

The Media, Culture & Society Series

Series editors: John Corner, Nicholas Garnham, Paddy Scannell,
Philip Schlesinger, Colin Sparks, Nancy Wood

The Economics of Television

The UK Case

Richard Collins, Nicholas Garnham and Gareth Locksley

Media, Culture and Society

A Critical Reader

edited by

*Richard Collins, James Curran, Nicholas Garnham,
Paddy Scannell, Philip Schlesinger and Colin Sparks*

Capitalism and Communication

Global Culture and the Economics
of Information

Nicholas Garnham, edited by Fred Inglis

Media, State and Nation

Political Violence and
Collective Identities

Philip Schlesinger

BROADCAST TALK

edited by

Paddy Scannell



SAGE Publications
London • Newbury Park • New Delhi

Chapter 1 and editorial arrangement © Paddy Scannell 1991
 Chapter 2 © Peter M. Lewis 1991
 Chapter 3 © John Corner 1991
 Chapter 4 © Steven E. Clayman 1991
 Chapter 5 © Sandra Harris 1991
 Chapter 6 © Greg Garton, Martin Montgomery and
 Andrew Tolson 1991
 Chapter 7 © Ian Hutchby 1991
 Chapter 8 © Martin Montgomery 1991
 Chapter 9 © Andrew Tolson 1991
 Chapter 10 © Graham Brand and Paddy Scannell 1991

First published 1991

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, transmitted or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without permission in writing from the Publishers.



SAGE Publications Ltd.
 6 Bonhill Street
 London EC2A 4PU

SAGE Publications Inc.
 2455 Teller Road
 Newbury Park, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
 32, M-Block Market
 Greater Kailash-I
 New Delhi 110 048

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Broadcast talk.—(Media, culture & society series)

I. Scannell, Paddy II. Series
 302.23

ISBN 0-8039-8374-3
 ISBN 0-8039-8375-1 pbk

Library of Congress catalog card number 91-052965

Contents

Transcription conventions	vi
Notes on contributors	vii
1 Introduction: the relevance of talk <i>Paddy Scannell</i>	1
2 Referable words in radio drama <i>Peter M. Lewis</i>	14
3 The interview as social encounter <i>John Corner</i>	31
4 News interview openings: aspects of sequential organization <i>Steven E. Clayman</i>	48
5 Evasive action: how politicians respond to questions in political interviews <i>Sandra Harris</i>	76
6 Ideology, scripts and metaphors in the public sphere of a general election <i>Greg Garton, Martin Montgomery and Andrew Tolson</i>	100
7 The organization of talk on talk radio <i>Ian Hutchby</i>	119
8 <i>Our Tune</i> : a study of a discourse genre <i>Martin Montgomery</i>	138
9 Televised chat and the synthetic personality <i>Andrew Tolson</i>	178
10 Talk, identity and performance: <i>The Tony Blackburn Show</i> <i>Graham Brand and Paddy Scannell</i>	201
Index	227

4

News Interview Openings: Aspects of Sequential Organization

Steven E. Clayman

When broadcast journalists and public figures come together to talk about current affairs on the air, they ordinarily do so within the framework of a news interview. The news interview has been the subject of increasing attention recently by social scientists who have sought to describe and analyse the conventional speaking practices that characterize this form of broadcast talk (e.g. Clayman, 1988, forthcoming; Greatbatch, 1986a, 1986b, 1988; Harris, 1986; Heritage, 1985; Heritage and Greatbatch, forthcoming; for an overview, see Heritage et al., 1988). It is now apparent that the interview, far from being a neutral conduit for the transmission of information and opinion, is in fact a strongly institutionalized genre of discourse that exerts a pervasive influence on the conduit of journalists and public figures, and on the manner in which they form their talk with one another.

Thus far, most analytical attention has been focused on interviewing practices associated with questioning and answering, and on the interactional and institutional consequences of that system for taking turns. But news interviews do not begin with questions and answers. The questioning is preceded by an introductory segment which presents an agenda for the interview and articulates it with relevant events of the day. This is a study of the opening segment in live television news interviews. The broad objective is to understand how openings are organized by way of utterly routine but previously unexamined language practices, and to determine what communicative tasks are accomplished through these practices.¹

In a variety of ways, the opening segment prefigures both the form and content of the interaction to follow. For example, interview openings have a sequential structure that differs from openings in more casual or 'conversational' interactions. These differences combine visibly to mark the encounter as something other than a spontaneously occurring interaction; more specifically, they help to make it recognizable as a prearranged interaction, one that is being orchestrated on behalf of the viewing audience. The first part of the chapter examines the basic sequential organization of news interview openings, and shows how it provides for the 'staged' quality that is such a familiar feature of this type of encounter.

The primary substantive task of the opening is to project an agenda for the interview, and to portray it as having been occasioned by some newsworthy

happening. Thus, openings propose a temporal and causal relationship between events outside the talk (prominent occurrences 'in the world') and the present occasion of talk (the occasion of the interview). This is plainly a way of exhibiting the interview's newsworthiness, but it also has implications for the manner in which both the worldly events and the interview's agenda are articulated. As we shall see, the agenda for discussion is characterized in terms fitted to the events that occasioned it. At the same time, the precipitating events are formulated in terms relevant to the interview toward which they are leading. Accordingly, any connection between the present interview and exogenous events is *achieved* through coherent referential and descriptive practices within the opening.

The analysis that follows has further implications for our understanding of the organizational constraints on the production of news. While institutional and ideological factors have attracted the most attention as determinants of news, news discourse has certain intrinsic organizational properties of its own, properties which exert an independent influence on the content of news. These implications will be elaborated further in the concluding discussion.

Data

The bulk of the data was drawn from two nightly news interview programmes in the United States: ABC News *Nightline* and *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* on PBS. Each programme was taped in three one-week blocks, for a total of thirty episodes consisting of an equal number (fifteen) of each programme. The weekly symmetry of these blocks is broken by the absence of one day of taping – a Wednesday – which was replaced by taping on the following Monday. For each programme, ten episodes were videotaped, while five were audiotaped only. A second set of materials was taken from the networks' major Sunday interview programmes: *Meet the Press* (NBC), *Face the Nation* (CBS), and *This Week with David Brinkley* (ABC). All three programmes were videotaped on one weekend. The resulting corpus contains fifty opening segments. Some additional materials were gathered on a more haphazard basis.

Particular openings have been transcribed and reproduced for illustrative purposes. The extracts exemplify patterned regularities that, unless otherwise noted, hold without exception throughout the entire corpus. While the central findings are based upon an analysis of the openings themselves, some background information on the institutional setting, obtained from ethnographic observations conducted at the studios of two news interview programmes, is also introduced.

The opening sequence

The only part of the interview that is explicitly addressed to the audience is the opening. In it the interviewer delivers his or her remarks directly to the camera, rather than addressing the interviewees or other programme per-

sonnel. Moreover, this stretch of talk has distinguishable components that regularly unfold in a fixed order of occurrence. This is not to say that specific openings are identical in structure; variations may be observed.² Yet underlying these differences is a formal sequential organization that remains constant across the programmes examined, and across a wide range of topics and interviewees. The sequence and its components are briefly outlined. This method of initiating a state of interaction is then contrasted with openings in ordinary conversation, and it is shown that the differences are related to the non-spontaneous or 'staged' character of interview encounters.

Headline

Pre-headline Interviewers start off by encapsulating some newsworthy item in a general statement or 'headline'. Before launching into the headline, however, interviewers sometimes produce a preliminary or 'pre-headlining' item that leads toward the headline by setting up a puzzle of some kind. In example [1] below this pre-headlining task is accomplished by posing a question (lines 01-02), the answer to which is projected in the subsequent headline as the agenda for the upcoming interview (lines 03-04). ('I' below denotes 'Interviewer.')

[1] [MacNeil/Lehrer 13 June 1985a]

- 01 I. How do authorities catch landlords or realtors who
02 discriminate against minorities?
03 There's an interesting proposal before Congress and
04 it's what we look at first tonight.

A preliminary puzzle may also be established by other means. For example, in extract [2] it is done through a series of provocative quotations (lines 01-04) which are initially unattributed, thereby posing a puzzle as to the author's identity. The solution is then provided immediately thereafter (05-07).

[2] [Nightline 3 June 1985]

- 01 I. His comment on feminists: 'Send those chicks back to the
02 kitchen where they belong.' On Walter Mondale: 'A jar of
03 jelly.' And on the press: 'It's ridiculous for them to
04 say they speak for the American People.'
05 Throughout the years Patrick Buchanan has always been
06 controversial, but now he holds one of the most sensitive
07 posts on the Reagan White House staff.

Pre-headlines are plainly designed to capture the audience's attention and focus it on the next item - the headline proper. While not uncommon, pre-headlines appear to be optional, for interviewers frequently begin immediately with the headline itself.

Headline Headlines are packaged in two alternative formats. In the case of the *news announcement*, the interviewer straightforwardly reports some news item. Announcements may refer to a discrete event from the recent past (as in [3] below) or the near future [4].

[3] [MacNeil/Lehrer 12 June 1985b]

- I. A major credit card forgery ring has been cracked by federal authorities.

[4] [MacNeil/Lehrer 11 June 1985a]

- I. Tomorrow the Reagan administration makes another stab at getting aid for the rebels or contras fighting the Sandinista government of Nicaragua.

A more general social trend, theme or state of affairs may also be announced.

[5] [Nightline 23 July 1985]

- I. Washington is split about what to do about South Africa and the debate is getting angrier.

Notice that the trend is marked as intensifying ('getting angrier').

The other major headlining format also involves the report of a news item, but in this case it is framed as a topic for discussion. These are termed *agenda projections*, for the news item is explicitly portrayed as the agenda to be addressed in the upcoming interview. This is usually accomplished by preceding the news item with a preface like 'We focus tonight on . . .' (italicized below).

[6] [MacNeil/Lehrer 10 June 1985a]

- I. *We begin our focus sections tonight* with a closer look at today's announcement that the United States will continue to observe the limits of the never-ratified SALT II arms control treaty.

[7] [MacNeil/Lehrer 12 June 1985a]

- I. *We focus first tonight on* the life and death of Karen Ann Quinlan, the young woman who became a symbol of one of the major issues of the 20th century, the right to die with dignity.

In [6] the embedded news item is a discrete event, while [7] contains a broader theme, but both are presented as topics to be discussed.

Agenda projections may also convey information about the agenda by identifying the participating interviewees. However, these are always used in conjunction with some other headlining device. For instance, in [8] identification of the interviewees (03-08) follows a pre-headline (01-02).

[8] [Nightline 24 July 1985]

- 01 I. What's been accomplished in what the United Nations has
02 labeled the Decade for Women?
03 From the UN conference in Nairobi we'll talk with the
04 head of the US delegation, Maureen Reagan, with the head
05 of the Greek delegation, Margaret Papandreou, American-born
06 wife of the prime minister of Greece. And also, joining us
07 from Alexandria, Egypt, Jihan Sadat, widow of Egypt's Anwar
08 Sadat.

This leads to the final observation about the headline segment, namely that it may be expanded to include multiple headlining devices.

[9] [Nightline 4 June 1985]

- 01 From the A-bomb of 40 years ago to the most sophisticated
02 undersea weaponry of today, what has motivated Americans
03 to steal US military secrets for the Soviet Union?
04 Good evening. I'm Ted Koppel in Washington and this is
05 *Nightline*.

- 06 Our topic, the Walker family spy case and its role in the
 07 continuing cloak and dagger war between the CIA and the KGB.
 08 Our guests include a former deputy director of the CIA, and
 09 from the federal penitentiary at Marion, Illinois,
 10 Christopher Boyce, the so-called Falcon of 'Falcon and the
 11 Snowman' fame, now serving 40 years for spying for the Soviets.

This elaborate segment contains a pre-headline (01-03), an agenda projection with an embedded event (06) and theme (07), and another agenda projection identifying the interviewees (08-11). Such combinations are especially common on *Nightline*, and appear to be connected with the fact that they are opening the telecast itself, as well as a specific interview within it. Accordingly, the host/interviewer and the programme title are also identified (04-05).

Story

After the headline comes a story segment that details relevant background information. This segment exhibits the most variation in length and organization, and may contain taped reports prepared earlier. Stories are examined in greater detail in later sections of this chapter. For now, it will suffice to observe that the transition from headline to story may be marked in a variety of ways. When the headline is an agenda projection, the transition is visible in the shift from a statement of 'what we are going to talk about' to a discussion of the events and circumstances themselves. In other instances (when the headline is a news announcement) the transition may be overtly stated (06).

[10] [MacNeil/Lehrer 11 June 1985b]

- 01 I. As we reported earlier, the Reverend Charles Stanley was
 02 re-elected president of the Southern Baptist Convention
 03 today in a political struggle that happened not in the
 04 world of politicians but in the ranks of the nation's
 05 largest Protestant denomination.
 06 Charlayne Hunter-Gault has our story. Charlayne?
 07 I2. Robin, it's been described as a holy war, but what it
 08 really is is a fight between different factions of
 09 Southern Baptists . . .

Overt story entry markers are generally used when the story segment is lengthy, or when it entails a shift to another interviewer (as in [10]) or to a taped segment.

Entry into the story may also be marked in more subtle ways, through shifts in verbal tense (usually from present to past) or temporal reference (usually from the near-present to the past), or through a movement from existing states of affairs to precipitating actions. The following illustrates a number of these markers.

[11] [MacNeil/Lehrer 26 July 1985b]

- I. And there is still no deal on the overall budget.
 → All week long there have been reports of pressure and talk and new offers and potential breakthroughs . . .

Lead-in

The next segment prepares for entry into the interview proper, and centres around the task of introducing the interviewees. It has two components.

Pre-introduction With occasional exceptions (see [15] below) introductions are generally preceded by an item that consists, minimally, of a preface such as the following.

[12] [MacNeil/Lehrer 22 July 1985a]

- I. We hear first from . . .

[13] [MacNeil/Lehrer 11 June 1985a]

- I. We pick up the debate now with . . .

These function to 'usher' the interviewees into the interaction. They may also convey advance information about the agenda at hand; in [13] for example, it is evident from the pre-introduction that the interview will take the form of a 'debate'. These same tasks may also be accomplished through more elaborate prefatory items such as the following, which provides advance information about the interviewee's identity preliminary to actually introducing her.

[14] [Nightline 26 July 1985]

- I. In a moment we'll be joined by American journalist Lynda Schuster, who for the past year and a half has been eyewitness to the overwhelming problems that Argentina now faces.
 (Commercial break.)
 I. With us now live in our Miami Bureau . . .

Extended pre-introductions of this sort are particularly common when the opening segment is interrupted by a commercial break. Then the pre-introduction functions as a 'teaser', enticing the audience to stay tuned.

Introduction In the final component of the opening segment, the interviewer identifies the guest interviewees to the audience. When multiple interviewees are present, they may all be introduced at this point; an alternative procedure is to limit the initial introduction to the first participant only, delaying the others until the point at which they are brought into the discussion. In either case introductions resemble the following (04-07), in which the interviewee's name is joined with other descriptive items.

[15] [MacNeil/Lehrer 24 July 1985b]

- 01 I. And that's one of the concerns that makes junk bonds as
 02 troubling to some members of Congress as they are on
 03 Wall Street.
 04 Senator Pete Domenici, Republican of New Mexico, is one of
 05 their most outspoken critics. He is the sponsor of legis-
 06 lation that would sharply reduce the use of junk bonds in
 07 hostile takeovers.
 08 He's with us tonight from Capitol Hill.
 09 Senator, what's the problem with using these things on
 10 takeovers?

This particular introduction is somewhat atypical in that it lacks a prefatory item. However, the last sentence of the story segment (01-03) implicitly prepares for the introduction by shifting the topic toward 'members of Congress'. Moreover, the 'ushering-in' task ordinarily done in the pre-introduction is here accomplished after the identification segment (08). At any rate, the end of the introduction marks the completion of the opening segment, after which comes the first question (09-10).

Implications: the news interview as a stage encounter

When interview openings are contrasted with interactional openings in more 'informal' settings, such as casual conversation (see Schegloff, 1968, 1979, 1986; Jefferson, 1980), three features stand out as distinctive. These features combine to *visibly mark* the encounter as having been prearranged for the benefit of the viewing audience. First, many of the canonical elements of conversational openings are absent. In particular, there is no preliminary process through which speakers ordinarily exhibit their availability and readiness to interact (Schegloff, 1968, 1986). The problem of achieving coordinated entry into talk is a general one, and may be resolved through a verbal summons and answer sequence (Schegloff, 1968) or, in face-to-face interaction, through additional non-verbal processes employing gaze and bodily orientation to move toward interactional readiness (cf. Schiffrin, 1977; Heath, 1984). However, in news interviews no such process is observable; when the parties initially appear on screen, their physical comportment indicates that they are already 'primed' to interact. This pre-existing availability and readiness can be understood in light of the fact that interview participants arrive at the studio or are placed before remote camera links prior to air time; hence, they have already been aligned as interactants. And since they initially appear ready to proceed, but do not actually begin talking until they are introduced to the audience, the interaction appears to viewers as one that has been set up in advance expressly for their benefit.³

The second difference concerns the identification process. Speakers ordinarily take steps to identify those with whom they are interacting; indeed, mutual identification (by verbal or non-verbal means) is regularly the first order of business in conversational encounters (Schegloff, 1979, 1986). While news interview openings retain an identification process, it is transformed. The process is addressed exclusively to the audience when the interviewer (who is commonly identified earlier in the programme) introduces the guests. But the participants do not engage in any observable identification process among themselves. This modification can also be understood in light of prior social processes. Interviewees are sought, screened and invited to participate through a pre-interviewing process, and they agree to appear with full knowledge of the identities of those with whom they will be interacting. Moreover, the participants commonly meet briefly prior to air-time. This prior identification process permits the omission of such work on screen. Accordingly, the only identifications are addressed to the audience, further marking the interaction as having been prearranged for them.

Finally, interview openings must announce the topic of discussion in advance. This contrasts with topical organization in ordinary conversation, where topics are not predetermined (Sacks et al., 1974) but are instead negotiated – introduced, pursued and/or changed – within the interaction (Button and Casey, 1984; Maynard, 1980; Maynard and Zimmerman, 1984). News interview openings can stipulate their topics at the outset because they have been predetermined in accordance with relevant newsworthy events, a fact that becomes visible through the 'agenda-setting' shape of the opening sequence.⁴

It is commonplace to observe that news interviews are less than spontaneous, that they are to some degree 'staged' for audience consumption. The point here is that this staging has specific and identifiable consequences for the organization of interview talk and interaction. News interviews 'begin' in the context of prior interactional and institutional processes that have pre-assembled the relevant topics and participants. The opening that viewers witness is in this respect a false beginning. Consequently, when the on-air talk is initiated, some of the opening practices characteristic of conversational encounters become redundant and are thus omitted, while others become systematically specialized and transformed. The resulting shape of the opening sequence provides in part for the 'staged' quality that is such a familiar attribute of the broadcast news interview; it appears as something that has been planned in advance and is now being orchestrated on behalf of the viewing audience.⁵

**Exhibiting newsworthiness:
situating the interview within a sequence of newsworthy events**

We have seen that the opening segment has a formal sequential organization that transcends particular programmes, topical agendas and interviewees. But this sequence is not produced as an end in itself. The opening is plainly designed to convey an agenda for the forthcoming interview and to situate it within an ongoing stream of newsworthy happenings. In this way, the occasion of talk is portrayed as a response to events and processes in the larger social world. Establishing this connection is a basic means of displaying the interview's 'newsworthiness', for it is through such discursive practices that the interview is linked to public occurrences in the wider society (cf. Lester, 1980).

As a first step in understanding how this connection is achieved, consider that an event/interview relationship may be straightforwardly displayed within the headline component alone. Recall that some headlines contain agenda projections that identify some outside event as a topic for discussion.

[16] [MacNeil/Lehrer 10 June 1985a]

- I. We begin our focus sections tonight with a closer look at today's announcement that the United States will continue to observe the limits of the never-ratified Salt II arms control treaty.

[17] [MacNeil/Lehrer 11 June 1985a]

Tomorrow the Reagan administration makes another stab at getting aid for the rebels or contras fighting the Sandinista government of Nicaragua, and tonight we have a preview of the debate in Congress.

Agenda projections like these have two features that combine to exhibit an event/interview connection. First, they establish an identity between some exogenous event and the forthcoming topic of discussion. Notice that the focal event need not precede the interview; in [17] the agenda is said to be a 'preview' of an upcoming congressional debate that will presumably be touched off when the administration attempts to get contra aid 'tomorrow'. But in both cases the interview is said to be about the reported happening.

Second, they contain temporal formulations that locate the event in relation to the occasion of the interview.⁶ Thus, in [16] the event is said to have occurred in the recent past ('today'), while in [17] it is about to occur in the near future ('tomorrow'). Such formulations clearly establish the timeliness of the events, and they express that timeliness *in relation to* the occasion of the interview. That is, rather than locate them on an abstract time-line (e.g. 'Wednesday' or '9 June 1985'), their location is expressed as some distance from the present interaction (Schegloff, 1972: 116-17; see also Zerubavel, 1982). In addition, these particular examples also fix the present occasion temporally ('tonight') and they do so through formulations that parallel and thus hearably contrast with the timing of the precipitating event: 'tonight/today' in [16] and 'tomorrow/tonight' in [17]. This imparts a sequential coherence to these respective occurrences, portraying the present occasion of talk as responsive to events in the larger social world.

An event/interview relationship may be similarly transparent in the pre-introduction component. Some pre-introductions convey advance information about the topic, which often has to do with a timely event. The following pre-introduction occurs after a story about differences between versions of the budget offered by the House and Senate.

[18] [MacNeil/Lehrer 10 June 1985b]

- I. We preview tomorrow's opening session now with two of the twenty-six who must now find a way to bridge the differences . . .

Like the agenda projections examined above, this pre-introduction displays an identity between the interview's agenda and an external event, temporally locates the event in relation to the interview, and thus presents the interview as having been occasioned by the reported event.

In other openings, however, the event/interview relationship is not established quite so explicitly. Headlines do not always contain agenda projections with embedded events. Some agenda projections have more general themes embedded within them (see [7] above), where the connection to any recent set of events is not specified. Moreover, headlines need not contain agenda projections at all; some simply announce a news item (see [3]-[5]) without actually formulating it as a topic for discussion. Similarly, the pre-introduction need not contain advance information about the topic; some merely

'usher' the interviewees into the interaction (e.g. [12]; see also [14]). When these conditions are present, the interviewer announces a news item, elaborates background information and introduces the interviewees without ever actually *stating* that the interview will be dealing with the reported events. For example:

[19] [MacNeil/Lehrer 23 July 1985a]

- I. President Reagan wants to change the way of the presidential veto. He wants the right to redline individual items in a spending bill rather than have to take it all or leave it all as he does now. It's called the line item veto, and it is so important to him that it was at the top of his lobbying agenda when he returned to the White House from the hospital this weekend. He has been on the phone the last few days trying to break a senate filibuster over it, but late today failed to pull it off. A move to end the filibuster came up three votes short; another attempt is expected tomorrow. The principal senate pusher of the legislation is Senator Mack Mattingly, Republican of Georgia. A principal opponent is Senator Lowell Weicker, Republican of Connecticut. Both are with us from Capitol Hill.

Yet even with this information, viewers can presumably recognize quite readily that the interview will indeed concern those events reported at the outset. This is made possible by the selection and arrangement of descriptive items within the opening. As we shall see, the interviewees are described in terms relevant to the events and themes reported earlier, while those events are characterized so as to be seen as leading up to the type of interview projected by the interviewee introductions. These various descriptive items are thus shaped to construct a coherent narrative in which the events and the interview emerge as elements of an interconnected sequence of happenings. The assembly of each element will be examined in turn, beginning with the interviewee introductions and working back to the precipitating events.

Introducing the interviewees

Consider, first, how interviewee introductions are put together. To understand this process is to grasp the principles of selection that govern the assembly of descriptive items within introductions. After describing these principles, we will consider how the resulting introductions function to set an agenda for the interview.

Person-description and introduction

Introductions consist primarily of person-descriptions, or utterances in which a person-reference term is coupled with one or more descriptive items (Maynard, 1982, 1984: 119-38). Thus, the interviewee's name and, frequently, title (arrows 1) are syntactically joined with other descriptive items (arrows 2).

[20] [Nightline 7 October 1986]

- I. Joining us in our Washington bureau are
 1→ Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts,
 2→ a member of the State Foreign Relations Committee, and

- 2→ a critic of administration policy in Central America, and
- 1→ Congressman Dick Cheney of Wyoming,
- 2→ a leading proponent of aid to the contras,
- 2→ and member of the House Intelligence Committee.

A more complex person-description occurs when a person-descriptive item is itself described. In the following, the interviewee is first described as affiliated with an organization ('the Black Sash') (arrow 1), after which that organization is further characterized and described (arrows 2).

[21] [Nightline 23 July 1985]

- I. With us now live also in our Washington bureau is Sheena Duncan,
 - 1→ president of a South African organization known as the Black Sash
 - 2a→ which, through three decades has come to symbolize white opposition to apartheid in South Africa.
 - 2b→ Since 1976 public gatherings of members of the Black Sash organization in South Africa have been against the law.

Considered in isolation, these items simply described an organization, first (2a) as involving 'white opposition to apartheid', and then (2b) as one whose meetings have been outlawed. However, this occurs immediately after a person had been described as a member of that organization. In this context, organization-descriptions operate as an indirect means of further characterizing the person being introduced. That is, by describing the organizations to which the interviewees belong, such items are also descriptive of the interviewees themselves. Thus, as Maynard (1982: 196) has observed, in the last analysis it is conversational structure, or more generally the sequential structure of discourse, rather than grammar or syntax, that determines what is or is not a person-description.

Selecting descriptive items

What considerations govern the selection and assembly of descriptive items within introductions? To conceive of this as a problem requires some recognition of the fact that ordinary language descriptions in general are necessarily incomplete (Garfinkel, 1967: 35-53; Garfinkel and Sacks, 1970; Heritage, 1984: 150-7). Theoretically, acts of reference or description can always be elaborated indefinitely, but as a practical matter of course they must stop somewhere. This raises a problem of selection: given the indefinite extendability of any description, which features are properly chosen for inclusion?

The answer, illuminated by a range of conversation analytic studies (e.g. Sacks, 1972, 1974; Schegloff, 1972; Drew, 1978; Watson, 1978; Maynard, 1982) is that selection decisions depend upon what situated activity is being accomplished in and through the description. The practice of describing is not a detached activity performed purely as an end in itself. Actual descriptions are always produced in some specific context for some practical purpose, and are addressed to an identifiable recipient. Particular descriptive items are selected in accordance with what is relevant in this situated context, for it is there that the description must accomplish whatever work it is called upon to do.

In news interviews, person-descriptions are transparently assembled in order to introduce the interviewees to the viewing audience. This activity occurs within a specific sequential context - the lead-in component of the opening sequence - which is transitional between the prior detailing of newsworthy events and the subsequent interview. Accordingly, two contextual considerations seem especially relevant here, and they will be illustrated with reference to the following introductions (06-14 below). The preceding headline (01-02) reports that the talk will concern the 'state of emergency' recently declared by the South African government in response to escalating racial violence.

[22] [MacNeil/Lehrer 22 July 1985a]

- 01 I. Our major focus section tonight is South Africa and the
- 02 declaration of a state of emergency over the weekend.
- 03 We look first at recent events that have led to the
- 04 declaration.
- 05 (*Taped story segment; 24 lines.*)
- 06 I. We hear first from the top South African official in the
- 07 United States, the ambassador designate, Herman Beukes.
- 08 (*Interview with HB; 70 lines.*)
- 09 I. A different view on events in South Africa now from
- 10 Doctor Nthato Motlona, chairman and founder of the
- 11 Committee of Ten, an activist civic association in
- 12 Soweto, the black township near Johannesburg.
- 13 The group was formed in 1977 after riots swept
- 14 that township.

Notice first that these person-descriptions highlight facets of the interviewees' identities which are relevant to the focal event reported in the headline. In the first introduction, for example (06-07), the interviewee is characterized in terms of his occupation, which relates him to South Africa as that government's official spokesperson; he is thus identified as representing the primary agent in the focal event. (That the declaration of a state of emergency is a *government* action was conveyed earlier in the programme.)

The next interviewee (09-14) is connected to South Africa as a representative of blacks in that country, who as a category are also implicated in the focal event. However, much more descriptive work is required to accomplish this. He is initially described (10-11) as chairman and founder of an organization ('the Committee of Ten'). This description is then elaborated by a sequence of items, each designed to exhibit the relevance of this committee to South African race relations. Thus, the committee is described as 'an activist civic organization in Soweto' (11-12), which is followed by a description of Soweto (12) that identifies it racially and locates it near a larger South African city ('the black township near Johannesburg'), and another description of the organization (13-14) that elaborates on its involvement in black/white relations ('The group was formed in 1977 after riots swept that township').

Two contextual considerations appear to be operating in assembling these descriptive items, suggesting two principles of selection. The first governs the relevance of particular items. News interview introductions are designed to inform the audience of the interviewee's relationship to the upcoming agenda

for discussion. And if previous arguments about an event/interview sequence are correct, the agenda should coherently follow from events reported earlier in the opening. The interviewee's identity should thus be formulated in a way that will align him or her to the focal matter, indicating the specific capacity in which he or she will be speaking to it. What is exhibited, then, is a topically aligned identity for the interviewee. This is clearly operating in the above introductions as only South African-relevant items are involved, and in particular those dealing with race relations there. (The only exception is in line (10) where the title 'Doctor' is employed, but titles have ritual significance which make them generally relevant on formal occasions such as this.) Accordingly, one principle governing the selection of descriptive items is the *topical relevance principle*, which operates as follows: select those components of interviewees' selves that are most relevant to the forthcoming topic as it is foreshadowed earlier in the opening (cf. Schegloff, 1972).

The second is an adequacy principle, which governs the elaborateness of each description. These descriptions are designed for an identifiable recipient: the viewing audience, which in this case consists mainly of the American public. Hence, in order for them to work as introductions, the topical relevance mentioned above must be made transparent enough so that most of the audience might be expected to grasp it. This appears to be what is at issue in the latter, more extended introduction above, in which the initial descriptive item (identifying Motlona as chairman and founder of 'the Committee of Ten') is systematically elaborated to specify its relevance to South African race relations. The trajectory of descriptive items thus implicates a second selectional principle, the *principle of recipient design*: make the interviewee's alignment to the topic explicit enough so as to be readily graspable by its intended recipient, which in this case is a typified sample of 'the American public' (cf. Schegloff, 1972; Sacks et al., 1974).

The operation of the second principle – recipient design – can be seen in the routine clarification of descriptive items when they might be presumed to be generally unfamiliar to the American public. The following extracts each contain an item (1) that is subsequently elaborated (2) (see also extract [21] above).

[23] [Nightline 6 June 1985]

- I. We'll focus tonight on two of the issues raised by the ABC documentary 'The Fire Unleashed'. Nuclear reactors and nuclear waste. The tradeoff between risk and advantage.
(Background segment – 100 lines.)
(Commercial break.)
- I. With us now live at our affiliate KOAT in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Don Hancock, administrator of
- 1 → the Southwest Research and Information Center,
 - 2 → a group dealing with energy and environmental issues.

[24] [MacNeil/Lehrer 20 October 1986a]

- I. Our lead focus segment tonight is about Nicaragua, and what, if any, role the US government is or should be playing in the fight against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

(Background information – 8 lines.)

First, we turn to David MacMichael, who was an estimates officer on the senior staff of the CIA from 1981 to 83.

He is now a senior fellow on

- 1 → the Council for Hemispheric Affairs,
- 2 → a Washington organization monitoring human rights and political developments in Central America.

Consider, for example, extract [24], where the acronym 'CIA' is readily recognizable to Americans and is allowed to stand in its abbreviated form, while the 'Council for Hemispheric Affairs' seems relatively obscure and is thus clarified. By differentially handling these items, the interviewer audibly treats them as having different degrees of familiarity.

The operation of the first principle – topical relevance – can be seen in the methodical ways that interviewees are aligned as qualified to speak to the focal matter. However, not all alignments are the same; they vary in the epistemological resources bestowed upon the interviewee. While alignments in general indicate that the interviewees will be talking about previously reported events, each projects a somewhat different type and level of expertise, and thus a different treatment of the topic. In this regard, several alignment-types can be briefly distinguished.

Participant-observer Interviewees may be shown to have first-hand knowledge of the focal matter. This may be conveyed by identifying them as participants in the events or processes reported at the outset. For example, in the following discussion of US-Soviet summitry, the interviewees are jointly identified as having played 'key roles in East/West summit meetings in the 1970s' (07–08). Each party's specific summit experience is then outlined in turn (""–13).

[25] [Nightline 10 October 1986]

- 01 I. The practice of summitry; it's been going on for centuries,
02 but really, does the payoff match the pomp? . . . We'll go
03 behind the scenes of summit meeting strategy tonight as we
04 talk with two men who in past summits have been directly
05 involved in getting US and Soviet leaders ready.
06 (Background segment – 100 lines.)
- 07 I. Joining us now are two men who played key roles in
08 preparing for East-West summit meetings in the 1970s.
09 Former Soviet diplomat Arkady Shevchenko helped brief
10 Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev for the 1972 Nixon-Brezhnev
11 summit in Moscow. Former National Security official
12 William Hyland was involved in that summit and others with
13 presidents Nixon and Ford.

Alternatively, the interviewee may be said to be an eyewitness to the events at hand.

[26] [Nightline 26 July 1985]

- I. Twenty-five thousand people disappeared. Men, women, and innocent children, assumed murdered in a reign of terror in Argentina . . . Tonight, a unique inside look at an old ally but a new democracy, Argentina.
(Background segment – 150 lines.)

- I In a moment, we'll be joined by American journalist Lynda Shuster, who for the past year and a half has been an eyewitness to the overwhelming problems that Argentina faces. (Commercial break.)
 → With us now live in our Miami bureau, *Wall Street Journal* correspondent Lynda Schuster, whose area of expertise is Latin America and the economy of Argentina.
 → Ms Schuster has recently returned from Argentina, where she witnessed the climate of the ongoing trial and Argentina's economic situation.

Although her general expertise is also noted, special emphasis is placed on her status as a direct witness. But whether identified as participant or witness, the interviewee is aligned to offer comments as one with first-hand knowledge of the subject under examination.

Certified expert Interviewees may also be characterized as having specialized knowledge relevant to the focal news item. They are thus certified to comment on it even though they may not have encountered it first-hand. Expertise of this sort may be simply asserted (see line 05 below), but it is more commonly displayed through descriptions of relevant organizational affiliation (06-07), publishing activities (08-09) and so on.

[27] [MacNeil/Lehrer 14 June 1985a]

- 01 I. Our first focus section is on the major news story of the
 02 day, the hijacking of a TWA plane in the Middle East.
 03 Joining us to try to shed some light on how this happened
 04 and to piece together events there is
 05 an expert on terrorism, Neil Livingston.
 06 He is president of the Washington based Institute on
 07 Terrorism and Subnational Conflict. Mr Livingston has
 08 written two books on terrorism and America's ability to
 09 combat it.

Advocate Alignments may involve more than the interviewees' source of relevant knowledge. They may also include each interviewee's opinion or position on the focal matter (2, 3).

[28] [MacNeil/Lehrer 13 June 1985a]

- I. How do authorities catch landlords or realtors who discriminate against minorities? There's an interesting proposal before congress and it's what we look at first tonight.
 (Background information - 8 lines.)
 1→ We have both sides of the argument now.
 Phyllis Spiro of the Open Housing Council here in New York City
 2→ supports federally funded testing.
 William North, general counsel of the National Association of Realtors,
 3→ opposes it.

When their perspectives are included (and they may be exhibited far less directly than in this example, e.g. through party affiliations), the interviewees are aligned as advocates prepared to defend a particular point of view. Here the pre-introduction (1) also works to project advocacy identities. Frequently,

advocates come in pairs representing 'both' sides of the issue, and they are positioned to speak in an official capacity.

Each alignment-type projects a different treatment of story and, consequently, a distinct trajectory for the interview. The introduction of first-hand observers and certified experts foreshadows an *informational interview* where official insiders will provide background to the story. Alternatively, advocates project a markedly different *debate interview*; here the story is treated as a controversial issue such that divergent points of view will be exhibited and made to clash.⁷ Significantly absent are non-official categories of interviewees; it is frequently observed that views outside the mainstream, as well as those of ordinary persons (e.g. those without official statuses or affiliations) are greatly underrepresented in news interviews (Nix, 1974; Hackett, 1985; Manoff, 1987). To some extent, this exclusionary process takes place behind the scenes, by selecting only official spokespersons as sources. However, every official is also a citizen, as well as a consumer, a taxpayer, a male or female, a homeowner or renter, etc. Hence, even after they have been chosen, some local work is required to establish the *official* facet of their identities as germane to the present occasion. And this occurs through the introductions, which bring relevant aspects of interviewees' selves to the fore, establishing a particular angle from which the topic will be addressed, and thus helping to constitute the lineaments of an agenda for discussion.

Repair

As final evidence of the topical relevance principle as an oriented-to feature of introductions, consider those introductions that are subsequently revised or repaired. Such repairs invariably address the *correctness* of a particular descriptive item, while accepting the relevance of that item and the general category of items to which it belongs.

In the following, repair is initiated by the interviewee (18-21) after the introduction has been completed and the first question is posed.

[29] [Nightline 6 June 1985]

- 01 I. We'll focus tonight on two of the issues raised by the ABC
 02 documentary 'The Fire Unleashed'. Nuclear reactors and
 03 nuclear waste. The tradeoff between risk and advantage.
 04 (Background segment - 95 lines.)
 05 (Commercial break.)
 06 I. With us now live at our affiliate KOAT in Albuquerque,
 07 New Mexico, Don Hancock, administrator of The Southwest
 08 Research and Information Center, a group dealing with
 09 energy and environmental issues.
 10 And in our New York Studios, Doctor Rosalyn Yalow, a
 11 nuclear physicist who currently looks into the effects of
 12 radiation on human beings for the Veterans Administration.
 13 Doctor Yalow, in one of those little patented sound bites
 14 that one hears in television news spots, we just heard you
 15 a few moments ago saying that this problem of nuclear waste
 16 is a soluble problem. Tell us about that, we need a little
 17 encouragement this evening.

- 18 RY Well, first let me identify myself as not – my research is
 19 not concerned with the effects of radiation on people.
 20 My work is (radioimmunoassay), which is completely unrelated
 21 to that.
 22 I. My apologies.

The initial description of RY as a nuclear physicist engaged in research (11–12) is squarely in line with the topic, announced earlier as ‘nuclear reactors and nuclear waste’ (01–03). When RY revises this (18–21), she produces an alternative characterization of her research, leaving intact her identity as a nuclear physicist. Thus, while she clearly has an opportunity to repair the introduction, she does not use it to invoke additional person-descriptions highlighting other aspects of her self, choosing instead to replace an ‘incorrect’ descriptive item with an alternative taken from the same category of items.

The following self-repair occurs later in the same interview, and exhibits a similar orientation on the part of the interviewer. He is projecting the identity of the next interviewee (a senator) in an extended pre-introduction, which he subsequently revises (arrowed).

[30] [*Nightline* 6 June 1985]

- I. . . . When we return, we’ll broaden the discussion as we’re joined by Senator Jim McClure of Ohio, chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee . . .
 (*Commercial break.*)
 → I. First of all, a little correction very quickly. Senator John Glenn, Senator Howard Metzenbaum, you need not call. I was wrong. Joining us live now from Capitol Hill is Republican Senator Jim McClure, who is not from Ohio, he’s from Idaho, and he’s chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and one of the backers of the 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act.

Here the repair concerns the Senator’s home state, and corrects the state proposed earlier. But what remains constant through both the original and its revision is the background assumption that it is his capacity as *senator* that is the focus of attention on this occasion, and in particular his status as chair of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Repairs thus operate in accordance with the same topical relevance principle, standing as further evidence of that as the fundamental principle determining focal aspects of interviewees’ selves. Moreover, it is demonstrably recognized and oriented-to by both interviewers and interviewees, because regardless of who initiates repair, their revisions are conducted under the auspices of that principle. Accordingly, who the interviewee is depends fundamentally upon what he or she is present to talk about.

We now have a partial solution to the problem of achieving an event/interview sequence. Introductions, because of the way they are built, project that the interview will take up matters reported earlier in the opening. So even when there is no agenda projection at the beginning, the introductions enable viewers to infer that the interview will be dealing with, and hence was occasioned by, previously reported events.

Assembling the precipitating news story

While introductions are fitted to the sequentially prior news item, the reverse process is also at work: the headline and story components are assembled in order to lead up to the interview that is about to take place. Rather than being a detached record of events, these items are methodically selected and combined to construct a particular version of events that will appropriately ‘set the scene’ for the discussion to follow. This will be demonstrated in two ways: first by comparing story formulations prior to informational interviews (those with observer and expert interviewees) versus those preceding debate interviews (those with advocate interviewees), and second by comparing pre-interview story formulations with those placed elsewhere in the news programme.

Story formulations preceding informational versus debate interviews

Pre-debate stories are always formulated to portray some unresolved disagreement or conflict, frequently concerning government policy. There are several ways of doing this. For one, a state of disagreement may be straightforwardly announced (arrowed).

[31] [*MacNeil/Lehrer* 6 October 1986b]

- I. Next tonight, we return to one of the hottest political issues of the day, drugs, and examine how politicians are dealing with it. With just four weeks left before the midterm elections, incumbent congressmen and senators are scrambling to come up with a new anti-drug program. And while there’s near universal agreement that something should be done,
 → there is sharp disagreement on what exactly that should be.

Disagreement may also be exhibited by detailing the contrasting views that characterize opposing sides of the issue (see lines 03–07 below). Although it is noted these policy positions are similar in some respects (08–09), the similarities are backgrounded while the differences are foregrounded and highlighted.

[32] [*MacNeil/Lehrer* 10 June 1985b]

- 01 I. Tomorrow the hard part starts for twenty-six members of the House
 02 and Senate. They are members of the conference committee which
 03 must reach a compromise on the budget between a Senate version
 04 that trims the cost of living increase for Social Security and
 05 a House version that does not, a House version that freezes
 06 defense spending and a Senate version that does not, and so on
 07 down the seemingly poles-apart line,
 08 although both do cut roughly the same amount from next year’s
 09 deficit, fifty-six billion dollars.

Finally, disagreement may be exhibited by formulating events in an ‘action–reaction’ sequence (cf. Maynard, 1988), where parties’ moves and counter-moves index their divergent views.

[33] [*MacNeil/Lehrer* 13 June 1985a]

- 01 I. . . . The Reagan administration is pushing a new fund of some
 02 four million dollars to help community groups set up such tests.

03 But the move is being fought by the National Association of
04 Realtors... We have both sides of the argument now...

Pre-debate stories thus exhibit a 'debatable' state of affairs, after which the interview is presented as picking up on this ongoing clash of perspectives (04 above).

When disagreement is not apparent at relevant junctures, its absence is notable and is commented upon by the interviewer. The following precedes a debate interview concerning sanctions against South Africa.

[34] [MacNeil/Lehrer 25 July 1985a]

(Discussing events since the South African Government declared a state of emergency.)

01 I. ... Today the story was the death of five more blacks and a
02 riotous clash with police outside Johannesburg, the arrest
03 total under the state of emergency going to 792, and
04 the move, led by France, to isolate the South African
05 government economically and diplomatically.
06 France took its sanctions call to the UN Security Council
07 late this afternoon and asked other nations of the world to
08 follow its lead.

09 South Africa is not a member of the UN General Assembly,
10 having been voted out some time ago, thus most of the words
11 heard today were those of condemnation. Here is an excerpt.

12 (Cut to taped segment.)

13 FA. (Condemnation statement by the French ambassador.)

14 DA. (Condemnation statement by the Danish ambassador.)

15 (Return to the studio.)

16 I. The sanctions issue now as seen by two white South Africans:
17 Sheena Duncan, president of the anti-apartheid organization
18 known as the Black Sash, and John Chettle, director of the
19 Washington-based South Africa Foundation.

The story reports recent racial violence in South Africa (01-03) and the reaction by the French government (04-08) calling for sanctions before the UN. In the following taped segment, two UN ambassadors are shown making statements on the sanctions issue (13-14). Both statements favour sanctions and condemn the South African government; they display consensus rather than conflict. However, this is noted in advance by the interviewer (09-11), who provides an account to explain why only condemnations will be heard. By doing so, he takes special steps to indicate that there are 'really' two sides to this issue, even though only one is to be heard in the opening. He thus continues to convey a situation of controversy consistent with the forthcoming interview. And the lead-in to the interview (16-19) subtly projects a debate, first (16) by referring to the topic as an 'issue', and marking the subjectivity of the interviewees' views ('as seen by...'). While both interviewees are categorized as 'white South Africans' (16), invoking the common-sense expectation that they might both be opposed to sanctions, one is described as president of an anti-apartheid organization (17), and is thus defined as an 'atypical' white South African, one who can be expected to favour sanctions. The ingredients for a sanctions debate are thus assembled.

When the interview is of the informational variety, that is, when the guests serve as participants, observers, or experts rather than advocates, the story is formulated in very different terms. Pre-informational story formulations report discrete events while indicating little if any conflict or disagreement surrounding them. Indeed, subjective interpretations of matters are generally absent.

[35] [MacNeil/Lehrer 10 June 1985a]

01 I. We begin our focus sections tonight with a closer look at
02 today's announcement that the United States will continue
03 to observe the limits of the never-ratified SALT II arms
04 control treaty. A decision was needed because the US
05 strategic force is nearing a key treaty limitation, the
06 number of allowed multiple-warhead missiles, which carry
07 more than one nuclear weapon. SALT II allows each side
08 1200. The Soviets now have 1130; the US, 1190. The
09 sea trials of a new US Trident submarine would put the
10 US 14 missiles over the limit. That violation was
11 avoided by the President's decision to withdraw a Poseidon
12 submarine from service, which keeps the US level at 1198,
13 two under the SALT II limit. As we reported, today's
14 decision was made despite administration findings that the
15 Soviets have violated some of the terms of the 1979 treaty.
16 With us for a newsmaker interview is Kenneth Adelman,
17 director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency.

The headline here (01-04) is an agenda projection indicating that the discussion will concern a recent event: the US government's decision to continue to observe the SALT II treaty. The introduction (16-17) foreshadows an 'insider's' view of the event by identifying the guest as an administration official close to the decision; note that in addition to his status as an arms control official (17), the discussion is characterized as a 'newsmaker interview' (16). Hence, rather than a partisan debate over the decision's merits, or an independent assessment of it, this introduction projects a specifically technical and official discussion of its details. Consistent with this agenda, the intervening story segment (04-15) details the various technical conditions surrounding the decision; it outlines the treaty limitations (05-07), reports the number of warheads on each side (08), and explains why the decision had to be made at this time (09-13). This prepares for an insider interview dealing with the decision itself and the reasoning behind it. While the interviewer does note that the decision was made in spite of apparent Soviet violations (13-15), thus raising perhaps the spectre of controversy, this is not the focus of the story. Indeed, this item is placed last in a context where it can be heard as merely another condition under which the decision was made. Pre-informational and pre-debate story formulations thus have distinct systems of relevance, the former emphasizing the circumstances and implications of events, and the latter focusing on the situation controversy generated by or embodied in events.

Pre-interview versus news roundup story formulations

The argument advanced thus far would be trivial if it could be argued that the selection of an informational or debate format for the interview *and* its corresponding story formulation were determined by the objective essence of the events 'out there'. However, a comparison of pre-interview story formulations with alternative formulations placed elsewhere in the same news programme does not support such a contention. The *MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour* can accommodate such a comparison, because the programme begins with a (roughly) 10-minute news 'roundup' or summary of the day's major stories. Hence, the pre-interview story formulation may be contrasted with its counterpart in the news roundup segment, thereby illuminating the manner in which story formulations are fitted to their sequential location within the programme.

To begin, compare the above pre-interview story concerning SALT II [35] to a corresponding story that appeared in the news summary.

[36] [*MacNeil/Lehrer* 10 June 1985]

- 01 I. The United States will remain in compliance with SALT II
 02 despite violations of that unratified nuclear arms treaty
 03 by the Soviet Union. President Reagan's decision was
 04 announced today following weeks of speculation and advice
 05 on what it should be. The decision means the United States
 06 will remain under the nuclear warhead missile limits of
 07 SALT II by dismantling an old submarine when a new Trident
 08 sub is launched this fall. The announcement was accompanied
 09 by a warning to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that the
 10 Soviets must quit violating the treaty's terms. National
 11 Security Advisor Robert McFarlane did the talking and
 12 explaining for Mr Reagan this afternoon.
 13 (*Cut to tape of Robert McFarlane at a press conference.*)
 14 RM. The pattern of Soviet violations, if left uncorrected,
 15 undercuts the integrity and viability of arms control as
 16 an instrument to assist in ensuring a secure and stable
 17 future world. The United States will continue to pursue
 18 vigorously with the Soviets the resolution of our concerns
 19 over Soviet noncompliance. However, in the interests of
 20 assuring that every opportunity to establish the secure,
 21 stable future that we seek is fully explored, I am prepared
 22 to go the extra mile to seek an interim framework of truly
 23 mutual restraint. This is not an open-ended commitment in
 24 perpetuity. We will evaluate Soviet compliance, Soviet
 25 building programs, their performance in Geneva - all of
 26 these things and, as milestones are reached in the future,
 27 the decision may be different.

This formulation contains few technical details about the treaty or conditions surrounding the decision to honour it; the only exception is one sentence (05-08) explaining what compliance will mean. Thus, unlike the pre-interview version, there is no direct mention of the treaty's specific terms, nor the numbers of warheads on each side, nor why a decision was necessary at this time. Moreover, the question of Soviet violations, which is treated as only one

of the various situational conditions in the pre-interview version, here takes a much more prominent position. From the very first statement (01-03) the decision is framed as having been made 'despite violations' by the USSR. This highlights the controversial nature of the decision, a property which is further emphasized by noting that the decision followed 'weeks of speculation and advice' (04). And in addition to the decision itself, this story reports another event that 'accompanied' the announced decision (08-10): an official warning to Gorbachev to 'quit violating the treaty's terms'. This is followed by a rather extended taped segment (14-27) showing the warning itself as it was issued at a press conference.

In short, this version portrays the treaty decision as a controversial public event, and links it to another public event (a warning to the Soviets) designed to counteract potential reservations. At the same time, technical details are minimized and downplayed. This is in marked contrast to the pre-interview version, where the focus is on the details surrounding the decision; hence the inclusion of specific circumstances and conditions under which the decision was made. The point is not merely that this version is different; rather, the nature of these differences highlight the manner in which the pre-interview version is fitted to its larger sequential location *vis-à-vis* the interview.

In the final example, the contrast between the pre-interview and roundup versions is similarly marked, although in this case even the roundup version is influenced - although to a lesser degree - by the existence of an eventual interview. First the pre-interview version, which begins (01-04) with a headline projecting a congressional debate over aid for the Nicaraguan contras, a debate sparked by Reagan administration initiatives.

[37] [*MacNeil/Lehrer* 11 June 1985a]

- 01 I. Tomorrow the Reagan administration makes another stab at
 02 getting aid for the rebels or contras fighting the
 03 Sandinista government of Nicaragua, and tonight we have a
 04 preview of the debate in Congress. Last April the House
 05 said no aid, but some minds appear to have been changed
 06 by the subsequent visit of Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega
 07 to Moscow. Last week the Senate approved an aid package of
 08 38 million dollars. Tomorrow the House votes on two
 09 different packages: one for 14 million dollars, the other
 10 27 million. President Reagan tried to woo some more House
 11 Democrats today with a letter promising to explore direct
 12 talks with the Sandinistas and adding, we do not seek the
 13 military overthrow of the Sandinista government. We pick
 14 up the debate now with two Democrats, Congressman Lee
 15 Hamilton from Indiana, chairman of the House Intelligence
 16 Committee and co-sponsor of the 14 million dollar package,
 17 and Congressman Dave McCurdy of Oklahoma, who as we saw was
 18 one of the Democrats to support the larger contra aid
 19 package and who met with the President at the White House
 20 today.

The story leads toward this debate by reporting recent events that may alter congressional sympathies (04-07), identifying various positions within the House and Senate (07-10) and reporting Reagan's recent efforts to 'woo'

members of Congress over to his side by promising direct talks with the Sandinistas (10–13). These events each include temporal formulations relating them to the present occasion, and are arranged to temporally zero in on it: 'last April' (04), 'last week' (07), 'tomorrow' (08), 'today' (11). All of this is fitted to the final introductions leading into the interview proper, which begin with a prefix ('We pick up the debate now...') presenting the interview as the next phase of this developing debate.

The roundup version, in contrast, has a completely different lead focus.

[38] [MacNeil/Lehrer 11 June 1985]

- 01 I. President Reagan said today he is exploring the possibility
 02 of resuming direct talks with the Sandinista government of
 03 Nicaragua. He said it in a letter he gave members of
 04 Congress in a White House meeting. Both the letter and
 05 the meeting are part of the administration's new effort to
 06 get some kind of funds for the anti-Sandinista contra
 07 guerrillas. The House is to vote on a 27 million dollar
 08 compromise proposal tomorrow. Several Democrats who voted
 09 against contra aid last month were at the White House today
 10 and said they could support the new proposal.
 11 (*Taped statement of Congressman Dave McCurdy follows.*)
 12 I. We will hear later from Congressman McCurdy and others in
 13 a focus segment on the contra aid question.

Here the story lead (01–03) says nothing about Reagan's controversial efforts to get contra aid through Congress. Instead, the primary focus is on his publicly announced intention to resume 'direct talks with the Sandinista government.' This is only later put into the context of contra aid (04–07); only then does it become identified as an effort to influence Congress to provide aid. This contrasts with the pre-interview version, which focuses on Reagan's contra aid efforts and reactions within Congress from the beginning.

But while the roundup version has a different initial focus, it later shifts matters toward the anticipated congressional debate (07–10), and then runs a taped statement on this issue by one Democratic congressman (11) who is now prepared to support the President. This occurs just prior to an agenda projection within the roundup segment (12–13) foreshadowing the interview to come. Hence, this version eventually shifts toward the topic of the interview, and this shift is sequentially fitted to the agenda projection that closes the story. It would appear, then, that even the news summary at the beginning of the telecast may be subtly shaped by the fact that associated interviews are going to take place later on in the programme.

One implication is that the interview's agenda cannot properly be regarded as a straightforward response to preconstituted exogenous events. Indeed, it is misleading to conceive of occurrences as having a singular, determinate character prior to the occasion of talk, for those occurrences may be characterized in divergent and contrasting ways, each of them in some sense 'correct.' But as they are formulated within the opening, occurrences take on a particular shape and form because of the manner in which they are going to be talked about; they are selected and assembled in order to lead up to the kind of interview that is about to take place. The substantive and causal linkages

between exogenous events and the present interview are thus *achieved* through discursive practices that constitute the opening segment.

Concluding remarks

This has been a study of some highly routine but thoroughly unremarkable speaking practices that organize news interview openings. Through these practices, the opening segment achieves specific institutional ends: (a) it marks the encounter from the outset as having been preassembled on behalf of the viewing audience, and (b) it sets an agenda for the interview, one that is linked to newsworthy events in the world at large. These are of course commonplace and obvious features of the news interview; upon witnessing an opening, anyone can presumably 'see at a glance' that the encounter has been staged for audience consumption, and that it was occasioned by prominent events in the news. But the aim here has been to push beyond the commonplace to analyse the underlying procedural logic by which these obvious characteristics are achieved and conveyed. To this end, we have outlined a formal sequential structure for news interview openings, and have specified the selectional principles that govern the assembly of items to fill specific 'slots' within the sequence. These procedures pervasively and recurrently organize interview openings, and they produce some of the most familiar qualities of news interview discourse.

While the immediate objective of this chapter has been to describe and analyse these language practices and their functions, the findings bear on one fundamental issue in media studies: how news is shaped by the institutional processes involved in its production. But the present study illuminates this issue from a decidedly different angle. Most research has focused on the routines of newsgathering, reporter–source relationships, ideological orientations and other behind-the-scenes aspects of journalistic practice to determine how these factors influence the content of news. In contrast, the focus of the current study are those practices of language and interaction which serve as the media through which news is packaged and presented to the audience. While the domain of discourse is no doubt responsive to prior bureaucratic and ideological processes, it is not wholly reducible to such factors; it has its own intrinsic organizational integrity (cf. Sacks et al., 1974). And as one corner of it, the news interview opening has organizational properties that demonstrably influence the content of news in two respects.

First, openings function to set an agenda for the interview; they both define and delimit the parameters of permissible discussion. This is significant for the social construction of news because, for a variety of technological and organizational reasons, news in both England the United States is increasingly being generated through processes of spoken interaction (Heritage et al., 1988). Thus, relatively spontaneous interactional encounters are coming to replace fully scripted news reports, and the growth of the news interview is one manifestation of this trend. In this context, news content cannot be fully explained without first understanding how topical agendas are established and enforced within such interactional encounters. The present analysis of the

interview opening addresses one component of this process. It is important to avoid overstating the significance of the opening sequence; it does not create an impenetrable barrier within which participants are trapped throughout the course of the interview. However, it does establish a set of discussion parameters and makes them available to the participants as well as the audience of 'overhearers', thus creating at least the necessary conditions for their enforcement. Future research should follow the lead of Greatbatch (1986a, 1986b) to determine how topical agendas are managed within the interview, and consider further how the opening segment figures in this process.

While the opening segment articulates an agenda *within* the interview, it is possible to view that agenda as a product, originally, of newsworthy events in the larger social world. However, such events are complex and multifaceted, and may be correctly characterized in a variety of contrasting ways; they have no singular, determinate character. Out of the range of possible accounts, the opening constructs a particular version of events that will warrant the type of interview that is about to take place. Hence, as we have seen, stories preceding informational interviews differ from stories preceding debate interviews, and pre-interview stories in general differ from corresponding accounts that appear elsewhere in the news programme. The structure of the opening thus exerts an influence on the portrayal of events that ostensibly precipitated the interview, and any witnessable event/interview connection is achieved in part through such descriptive practices.

In a similar vein, researchers have observed, following Weaver (1975), that television news discourse has a sequential coherence that structures news content both within and across stories. Thus, stories for broadcast are organized into narratives with recognizable beginnings, middles and ends, and adjacent stories are combined into clusters according to common themes and topics. As a consequence, component stories appear to be selected and shaped to coherently fit within a thematic cluster (Altheide, 1977:75; Weaver, 1975; Paletz and Pearson, 1978). Discursive conventions of this kind appear to vary across cultural boundaries (Hallin and Mancini, 1984), and a somewhat different set of conventions seems to operate in printed news (Weaver, 1975; van Dijk, 1988). Nevertheless, together with the present study, these observations point to a largely unexplored domain in media studies: the routine, institutionalized language practices that serve to organize news discourse, and in particular the sequential conventions that govern the construction of coherent stretches of discourse. While this domain may seem rather mundane in comparison to the domain of ideology, and perhaps trivial in comparison to large-scale institutional forces, it is nevertheless a significant dimension of newswork, a dimension with its own organizational practices and constraints. Our grasp of the institutional frameworks of news production will remain incomplete until the domain of discourse is more thoroughly explored.

Notes

I'm grateful to Doug Maynard for reading and commenting on an earlier version of this paper. This research was supported in part by grant MH14641 from the National Institute of Mental Health.

1. For a more specialized analysis of a single, dramatic opening, see Pomerantz (1989).
2. *Nightline*, for example, has more elaborate openings than *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*. This is due in part to the fact that in the former the interview's opening is coterminous with the opening of the programme as a whole and is expanded to deal with that task, while the latter programme opens with a news summary or overview of the days events, this summary preceding the specific interview segments.
3. This should not be taken to imply that this absence is a necessary feature of prearranged encounters. For example, on celebrity talk shows in the US guests are commonly brought onstage as they're introduced, enabling the audience to witness their physical movement toward one another and into a state of talk. This creates at least the veneer of an interaction that appears to be 'just beginning', even though such encounters are known to be planned, and the parties may well have spoken to one another prior to air-time. What is being proposed here is that the participants' previously exhibited availability and readiness to interact *enables* them to dispense with the ordinary processes of entry, and that by doing so they visibly *mark* the interaction as following from some prior set of arrangements. (For a further discussion of the relatively 'informal' or 'conversational' character of chat shows versus news interviews, see Greatbatch, 1988.)
4. Greetings and 'how are you' are also notably absent, but this will not be dealt with in detail here. However, Whalen and Zimmerman (1987) have noticed similar absences in citizen calls to the police. They demonstrate that it is through such absence that the participants exhibit an orientation to the focused 'institutional' character of the interaction. This may achieve a similar end in news interviews as the participants address one another as incumbents of particular identities. Furthermore, since the interview opening that appears on television is really a 'false' beginning, greetings and 'how-are-yous' would seem to be technically redundant at this juncture and thus may be expendable. Other work may also be achieved by these absences, including an orientation to the question/answer turn-taking system characteristic of interview talk (Greatbatch, 1988). That is, by omitting greetings, 'how-are-yous,' and other canonical interactional sequences, parties display strict adherence to the restriction that they produce only questions and answers within their turns.
5. For an analysis of other ways in which news interview talk is organizationally designed as 'talk for an overhearing audience', see Heritage (1985).
6. Temporal formulations are sometimes absent within agenda projection/headlines, but this appears to occur only when the timeliness of the embedded event has already been established earlier in the programme (e.g. in a prior news summary), or when it is taken to be something that 'everyone' knows, as with certain major stories that have already received widespread coverage.
7. News personnel orient to these different categories of interviews, and they select interviewees in accordance with predetermined format considerations (Gladstone, 1986; Hill, 1987; Clayman, 1987: 150-1).

References

- Altheide, David L. (1977) *Creating Reality: How TV News Distorts Events*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Button, Graham and Neil Casey (1984) 'Generating Topic: The Use of Topical Initial Elicitors', pp. 167-90 in J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (eds), *Structures of Social Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Clayman, Steven E. (1987) 'Generating News: The Interactional Organization of News Interviews.' Doctoral Dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Barbara.
- Clayman, Steven E. (1988) 'Displaying Neutrality in Television News Interviews', *Social Problems*, 35(4): 474-92.
- Clayman, Steven E. (forthcoming) 'Footing in the Achievement of Neutrality: The Case of News

- Interview Discourse', in Paul Drew and John Heritage (eds), *Talk at Work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Drew, Paul (1978) 'Accusations: The Occasioned Use of Members' Knowledge of "Religious Geography" in Describing Events', *Sociology*, 12(1): 1-22.
- Garfinkel, Harold (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Garfinkel, Harold and Harvey Sacks (1970) 'On Formal Structures of Practical Actions', pp. 338-66 in J.C. McKinney and E.A. Tiryakian (eds), *Theoretical Sociology*. New York: Appleton Century Crofts.
- Gans, Herbert (1979) *Deciding What's News*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Gladstone, Valerie (1986) 'MacNeil and Lehrer and the Art of Talking', *Dial*, May: 16-18, 45.
- Greatbatch, David (1986a) 'Aspects of Topical Organization in News Interviews: The Use of Agenda Shifting Procedures by Interviewees', *Media, Culture and Society*, 8(4): 441-55.
- Greatbatch, David (1986b) 'Some Standard Uses of Supplementary Questions in News Interviews', pp. 86-123 in John Wilson and Brian Crow (eds), *Belfast Working Papers in Language and Linguistics*, Vol. 8. Jordanstown: University of Ulster.
- Greatbatch, David (1988) 'A Turn-Taking System for British News Interviews', *Language in Society*, 17: 401-30.
- Hackett, Robert A. (1985) 'A Hierarchy of Access: Aspects of Source Bias in Canadian TV News', *Journalism Quarterly*, 62(2): 256-65, 277.
- Hallin, Daniel C. and Paolo Mancini (1984) 'Speaking of the President: Political Structure and Representational Form in US and Italian Television News', *Theory and Society*, 13(6): 829-50.
- Harris, Sandra (1986) 'Interviewers' Questions in Broadcast Interviews', pp. 50-85 in John Wilson and Brian Crow (eds), *Belfast Working Papers in Language and Linguistics*, Vol. 8. Jordanstown: University of Ulster.
- Heath, Christian (1984) 'Talk and Reciprocity: Sequential Organization in Speech and Body Movement', pp. 247-65 in J.M. Atkinson and J. Heritage (eds), *Structures of Social Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Heritage, John (1984) *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Heritage, John (1985) 'Analyzing News Interviews: Aspects of the Production of Talk for an Overhearing Audience', pp. 95-117 in Teun A. van Dijk (ed.), *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, Vol. 3: *Discourse and Dialogue*. London: Academic Press.
- Heritage, John C., Steven E. Clayman and Don H. Zimmerman (1988) 'Discourse and Message Analysis: The Micro-Structure of Mass Media Messages', pp. 77-109 in R. Hawkins, S. Pingree and J. Weimann (eds), *Advancing Communication Science: Merging Mass and Interpersonal Processes*. Sage Annual Reviews of Communication Research, Vol. 16. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Heritage, John and David Greatbatch (forthcoming) 'On the Institutional Character of Institutional Talk: The Case of News Interviews', in D. Boden and D. Zimmerman (eds) *Talk and Social Structure*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hill, Doug (1987) 'Ted Koppel's *Nightline*: It's Now *The Arena* for Quizzing Today's Newsmakers', *TV Guide*, 10 Jan: 4-9.
- Jefferson, Gail (1980) 'On Trouble-Premonitory Response to Inquiry', *Sociological Inquiry*, 50(3/4): 153-85.
- Lester, Marilyn (1980) 'Generating Newsworthiness: The Interpretive Construction of Public Events', *American Sociological Review*, 45(6): 984-94.
- Manoff, Robert Karl (1987) 'Quick-Fix News: MacNeil/Lehrer Play it Safe', *The Progressive*, 51(7): 15.
- Maynard, Douglas W. (1980) 'Placement of Topic Changes in Conversation', *Semiotica*, 30: 263-90.
- Maynard, Douglas W. (1982) 'Person-Description in Plea Bargaining', *Semiotica*, 42(2/4): 195-213.
- Maynard, Douglas W. (1984) *Inside Plea Bargaining: The Language of Negotiation*. New York: Plenum.
- Maynard, Douglas W. (1988) 'Narratives and Narrative Structure in Plea Bargaining', *Law and Society Review*, 22(3): 449-81.
- Maynard, Douglas W. and Don H. Zimmerman (1984) 'Topical Talk, Ritual, and the Social Organization of Relationships', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 47: 301-16.

- Nix, Mindy (1974) 'The Meet the Press Game', pp. 66-71 in G. Tuchman (ed.), *The TV Establishment*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Paletz, D.L. and Pearson R.F. (1978) '"The Way You Look Tonight": A Critique of Television News Criticism', pp. 65-85 in W. Adams and F. Schreibman (eds), *Television Network News: Issues in Content Research*. Washington, DC: School of Public and International Affairs, George Washington University.
- Pomerantz, Anita (1989) 'Constructing Skepticism: Four Devices Used to Engender the Audience's Skepticism', *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 22: 293-314.
- Sacks, Harvey (1972) 'An Initial Investigation of the Usability of Conversational Data for Doing Sociology', pp. 31-74 in D. Sudnow (ed.), *Studies in Social Interaction*. New York: Free Press.
- Sacks, Harvey (1974) 'On the Analyzability of Stories by Children', pp. 216-32 in R. Turner (ed.), *Ethnomethodology*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Sacks, Harvey, Emanuel A. Schegloff and Gail Jefferson (1974) 'A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn Taking for Conversation', *Language*, 50: 696-735.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A. (1968) 'Sequencing in Conversational Openings', *American Anthropologist*, 70: 1075-95.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A. (1972) 'Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place', pp. 75-119 in D. Sudnow (ed.), *Studies in Social Interaction*. New York: Free Press.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A. (1979) 'Identification and Recognition in Telephone Call Openings', pp. 23-78 in G. Psathas (ed.), *Everyday Language: Studies in Ethnomethodology*. New York: Irvington.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A. (1986) 'On the Achievement of "Routine"' *Human Studies*.
- Schiffrin, Deborah (1977) 'Opening Encounters', *American Sociological Review*, 42(5): 672-91.
- van Dijk, Teun A. (1988) *News as Discourse*. Hilldale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Watson, D.R. (1978) 'Categorization, Authorization and Blame-Negotiation in Conversation', *Sociology*, 12: 105-13.
- Weaver, Paul (1975) 'Newspaper News and Television News', pp. 81-94 in Douglas Cater and Richard Adler (eds), *Television as a Social Force: New Approaches to TV Criticism*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Whalen, Marilyn and Don H. Zimmerman (1987) 'Sequential and Institutional Contexts in Calls for Help', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 50: 172-85.
- Zerubavel, Eviatar (1982) 'The Standardization of Time: A Sociohistorical Perspective', *American Journal of Sociology*, 88(1): 1-23.