing an explanation for the nonanswering action, and more on offering a conjecture as to what the unspoken answer might really be. As Moyers understands it, the silence is meaningful and revealing of Burger's actual feelings about Nixon, even though these are never overtly stated by Burger himself. This article thus provides readers with an interpretation of the nonanswer derived from someone other than the nonanswering party.

But even when no account or interpretation is offered within the story itself, readers may use their own common-sense knowledge of public affairs to construct plausible explanations for the spokesperson's nonanswering conduct. Depending on the reader's orientation, he or she may be predisposed to attribute worthy reasons to the action (e.g. to withhold judgement on a sensitive matter, to protect the safety of persons involved, to preserve national security, etc.), or more sinister motives (e.g. to conceal an unpopular, illegal, or immoral act for personal gain). In either case, such inferential work is 'triggered' when it becomes evident that the spokesperson did not answer, and that is achieved in part by locating the source's action in its interactional context.

Discussion

Journalists have a variety of methods for conveying what took place in an interview or press conference. Preserving what the public figure said, the manifest content of his or her remarks, is one such method. But they may also indicate *how* the source spoke in relation to the ongoing course of interaction in which they were involved. By preserving the sequential context of specific utterances — in particular, the immediately preceding question — newswriters can show that a given statement was elicited rather than offered voluntarily, that its speaker was initially evasive rather than forthcoming, that they responded quickly or after some hesitation, that they were confirming a supportive question or countering a challenging interrogation, or that they declined to answer altogether. These details of conduct are each made visible through concrete discourse arrangements that portray source statements as social actions produced in interaction with others, rather than abstract or detached propositions. Moreover, this basic information regarding the structure of the interaction can generate further understandings because it enables readers to construct warranted inferences regarding the character traits, motives, interests, role obligations, and other circumstantial factors which might lie behind the public figure's conduct.

Many of the quotation sequences examined in this paper show the source to be in some way *resisting* a line of questioning. Declining to answer the question, or rejecting what it proposes, or initially evading what it seeks, are common varieties of resistance. This pattern not accidental; quoted questions are particularly useful for conveying resistant conduct. Since questions create a sequential environment that strongly constrains the production of subsequent talk, quoting the question preserves just that environment in which the degree of 'interactional resistance' can be recognized and assessed by readers. Moreover, while the emphasis here has been on the consequences for the image of the public figure, there are also implications for the image of reporters and the news media that they represent. Quoted questions show that journalists are 'on the job', asking tough questions and pursuing evasive answers.

This analysis may partially explain why presidential press conferences and other high-level briefings continue to be of such interest to reporters and audiences alike. Public figures often reveal little that is new in the way of substantive policy or perspective. But even when the official line is utterly routine and stale, the dynamics of the interaction remain lively and fresh. How officials conduct themselves under questioning is perennially newsworthy.

The question–answer sequences examined here stand as an alternative to vernacular characterizations of the public figure's interactional conduct. In place of the sequence types outlined in this paper, newswriters could simply describe the source as being reluctant, evasive, misleading,

defensive, embattled, and so on. But descriptions of this sort rarely appear in newspaper accounts, and when they do they are restricted to a narrow range of contexts. Descriptive characterizations occasionally appear as attributive verbs within quotation sequences; instead of neutral or unmarked terms like 'said' or 'declared', newswriters sometimes use more descriptive verbs like 'conceded' or 'rejected'. But in these cases the sequence of talk is also preserved as evidence to support the characterization; newswriters do not usually allow such terms to stand on their own. While there are exceptions to this general principle, they tend to be restricted to the most visible and newsworthy encounters. Thus, newspaper accounts of formal presidential press conferences often contain a segment detailing the President's appearance and comportment.

[22] [*New York Times* 24/2/74: I,1]

> Nixon Asserts A Criminal Offense Is Required for an Impeachment; He Does Not Expect House to Act
>
> . . . While Mr Nixon appeared nervous as the news conference began and perspired profusely under the television lights set up in the White House East Room, he was more subdued and less feisty than he had been in similar appearances last fall.
>
> He spoke in slow, measured tones with the air of one resigned to discomfort and hostile questions.

But descriptions of this kind do not appear in accounts of most routine reporter–source interactions.

The restricted usage of action characterizations and descriptions can be understood as a strategy for maintaining a formally objective or objectivistic stance (cf. Robinson and Sheehan, 1983; Tuchman, 1972). Unlike straight quotations, vernacular characterizations of conduct are less tightly grounded in the details of concrete interactional events. As a consequence, they are open to counterinterpretation and criticism, and are thus vulnerable to the charge that the reporter's personal biases entered into the story. But reporters can convey details of conduct and comportment more convincingly by reproducing interactional sequences that instantiate the conduct in question; they can show, rather than tell, what took place. It is then left up to the newsreader to see how the source behaved by analysing their words in context, as a contribution to an ongoing course of interaction. As one journalism textbook puts it, reporters 'should not intervene to tell the reader how to think about the quote. . . . Always leave the reader to decide what the quote means' (Biagi, 1986: 133; see also Geis, 1987: 91–94). The discourse is thus organized to enable readers to 'see for themselves' what happened, so that they become implicated in whatever analysis is made of the statement at hand; this remains true even though the resources enabling them to arrive at an analysis were in part furnished by the reporter. This argument is

consistent with experimental research indicating that straight quotations are seen as more believable and objective than those containing 'strong' attributive verbs (Cole and Shaw, 1974). Hence, journalists can defensibly maintain an objectivistic stance by restricting their accounts to the 'hard facts' of the speech sequence itself.

It should be emphasized, however, that this does not amount to being objective in an absolute sense. While newswriters generally avoid using action characterizations, it is they who choose whether to make the contextual information available that enables readers to see how the sources conducted themselves. Moreover, each utterance examined here occurs within and is conceivably responsive to many distinguishable contexts; the local context of talk is only the most immediate. There are also those actions undertaken by persons who had no part in the present encounter, as well as other events and processes in the larger social world; sources are sometimes portrayed as responding to such exogenous happenings. Accordingly, to preserve the local sequential context represents a selection from among a range of alternatives. Note that there is no way for newswriters to avoid having to make editorial choices of *some* kind; even if they were to quote individual statements as detached *non sequiturs*, such that they do not appear to be responding to any environing actions or events, that is equally a decision with obvious interpretive implications.

These implications can, in turn, have larger political consequences. It is a fact of contemporary political life, as well as a fact of life in a far more general sense, that *what* people say is assessed and evaluated in the light of *how* they say it. Hence, as public figures attempt to present their viewpoints and policies to the audience at large, the kind of hearing that they receive will depend in part on further behavioural details that audience members have available to them. It might be tempting to try to fit these quoting practices into a theory of ideological reproduction, with the news media occupying centre-stage. Certainly reporters can attempt to 'inflect' official statements in specific ways, and thus further a particular world view through such editorial decisions. But it is important to remember that details of conduct do not inhere in the text as pre-existing matters of fact, waiting to impose themselves on unsuspecting readers. The text merely provides a set of particulars (e.g. statements and the questions that preceded them) out of which readers fashion whatever sense the message is then taken to have. Moreover, additional second-order understandings will be likely to vary quite fluidly across readers because, as we have seen, details of conduct can generate further characterological and motivational inferences which will be shaped by each reader's own existing knowledge of public affairs. Whatever the interpretive outcome, it will be collaboratively achieved by readers in conjunction with the text.

Accordingly, a media-centred theory of hegemony is difficult to sustain on the basis of these findings. However, this study does point the way to a

research agenda aimed at analysing what might be termed the *embedding practices* of newswriters: that is, the set of contexual resources invoked to provide for the specific sense of reported speech (see also Geis, 1987: 98–120). This paper has explored how one such resource — the local interactional context — can fulfil this function in quotations from one form of interaction: the reporter–source interrogation. Much remains to be discovered for this and other interactional forms (e.g. legislative sessions, courtroom trials, congressional hearings, political speeches, etc.). There are a variety of contexts exogenous to the immediate occasion of interaction; public figures may be shown to be responding to prior actions or events in the larger social world, or acting in anticipation of future events as they speak. A given statement may also be juxtaposed with that speaker's own previous statements on the matter, displaying consistency, evolution, or contradiction in his or her position. The challenge for research of this kind is to uncover the diversity of embedding practices and describe how they work; that is, to specify what additional information each makes available to the audience of newsreaders, and to explicate how readers can use this information as they go about the task of making sense of what was said and done. For this line of inquiry, findings derived from the naturalistic study of spoken interaction are a useful analytic and methodological resource. Taken together, embedding practices constitute fundamental journalistic tools-of-the-trade, for it is through them that reporters and their audiences jointly construct the sense and import of reported speech.

Notes

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1. For a review of recent research on the interactional foundations of mass media messages, see Heritage, Clayman and Zimmerman (1988).

2. For overviews of the methods, procedures and findings of conversation analytic research, see Heritage (1984: 233–92), Lee (1987) and Zimmerman (1988). A good sampling of recent research in this area can be found in Atkinson and Heritage (1984).

3. Atkinson (1983: 230–31), provides a rationale for using the analysis of talk as a resource for understanding texts (see also Levinson, 1983: 284–94 and Heritage, 1984: 238–40). As a species, human beings evolved the ability to speak long before they became literate, and each individual becomes a competent interactant before he or she learns to read and write. Since spoken interaction is both phylogenetically and developmentally primary, it is likely that the practices involved in producing and understanding texts are adapted from the primordial competences of talk,

rather than the reverse. Recently, some researchers have begun to use what is known about talk as a resource for textual analysis (Atkinson, 1983, 1984: 124–63; Geis, 1987: 78–120; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1986: 150–53; Lee, 1984; McHoul, 1978, 1982; Mulkay, 1985: 79–102, 1986).

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