Reformulating the question: A device for answering/not answering questions in news interviews and press conferences

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Abstract

When responding to questions from journalists, public figures sometimes answer straightforwardly, but they may also attempt to evade the question. This paper analyzes one particular response practice that can play a role in both processes. Before answering, public figures may first paraphrase or reformulate the preceding question. Question reformulations may serve to indicate how a complex question will be dealt with, but they may also enable the public figure to sidestep the question. Journalists have the capacity to recognize and counter evasive reformulations when they occur, while public officials can employ such reformulations in ways that resist detection. Question reformulations are more common in press conferences than in news interviews, largely because press conference turn-taking arrangements (particularly the absence of follow-up questions) embody the specific conditions that give rise to question reformulations.

Keywords: conversation analysis; journalism; mass media; news interviews; political communication; press conferences.

How do politicians and other public figures answer questions in news interviews and press conferences? The construction of answers-to-questions is of course a highly general interactional practice which spans both formal and nonformal settings, but it is particularly prevalent in those specialized interactions that consist *primarily* of questions and answers, such as journalistic interrogations. Because these encounters are broadcast to a mass audience, and involve elected officials, political candidates, and others in the public eye, their conduct in answering is potentially of great consequence. Public figures are closely scrutinized when they are dealing with members of the press. Such scrutiny begins within the interaction itself; journalists must gauge the adequacy of each

successive answer when deciding whether to ask a probing follow-up question or to move on to something new (Greatbatch, 1986a: 449–463; 1986b; 109–118). The scrutiny continues when news writers select excerpts from interviews and press conferences to construct sound bites on the nightly news and quotation sequences in print; these excerpts frequently show the public official to be resistant to the course of questioning (Clayman, 1990). Political commentators are more explicit, often discussing at length the extent to which politicians are forthcoming or evasive under questioning (e.g., Donaldson, 1987). And ordinary citizens, having been exposed to extensive professional commentary and analysis, are perhaps predisposed to closely monitor such conduct for themselves. Accordingly, this is an arena where significant political outcomes may be influenced by mundane interactional skills and practices.

Such practices have traditionally been overlooked by scholars of mass communication, who have focused their efforts on exploring the institutionalized production of media messages, the thematic content of such messages, and the effects deriving therefrom. The impetus to study news interviews, press conferences, and other journalistic forms of interaction has been led by analysts of talk-in-interaction, who have adapted methods and findings from the study of ordinary conversation to the analysis of talk broadcast to a mass audience.[1]

As part of this research, some have begun to examine how public officials conduct themselves under questioning (Greatbach, 1986a; Harris, 1991; see also McHoul, 1987). One approach to the analysis of answering conduct is to operationally establish criteria for 'direct' versus 'evasive' answers for the purposes of assessing the relative evasiveness exhibited by various politicians under various circumstances (e.g., Harris, 1991). Such an approach promises important findings, but it assumes a comprehensive understanding of what would constitute, a 'direct' or, by contrast, an 'evasive' answer, and it is by no means clear that our present state of knowledge is adequate to the task. Given that politicians' responses are usually lengthy and complex, and involve speaking practices that have only recently been examined systematically, it seems unlikely that valid criteria for 'directness/evasiveness' can be unproblematically specified. Indeed, in the most systematic attempt thus far, Harris (1991: 89–91) presents a range of borderline cases that are difficult to classify in either terms, which leads her to conclude that her own study is 'perhaps best regarded as an approximation' (1991: 91).

An alternative approach is to adopt a straightforwardly descriptive orientation to this phenomenon; that is, to explore elementary response practices as phenomena in their own right, without regard to how they are distributed across speakers (e.g., Greatbach, 1986a). How do public

officials indicate that they are indeed adhering to the topical agenda established by the question? Conversely, how do shifts of the agenda become evident? How do journalists deal with these various maneuvers, and what does this reveal about whether journalists find such responses to be direct or evasive? Is it possible for *de facto* evasion to be accomplished covertly, under the guise of what initially appears to be a straightforward answer?

I have adopted this latter approach in order to analyze one particular response practice which I am calling 'reformulating the question'. As we shall see, this way of responding sometimes functions innocuously to indicate how a complex question will initially be dealt with, but it may also enable a public figure to sidestep or avoid some aspect of the question. Moreover, I will demonstrate that journalists have the capacity to recognize and counter evasive reformulations when they occur, while respondents can in turn employ such reformulations in ways that resist detection.

The data were taken from a range of settings that involve U.S. journalists interrogating public figures. I first observed the phenomenon under analysis here in the 1988 U.S. presidential debates. Those were only nominally 'debates'; they were organized in accordance with a modified press conference format such that the candidates responded to questions from a panel of journalists. The debates were videotaped and transcribed in their entirety, and all question reformulations were collected and analyzed. Transcripts of news interviews and presidential press conferences were then searched for additional examples. While the interview transcripts were produced by the investigator, the press conference transcripts were drawn from selected volumes of *Public Papers of the Presidents*. The analysis presented here is based on a comprehensive analysis of these cases.

Elementary properties of question reformulations

When questioned by journalists, public officials often proceed to answer without substantial delay. On some occasions, however, the route to an answer is more circuitous. Before answering, officials may first paraphrase or reformulate the question that was raised. A typical instance of a question reformulation is reproduced below. The response opens with a reformulation that begins at arrow 1, displacing the answer proper such that the latter does not begin until arrow 2. (Throughout the transcripts, speakers are designated as follows: 'JRN' for journalist–questioner, and first and last initials for public officials.)

(1) [Bentsen–Quayle Debate 10/5/88: 0:30:28]

JRN: Senator Quayle (.) in recent years thuh Reagan
         administration has scaled back thee activities:
         of thee Occupational Safety and Health
         Administration .hhh prompted in part by Vice
         President Bush's task force on regulatory
         relief. .hhhh Thee uh budget for thee agency
         has been cut by twenty percent, (0.2) and thuh
         number of inspections at manufacturing plants
         .hhh has been reduced by thirty three percent.
         .hhhh This's had a special effect in this area
         where many people work in thuh meat packing
         industry, .hh which (.) has a far: higher
         rate of serious injuries than almost any other
         injury, .hh a rate which appears to've been
         rising: although we're not really su:re .hh
         bec = some- some o'thuh lar:gest companies have
         allegedly been falsifying thuh reports. .hhhh
         Would you:: uh (0.5) acknowledge to thuh hundreds
         of injured and maimed people, (.) in Nebraska
         (.) Iowa: and elsewhere in thuh midwest .hhh
         that in this case deregulation may have gone
         too far:, and thuh government should reassert
         itself in protecting workers rights
         (0.8)

DQ: 1→   .hhh Thuh premise of your question John: .hh
         is that somehow this administration has been
         la::x. .hh in enforcement. .h of thee OSHA
         regulations. . hh

      2→   And I disagree with that. (0.3) And
         I'll tell ya why:. .hh If you wanna:
         ask some business people. (1.2) that I talk to
         periodically (0.8) they complain:. (1.2) about
         th' tough enforcement (0.7) of this administration,
         .hhh and furthermore, (0.6) lemme tellya this
         for thuh record. (1.1) When we: have foun:d
         violations in this administration. (1.0) there
         has not only been (0.5) tough enforcement. (1.2)
         but there have been: thuh most severe: penalties
         .hh thuh lar::gest penalties in thuh history.
         .hh (0.9) of thuh Department of Labor (0.2) have

been le::vied (0.2) when we- these ehviolations
have been found. ...

This question was put to Dan Quayle during the 1988 presidential debates, and it concerned the negative effects of deregulation during the Reagan administration. Before he actually answers the question, Quayle represents it in somewhat different terms: 'The premise of your question John, is that somehow this administration has been lax in enforcement of the OSHA regulations.' He then proceeds to dispute this by citing evidence to the contrary.

This example illustrates the basic features which are characteristically associated with most reformulations.

1.   *The reformulation occurs within a discrete unit of talk which is syntactically disjoined from the ensuing response.* In this particular instance it is packaged within a separate sentence, although reformulations may also occupy distinct clausal units (see extract [2], arrow 2 below).

2.   *The reformulaton refers to the preceding question or some aspect of it, and paraphrases or re-presents what was said.* Here, as in most cases, the paraphrase is explicitly attributed to the journalist ('The premise of your question, John is that ...'). As paraphrases, reformulations do not merely repeat the preceding question in a literal, word-for-word manner; they recast the prior in a way that alters its character (cf., Heritage and Watson, 1979; Heritage, 1985). The precise nature of this transformation varies from case to case. Some reformulations operate on the question as a whole object by summarizing it, or presenting what might be regarded as 'the basic thrust' of the question, or 'a central premise' of it, as in example (1) above. In other instances, reformulations target one specific component of a more complex question for re-presentation; i.e., some lexical item within the question, one part of a two-part question, or one statement introduced as preliminary background information for a subsequent question. An example of the latter is reproduced below. Here a question to President Nixon concerning his assessment of a Justice Department investigation of Vice President Agnew is prefaced with several items of background information, including an assertion (beginning at arrow 1 below) that 'you have been briefed in some detail on the evidence in the Agnew problem'. Through this preliminary assertion, the journalist establishes grounds for raising the question that he subsequently asks. In response, Nixon first reformulates this preliminary item (arrow 2) before proceeding with a substantive response (arrow 3).

(2) [Nixon Press Conference 10/3/73: 841–842]

JRN: 1 → On that particular point, you have been briefed in
        some detail on the evidence in the Agnew problem.
        You are also a lawyer with some expertise. You could
        tell us-
RN: Some would question that.
JRN: whether there is any substance to Mr. Agnew's charges
        that this is a frivolous investigation, that it is a
        frameup, and that it is in fact a smear.
RN: 2 → Mister Mollenhoff, when you say that I have been
        briefed on the charges,
        3 → I should respond to that by saying that I have not
        heard the witnesses. I have only been briefed on what
        it is believed the witnesses might testify to.
        4 → As far as the charges are concerned, they are serious
        and not frivolous. ...

'Question reformulations' thus represent a class of objects that paraphrase
the prior question or some aspect of it: one component of a multi-part
question, some item of background information introduced prior to the
question, a central premise or presupposition of the question, etc.

3. *The reformulation is asserted as a preface to further talk.* The respon-
dents do not produce their reformulations as mere 'guesses' or under-
standing checks to be confirmed or clarified by the journalist (cf.,
Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, 1977). Notice that the reformulations
above are not interrogatively formatted (e.g., 'Are you saying that ...'),
nor are they spoken with the sort of rising intonation commonly associ-
ated with understanding checks. Moreover, the respondents do not wait
for confirmation; after reformulating, they proceed with further talk
without hesitation. Correspondingly, the journalists in these examples do
not attempt to provide confirmation or clarification at this juncture. In
each instance, then, the reformulation is asserted affirmatively as a valid
re-presentation of what was said previously, and is prefatory to further
talk.

4. *Subsequent talk initially builds upon the reformulation rather than the
original question.* The ensuing talk is thus more closely responsive (at
least initially) to the reformulated version of the question than to the
original version. This is consistent with a highly general principle of
conversational interaction: namely, that contributions to interaction ordi-
narily address and deal with the immediately preceding item of talk rather
than more distant interactional events (Schegloff and Sacks, 1973; 319;

Sacks, 1987). Thus, in example 1 (at arrow 2) Quayle's subsequent
response ('And I disagree with that') contains a pro-term ('that') which
has as its referent the reformulated version of the question which immedi-
ately precedes it. Similarly, in example 2 Nixon's subsequent response
rejects the presupposition highlighted by the reformulation (that he was
briefed on the evidence in the Agnew investigation) and hence does not
address the issue raised by the original question (which asked him to
comment on the Agnew investigation). In each case the public official's
response initially builds upon and is thus fitted to the reformulated item
rather than the original question.

Question reformulations in action

Why would public officials respond to questions in what might seem to
be a roundabout, circuitous manner? What is being accomplished in and
through such reformulations?

A solution to this puzzle may be obtained by considering the inter-
actional circumstances in which reformulations are used. The vast major-
ity of question-answer sequences do not contain question reformulations,
but those that do share certain common properties; question reformula-
tions thus crop up disproportionately in certain sequential environments.
Specifically, reformulations appear in environments where the relation-
ship between 1) what the question is seeking to obtain, and 2) what the
response actually provides, is potentially problematic. The 'fittedness' of
a response can become problematic when the question is particularly
complex, or when the response diverges in some manner from the topical
agenda established by the question, or some combination of these. I will
argue that in such environments question reformulations are occupied
with the task of forging a relationship between the original question and
the subsequent talk by furnishing a version of the question to which the
ensuing talk can be seen as responsive. In other words, question reformu-
lations represent one way in which the talk following a question is
presented as indeed 'answering' the question.

Within this general framework, question reformulations can accom-
plish a variety of interactional objectives. Two activities may be distin-
guished which are particularly common: 'managing a response trajectory'
and 'shifting the topical agenda'.

Managing a response trajectory

In some instances, reformulations appear to be produced straightfor-
wardly in the service of a kind of clarification. The need for clarification

can arise when the question is particularly complex, involving extensive background information or multiple interrogative components, such that there are a range of possible response trajectories available to the respondent. In this environment, question reformulations can be used, singly or in combination, to indicate how a complex question will be dealt with.

Reformulations of this sort appear most commonly when a public figure chooses to begin the response by 'reaching back' into the previous questioning turn to address something other than the most recent item produced. This is an atypical response trajectory; speakers ordinarily begin by addressing the most recent item produced, a pattern that Sacks (1987) has termed the preference for contiguity in interaction. Respondents use question reformulations (or related practices) when they are about to depart from this pattern, and by doing so they provide advance warning that something other than a standard response trajectory will be followed. We have already seen an example of a reformulation that 'reaches back' into the previous turn; in extract (2) the speaker (Nixon) targetted a question-preliminary item of background information for reformulation. The complexity of that questioning turn, coupled with the decision to respond initially to a sequentially distant item of background information, provides a straightforward rationale for the use of a reformulation prior to answering. Hence, this reformulation is accountable upon its occurrence as an effort to clarify just what aspect of the question will be dealt with first. Notice that Nixon eventually goes on to answer the original question (see arrow 4 in extract (2) above).

Response trajectories may also be managed through practices that, while related to the reformulations examined thus far, are in varying degrees less elaborate. A respondent may simply *refer to* that component of the question which is to be addressed. For instance, in the preceeding extract when Nixon turns from responding to the background information to address the question proper (at arrow 4), he marks that transition by referring to the matter raised by the question ('As far as the charges are concerned ...'). Similarly, in the following extract, after a two-part question concerning the 1972 presidential election (lines 01–03 below) and its predicted consequences for the partisan balance of Congress (line 04), Nixon (line 05, arrowed) targets the first component of the question by referring to the matter raised therein ('First, with regard to the majority ...').

(3)   [Nixon Press Conference 8/29/72; 836–837]

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01   JRN:    Mister President, the majority you talked about a
02           minute ago, what kind of majority will it be,
03           a Nixon majority or a Republican majority,
04           and will it bring a Congress along with it?
05   RN:  →  First, with regard to the majority,
06           the thrust of our campaign, I have tried to emphasize
07           to our campaign people, should be to make it a positive
08           majority rather than a negative majority. ...
09           :
10           : ((Nixon goes on to describe his hopes for
11           : a majority victory in the 1972 election.
12           : Several lines of transcript omitted))
13           :
14           Second, we need a new Congress. Now, on the Congress,
15           I am sophisticated enough, as all of you are, because
16           I have read some of your columns here, to know that
17           in both the House and the Senate it is tough for us
18           to elect a Republican majority. ...
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Like reformulations, references to a question component are often syntactically disjoined from the ensuing response.[2] However, references may be distinguished from reformulations by 1) the use of a brief (often one-word) characterization of the question component or its topic rather than a more elaborate paraphrase, and 2) the absence of an attribution to the journalist.

Also relevant to the management of a response to a multifaceted question is the use of ordinal numbers, typically in turn-initial position. Thus, in the preceding example Nixon projects — through the turn-initial 'first' in line 05 — that there will be further components of his answer to come. When he goes on to answer the other question about Congress, he marks that transition with a turn-initial 'second' (line 14). Across these examples, question reformulations and cognate practices provide for the management of a complex response trajectory in a way that will allow hearers to track its unit-by-unit relationship to the preceding question.

Shifting the topical agenda

In other instances, question reformulations are not analyzable in such innocuous terms. Some are hearable as embodying an attempt to shift the agenda of the question, at least momentarily. This is particularly evident when the question is structurally simple, and the reformulation embodies a more substantial transformation of it, as in example (4) below. Here Gary Hart is asked specifically if he had an affair with

Donna Rice. Although there is a brief lead-in to this question, the question itself (at arrow 1) occupies a single turn constructional unit. Hart's reformulation (arrow 2) substantially broadens the question so that it now concerns his marital fidelity over the past 29 years, including periods during which he and his wife were publicly known to be separated. Hart appears to recognize that a significant shift of the agenda is manifest here; notice that he offers the reformulation somewhat tentatively within an 'if' clause ('... if the question is ...').

(4)   [The Best of Nightline 1990 0 : 8 : 45]

JRN:		Uh- (0.5) I told you::. (0.4) some days ago when we spo:ke, and I told our audience this evening that I would ask you both questions. I will ask you thuh first now: just before we tak a brea:k because I think I know what your answer's gonna be.=
	1→	= Did you have an affair with Miss Rice?
GH	2→	.hhhh Mister Koppel (1.1) if thuh question: (.) is in thuh twenty nine y:ear:s of my marriage, including two public separations have I been absolutely and totally faithful: to my wife .hhh
	3→	I regret to say thee answer is no:. ...

The advantages of such a transformation are obvious. It enables Hart to appear 'forthcoming', but in response to a question that, by virtue of its generality, is much less pointed. His answer is thus less politically damaging than it might otherwise have been. In instances like this one, the reformulation is analyzable as strategically motivated to 'steer the question' in a more desirable direction, thereby facilitating a response that to some degree diverges from the original topic of inquiry.

Reformulations may be useful for agenda-shifting purposes because even as they initiate a new topical direction, they simultaneously propose that this direction is somehow related to the agenda posed by the original question. In the preceding example, the proposal of a topical connection between the question and its reformulation was markedly tentative (recall the 'if the question is ...' preface). In other instances, however, the relationship is asserted straightforwardly and without qualification. In the following question to Dan Quayle, a journalist enumerates several prominent Republicans who had been highly critical of Bush's decision to choose Quayle as his running mate (04-16); the journalist then asks Quayle why he hasn't made 'a more substantial impression' on his own Republican colleagues (16-19). Quayle begins his response (21-24) by

recasting the question in terms of his general qualifications for the presidency. (For the audience, strings of 'xxxx' indicate applause, and 'hhhh' indicates laughter.)

(5)   [Bentsen-Quayle Debate 10/5/88: 0 : 2 : 00]

01	JRN:	.hhhh Senator you have been criticized as we all
02		know:: for your decision to stay out of the Vietnam
03		war::, (0.3) for you poor academic record, .hhhhhh
04		but mo:re troubling to so::me are some o'thuh
05		comments that've been made by people in your own
06		party. tch .hhh Just last week former Secretary
07		of State Hai::g. .hh said that your pi:ck. (0.2)
08		was thuh dumbest call George Bush could've
09		ma[:de.
10	AUD:	[h-h-hhxhxhx[hxxXXXXXXXXXXXXX]=
11	JRN:	[Your leader in thuh Senate]
12	AUD:	=XXXXXXXXXXX[XXXXXXXxxxxxxx (5.8)]
13	JRN:	[Your leader in thuh Senate] Bob
14		Do:le said that a better qualified person could have
15		been chosen. .hhh Other republicans have been far
16		more critical in private. .hhhh Why d'you think
17		that you have not made a more substantial
18		impression on some of these people who have been able to
19		observe you up clo:se.
20		(1.5)
21	DQ:	→ .hhhhhh Thuh question goe::s (1.0) to whether
22		I'm qualified (1.1) to be vice president, (0.8)
23		.hhh and in thuh case of a:: (.) tragedy whether
24		I'm qualified to be president. (0.6) .hhhh (0.7)
25		Qualifications for:: (0.2) thee office of vice
26		president 'r president (1.0) are not age alo:ne.
27		(1.5) you must look at accomplishments: (1.0)
28		and you must look at experience. ...

This is a substantial transformation. On one level, it moves from subjective impressions of Quayle to his qualifications considered as an objective matter. There is also a change in the presuppositional valence of the question. The original question is presuppositionally negative; it presumes that Quayle did not in fact make a good impression, and asks why this is so. That negative presumption is encoded in the preliminary background information (04-16) and in the wording of the question itself

('Why do you think you have not made a more substantial impression...').
In contrast, the reformulation is relatively 'neutral' in character; it con-
tains only a reformulation of the question proper, which is cast in less
presumptive terms ('whether I'm qualified').[3] Notwithstanding the magni-
tude of this transformation, the reformulation is asserted affirmatively
and without qualification: 'The question goes to whether I'm qualified...'
(21). Quayle thus proposes that his reformulation successfully captures
'what the question comes down to' in its essence.

To appreciate the significance of this device in managing a shift of the
topical agenda, it might be useful to consider what the preceding sequence
would look like without a reformulation:

(6)   [Invented]

JRN: ... Why do you think that you have not made a more
       substantial impression on some of these people who
       have been able to observe you up close?
DQ: Qualifications for the office of vice president or
       president are not age alone. You must look at
       accomplishments and you must look at experience.

When the 'answer' is made to follow the question without any preparatory
work, it seems manifestly disjunctive. Against this backdrop, the impor-
tance of the reformulation is that it affiliates the matter-to-be-pursued
with the matter-that-was-inquired-about, thereby minimizing any discrep-
ancy between the two which might otherwise be obvious. In effect, the
reformulation proposes that what follows is responsive to the underlying
spirit, if not the actual letter, of the original question.

Question reformulations thus serve as a resource for public officials
seeking to unambiguously establish what might otherwise seem to be a
tenuous relationship between the preceding question and the subsequent
answer. Whether 'managing a response trajectory' or 'shifting the agenda',
the reformulation provides a version or aspect of the question that the
subsequent response can be seen as 'answering'. Through this device,
public officials can propose that, despite appearances to the contrary,
what they are about to say is dealing *in some manner* with the topical
agenda that the journalist raised.

Countering evasiveness

That reformulations may be used either to manage a response trajectory
or to shift the agenda is not merely an abstract analytic distinction. It is

also relevant for journalists themselves, who must decide whether to
move on to another question or to pursue the matter that was raised by
the preceding question (Greatbatch, 1986a: 449–453; 1986b: 109–118).
In order to decide upon an appropriate course of action, journalists must
monitor the official's talk to determine the degree to which the question
has or has not been answered. When the response is perceived as being
inadequate, a probing follow-up question becomes relevant, and percep-
tions of inadequacy are distinctly possible when an agenda-shifting refor-
mulation has been used. When a pursuit is actually undertaken, it treats
the prior response as 'evasive' and thus counteracts the more benign
portrayal embodied in the reformulation (cf. Pomerantz, 1984).[4]

Journalists can pursue the matter at different points in the course of
an unfolding response. Most commonly, the pursuit does not begin until
the official has produced both a question reformulation and a substantive
response that is analyzably evasive. Thus, during the debates journalist
Brit Hume asked vice presidential candidate Quayle what he would do
if Bush become incapacitated and he had to 'take the reins' of presidential
power. Quayle initially takes a stab at outlining a plan for assuming the
presidency (arrow 1 below), but he then produces a question reformula-
tion (arrow 2) that shifts the topic away from his *plan of action* and
toward his *qualifications for the presidency*; the remainder of his turn
details those qualifications. After a subsequent round of questions (initi-
ated by other journalists on the panel in a prearranged order but omitted
from this transcript), the role of questioner returns to Hume, who chooses
to pursue the matter (arrow 3). Notice that the pursuit is explicitly framed
as a follow-up to 'the question that I asked you earlier'. Moreover, Hume
justifies his pursuit by commenting on the inadequacy of Quayle's answer;
beginning at arrow 4, he characterizes Quayle's talk in the most minimal
of terms, thereby portraying it as a particularly 'feeble' attempt at answer-
ing. The audience, apparently picking up on this derisive commentary,
laughs.

(7)   [Bentsen–Quayle Debate 10/5/88: 0 : 26 : 51]

JRN: Senator I wan- I wanna take you back if I can
       to thuh question Judy as:- asked you about some
       o'thee apprehensions people may feel about your
       being a heartbeat away from thuh presidency. .hhhh
       And let us assume if we can for thuh sake of this
       question that you become Vice President- an:d thuh
       President is incapacitated for one reason or
       another and you hafta take thuh reigns of power.

.hhhh When th<u>a</u>t moment <u>ca</u>::me, <u>wh</u>:at would be
thuh <u>fir</u>st steps that you'd <u>ta</u>ke (0.2) and <u>why</u>::.
(3.2)

DQ: 1→ .hh First I'd- <u>fir</u>st I'd say a prayer (1.1) tch for
             myself (2.3) and for thuh country that I'm about to
             lead (2.4) And then I would (1.1) assemble h<u>i</u>s:
             (1.1) people and talk (0.8) .hhh And

       2→ I <u>th</u>ink this question keeps going <u>ba</u>:ck to: (1.0)
             thuh qualifications and what kind of (1.1) of vice
             president 'n (0.7) in this hypothetical
             situation (1.0) if I h<u>a</u>d to ass<u>u</u>me:: (0.8) thuh
             responsib<u>i</u>lities of: (0.3) president <u>w</u>hat I would
             be. (1.0) .hhh and <u>a</u>s I have <u>sa</u>id...
             ((four line side sequence omitted))
             ...age al<u>o</u>ne. (1.0) is <u>no</u>t (0.2) the <u>onl</u>y (0.5)
             qualification. .hhhh you've <u>go</u>t to <u>lo</u>ok at
             ex:<u>pe</u>rience. (.) and you've got to look at
             acc<u>o</u>mplishments. and <u>ca</u>:<u>n</u> you make a difference. ...
             ((Quayle continues to describe his qualifications))

((Several question–answer sequences initiated by other journalists follow,
after which the turn passes back to the journalist above.))

JRN: 3→ Senator I wanna take you back to thuh question
             that I asked you <u>ea</u>rlier about what would h<u>a</u>ppen
             if you were tuh: >t<u>a</u>ke over in an emergency and
             what you would do <u>fir</u>st and <u>why</u>:: .hhhh

       4→ You said you'd say a <u>pra</u>yer:: and you said something
             about a <u>mee</u>ting hh

       5→ What would you do n<u>e</u>xt.
             (0.5)

AUD: h-hhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh-h

Here, then, the pursuit is not initiated until after a manifestly evasive
response has been completed.

Journalists do not always wait this long, however. They may also
initiate a pursuit pre-emptively, immediately after the question reformula-
tion and before any substantive response has begun. Journalists are
apparently able to recognize the potentially evasive import of certain
question reformulations even as they are produced. An example of a pre-
emptive pursuit appears in extract (8) below (see line 18). Here the
journalist, after noting that Quayle supported the U.S. invasion of
Granada (lines 01–05 below), asks Quayle if he would also support using

the military to 'go after South American drug cartels and General
Noriega ...' since 'drugs ... pose a far greater danger to many more
people' (07–11). Quayle responds by first producing a reformulation
embedded in an expression of agreement: 'you're absolutely right that
the drug problem is the number one issue' (14–16). That is, he expresses
agreement with and thereby embeddedly reformulates this part of the
question.[5] Notice that the reformulated item concerning the magnitude
of the drug problem was the final item mentioned in the previous turn
(10–11); it was introduced only after the question concerning the use of
the military had been brought to a first possible completion point (at the
end of line 09). As the most recent item mentioned, the magnitude issue
occupies the sequentially implicative position within the questioning turn,
and in this respect it is unremarkable that Quayle begins by targeting
this issue. However, from a substantive point of view the magnitude issue
is really a peripheral aspect of the question; it merely provides a rationale
for the central question at hand, which focuses specifically on the use of
the military. On this basis, the reformulation could be heard as the first
move in an attempt to shift the agenda away from 'the use of the military
to address the drug problem' to discuss 'the magnitude of the drug
problem' in a more general way.

(8) [Bentsen–Quayle Debate 10/5/88: 0:41:53]

01 JRN: Senator Quayle as you:: uh (0.3) mentioned here
02   to<u>nig</u>ht you actively supported thee invasion of
03   Granada which was thuh military operation to
04   rescue some American medical students an:d to
05   rescue an island from a k- Marxist <u>ta</u>keover.
06   .hhhhh If <u>mi</u>litary force was n<u>e</u>cessary:. i:n <u>tha</u>t
07   endeavor (0.2) why not use thuh military to go
08   after thuh South American <u>dr</u>ug car:tel:s and after
09   General Nor<u>ie</u>ga for that matter in a <u>su</u>rgical <u>str</u>i:ke,
10   .hhhh since <u>dr</u>u:gs in thuh minds of <u>mo</u>st Americans
11   po:se a <u>far</u> greater <u>da</u>nger: to <u>ma</u>ny more people.
12   (0.8)
13 AUD: x x [x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x- (2.0)
14 DQ: [You're- you're <u>a</u>bsolutely <u>ri</u>:ght (1.2) you're
15   <u>ab</u>solutely right that thuh <u>dru</u>g problem. (0.7) is:
16   (0.4) thuh number one issue.
17   (0.3)
18 JRN: But would you [please address thuh military aspect of it.
19 DQ: [in this country

```
20   DQ:     I will address thuh military aspect if I may respond.
21           .hhhh Thuh military aspect (0.3) of thuh drug problem
22           is: being addressed. (1.0) as a matter of fa:ct .hh
23           we are using thuh department of defense: (0.6) in
24           ay coordinated effort, (0.8) on reconnaissance, ...
```

The journalist appears to hear the reformulation as potentially evasive, for he promptly attempts to oppose it. Directly upon its completion and before any further talk by Quayle, the journalist intervenes and pursues the matter by asking him specifically to address 'the military aspect' of the question (18). This does succeed in getting Quayle more clearly on track (20–24); notice that he twice uses the target phrase ('the military aspect') in the ensuing response, thereby answering in a markedly faithful manner. Here, then, a reformulation is analyzed *upon its occurrence* as potentially evasive, and is explicitly countered by the journalist at that point.

Accordingly, journalists do not necessarily withhold judgement to determine whether a shift of the topical agenda has occurred. They have the capacity to recognize and counter those question reformulations that appear to be preparing the groundwork for evasion. However, it is important to note that a pre-emptive course of action is not without potential costs; the journalist risks being seen as 'disrespectful' or 'rude' for interrupting the public official. Dan Rather's interview of candidate George Bush during the 1988 presidential campaign, after which Rather was widely criticized for what was perceived as unnecessarily argumentative and interruptive conduct (see Clayman and Whalen, 1988/1989), aptly illustrates this risk. This may in part explain why pre-emptive pursuits are relatively uncommon.

The risk of appearing rude may also explain why incipiently evasive reformulations are sometimes pre-emptively countered through more subtle, nonvocal methods. This occurred in the 1988 presidential debates sometime after the exchange reproduced in example (7) above. Recall that Quayle was twice asked to describe his plan of action for assuming the presidency in an emergency; in each case he reframed the issue in terms of his general qualifications for the presidency (although only the first reformulation was reproduced and discussed in example [7]). Sometime later, another journalist pursues the matter once again (beginning at arrow 1 below), but Quayle resists in much the same way as before. After some preliminary commentary on the number of times he's had this question, he launches into a very similar reformulation (arrow 2) that redirects the question away from his plan of action for assuming the presidency and toward his overall qualifications for that office. By repeat-

edly using the same device to evade the same recycled question, its strategic character — which might otherwise remain 'invisible' to the participants — seems quite transparent here (cf., Heritage, 1991: 319–324).

(9)   [Bentsen–Quayle Debate 10/5/88: 0:56:30]

```
01   JRN:   1→  Senator Quayle I don't mean to beat this drum
02               until it has no more sound left in it but to
03               follow up on Brit Hume's question w:hen you said
04               that it was a hypothetical situation, .hhhh it is
05               sir after: all: thuh reason that we're here tonight.
06               .hh[h Because you are =
07   DQ:          [Mhm
08   JRN:       [running [not just for vice president,]
09   AUD:       [x x     [x-x-x-xxxxxx =              ]
10             = xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx [xx-x-x-x-x (4.4)    ]
11   JRN:                        [And if you cite the] experience
12               that you had in Congress, (0.2) surely you must have
13               some plan in mind about what you would do: if it fell
14               to you to become >president of thuh United States<
15               as it ha:s to so many vice presidents .hh just in
16               thuh last twenty five years er so.
17               (0.3)
18   DQ:         tch .hhhh Lemme try tuh answer thuh question one more
19               ti:me. I think this is thuh fourth ti:me,
20               (1.0) [that I 'ave had this question, .h [an' I think =
21   JRN:             [(this is-)                         [third time
22   DQ:         = that- .hh three times, (0.8) that I 'ave had this
23               question, an I'll try tuh answer it again for ya.
24               (0.3) as clearly as I can. (0.7) .hh Because
25         2→  thuh question you're asking. (1.3) is what (.)
26               kind (.) of qualifications
27               .hh[hhhh does Dan' Quayle have to be president.]
28   JRN:   3→     [  ((JRN shakes his head several times))    ]
29               (1.0)
30   DQ:         tch What kind of qualifications do I have
31         4→  and what would I do: (1.0) in this kind of
32               a situa[tion.
33   JRN:   5→         [((JRN nods several times))
34   DQ:         And what would I do in this situation, .hh I would
35               (1.9) make sure. (2.1) that thuh people in thuh
```

36   cabinet, (1.0) 'n thuh people 'n thuh advisors
37   to thuh president, (0.2) are called in, (0.2) an I'll
38   talk to 'em, (0.8) an I'll work with 'em. ...

And indeed, the journalist promptly counters Quayle's move nonvocally. After only the first part of the reformulation is vocalized ('the question you're asking is what kind of qualifications ...'), just enough to project unambiguously that Quayle is moving in a similar direction, the journalist begins to shake his head (arrow 3), thus nonvocally rejecting Quayle's recharacterization of the question and thereby rejecting his bid to shift the agenda. This move does appear to succeed in blocking Quayle's incipient evasion. After the headshakes, Quayle appends a second component to his reformulation (arrow 4), one that returns to the original topic of inquiry (his plan of action for assuming the presidency). Upon the completion of this second reformulation component, the journalist nods approvingly (arrow 5), and Quayle then begins to discuss his plans in the ensuing talk.

Just as the journalist's pursuit is muted via less explicit nonvocal methods, Quayle's abandonment of his incipient agenda shift is done covertly and is made to appear to be unrelated to what the journalist has done. Notice that Quayle does not immediately respond to the journalist's headshakes; he continues to speak without a hitch during the headshakes until his reformulation is possibly complete (line 27). He also places some distance between the completion of the headshakes and the start of the second reformulation component. Instead of moving on to the second component then and there, he allows a full one-second silence to elapse (line 29), and he then reissues the first reformulation component (line 30). Moreover, the second reformulation component, when it finally comes, is connected to the first with 'and' (see line 31); the second component is thus packaged as a continuation of the first, and as a supplementary rather than a contrastive addition (Jefferson, 1986). By these various means, Quayle is systematically constructing his reformulation so that it comes across as a single continuous action rather than an 'about face', and it appears to have been his own doing rather than having been prompted by the journalist.

In summary, while question reformulations may facilitate shifts of the agenda, journalists can effectively counter such moves either after a response has been completed or much earlier, in response to the reformulation itself. At least some question reformulations are thus analyzable upon their occurrence as incipiently evasive. Ironically, the very practice used to facilitate a shift of the topical agenda can, in some instances, call

attention to the incipient evasion and thus prompt the journalist to oppose it.

Question reformulations and covert agenda-shifting

Question reformulations can alter the agenda of the question in ways that are less obvious and more subtle than the preceding examples. These 'covert' agenda shifts are less apt to be noticed as evasive, and hence are less vulnerable to interception. The *raison d'être* of many reformulations is, of course, to manage a departure from the extant topical agenda in a minimally disjunctive manner, and we have already considered some basic design features which facilitate this process. Now we will consider some additional ways in which reformulations may accomplish agenda-shifts in a covert or non-accountable manner.

Agenda-shifting under the guise of 'summarizing': Stepwise transition to a new topic

Whether a reformulation will be recognized as 'evasive' depends in part on the perceived distance between the topical agenda as framed by the original question and the agenda established by the reformulation. While reformulations do not literally repeat the question, some appear to be innocuously 'summarizing' the question rather than attempting to transform it. However, even reformulations which seem quite true to the spirit of the original question may facilitate agenda shifts nonetheless because topics can change in a gradual or 'stepwise' manner, through a series of small incremental moves (Sacks, 1971; 1972; Jefferson, 1984; Heritage, 1991). Taken individually, each move may be topically coherent with its prior, but in combination they can result in substantial topic changes. This may be exploited by officials who can use question reformulations to lead toward topically disjunctive matters in a manner that is not initially evident when the reformulation is produced.

Consider, for example, the question to Quayle concerning Reagan administration deregulation of OSHA; this case was examined in example (1) above and is reproduced again below. That question was quite complex, involving much background information on budgetary reductions and inspection cutbacks (lines 01–09), and the deleterious effects of this policy on workers in the meat-packing industry (10–17). Moreover, the question itself has two distinct components: the first asks Quayle to acknowledge that 'in this case deregulation may have gone too far' (18–21), and the second asks him to admit that 'the government should

reassert itself in protecting workers' rights' (22–23). Quayle's reformulation (25–28) boils this complex question down to one general proposition: that the Republican administration 'has been lax in enforcement of the OSHA regulations'. Although it contains much less detail, this reformulation apears to accurately encapsulate a central premise which runs through much of the original question.

(10) [Bentsen–Quayle Debate 10/5/88: 0 : 30 : 28]

```
01  JRN:  Senator Quayle (.) in recent years thuh Reagan
02        administration has scaled back thee activities:
03        of thee Occupational Safety and Health
04        Administration .hhh prompted in part by Vice
05        President Bush's task force on regulatory
06        relief. .hhhh Thee uh budget for thee agency
07        has been cut by twenty percent, (0.2) and thuh
08        number of inspections at manufacturing plants
09        .hhh has been reduced by thirty three percent.
10        .hhhh This's had a special effect in this area
11        where many people work in thuh meat packing
12        industry, .hh which (.) has a far: higher
13        rate of serious injuries than almost any other
14        injury, .hh a rate which appears to've been
15        rising: although we're not really su::re .hh
16        bec = some- some o'thuh lar:gest companies have
17        allegedly been falsifying thuh reports. .hhhh
18        Would you:: uh (0.5) acknowledge to thuh hundreds
19        of injured and maimed people, (.) in Nebraska
20        (.) Iowa: and elsewhere in thuh midwest .hhh that
21        in this case deregulation may have gone too far:,
22        and thuh government should reassert itself in
23        protecting workers rights
24        (0.8)
25  DQ:   .hhh Thuh premise of your question John: .hh
26        is that somehow this administration has been
27        la::x. .hh in enforcement. .h of thee OSHA
28        regulations. .hh
29        And I disagree with that. (0.3) And I'll
30        I'll tell ya why:. .hh If you wanna:
31        ask some business people. (1.2) that I talk to
32        periodically (0.8) they complain:. (1.2) about
33        th' tough enforcement (0.7) of this administration,
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```
34        .hhh and furthermore, (0.6) lemme tellya this
35        for thuh record. (1.1) When we: have foun:d
36        violations in this administration. (1.0) there
37        has not only been (0.5) tough enforcement. (1.2)
38        but there have been: thuh most severe: penalties
39        .hh thuh lar::gest penalties in thuh history.
40        .hh (0.9) of thuh Department of Labor (0.2) have
41        been le::vied (0.2) when we- these ehviolations
42        have been found. ...
```

Despite this apparent fidelity to the original question, the subsequent response does not address the specific issue that it tabled. After asserting disagreement (29) with the proposition embodied in the reformulation (that the administration has been 'lax on enforcement'), Quayle goes on to support his disagreement first by noting that businesspeople complain to him about 'tough enforcement' (30–33), and then by noting that when violations *have* been found, there has been 'tough enforcement' and 'severe penalties' (35–41). The original issue, however, was *not* primarily about *prosecuting violators once they are caught*; it was about *the way in which budgetary reductions and inspection cutbacks have weakened the ability of OSHA to detect violators in the first place*. A subtle agenda shift has thus occurred.

In retrospect, the reformulation appears to have facilitated this shift. While it preserves 'weakened OSHA enforcement' as the topical referent, it frames the question concerning this referent in a much more general and nonspecific way. Thus, the specific question about whether, given recent budgetary reductions and inspection cutbacks, 'deregulation may have gone too far and the government should reassert itself ...', is summarily reframed as having to do with whether 'this administration has been lax on enforcement ...'. This reformulation neatly bridges the original question and Quayle's subsequent response to it; the 'lax on enforcement' rubric is general enough to encompass both the issue of detecting violators (which was the essence of the original question) and prosecuting violators once they are caught (which is what Quayle addresses in his response). Quayle has thus produced a version of the question that, by virtue of its generality, licenses the subsequent response that he gives. As a consequence, he is able to produce talk that might be hearably disjunctive if juxtaposed with the original question, but is now preceded by a new version of the question with which it is entirely consistent. Accordingly, it is evident in retrospect that the reformulation was the first move in a gradual or 'stepwise' transition to a discriminably different topic. This was by no means obvious at the outset, however,

for the reformulation preserved the spirit, if not the precise wording, of the question, and it was initially accountable as an effort to summarily encapsulate a highly elaborate and multifaceted question.

Agenda-shifting under the guise of 'reaching back': Avoiding the second part of a two-part question

Recall that question reformulations are often used when speakers violate the preference for contiguity by 'reaching back' to address something that was said earlier in the previous turn. Such reformulations are initially accountable as an innocuous attempt to project that an atypical response trajectory is in progress. Moreover, since respondents often go on to address the remainder of the question (see examples 2 and 3 above), evasiveness may not be an issue even in retrospect. In other instances, however, a respondent may never get around to addressing the remainder of the question, and may thereby avoid answering that more recent component.

Consider those reformulations which target the first part of a two-part question. In the following example, a question to Nixon contains two components; the first (beginning at arrow 1) asks whether Nixon is personally investigating charges that his campaign funds were mishandled, and the second (arrow 2) asks whether the charges will hurt his bid for re-election. After a prefatory remark, Nixon produces a reformulation (arrow 3) that highlights the first part of the question and replaces a key term which was negatively weighted ('mishandling') with one that is comparatively positive ('handling'). More importantly, the remainder of his response deals exclusively with the matter of an investigation; he never gets around to answering the second part of the question regarding the consequences for his re-election campaign.

(11) [Nixon Press Conference 8/29/72: 276–277]

JRN: 1→ Mr. President, are you personally investigating
           the mishandling of some of your campaign funds,
     2→ and do you agree with Secretary Connolly that
           these charges are harmful to your re-election?
RN: Well, I commented upon this on other occasions,
           and I will repeat my position now.
     3→ With regard to the matter of the handling of
           campaign funds, we have a new law here in which
           technical violations have occurred and are occurring,
           apparently, on both sides. As far as we are concerned,

we have in charge, in Secretary Stans, a man who is an honest man and one who is very meticulous — as I have learned from having him as my treasurer and finance chairman in two previous campaigns — in the handling of matters of this sort. Whatever technical violations have occurred, certainly he will correct them and will thoroughly comply with the law. He is conducting any investigation on this matter, and conducting it very, very thoroughly, because he doesn't want any evidence at all to be outstanding, indicating that we have not complied with the law.

This omission may not have been accidental. Nixon may well prefer to answer the first question because by talking about the investigation he can show himself to be judiciously 'doing something about' a scandal within his administration, and thus cast himself as independent of the morally tainted forces which brought it about. In contrast, the issue of whether the scandal will hurt his campaign seems, at least from his standpoint, much less advantageous.

But whatever motivated this course of action, it is clear that, unlike other instances of 'reaching back' (e.g., examples [2] and [3] above), in this case the more recent part of the question remains unanswered. While this absence is clear in retrospect, it was not evident at the outset that some form of avoidance was in progress, because the reformulation was initially accountable as an effort to project that an atypical response trajectory was in the works.

Agenda-shifting under the guise of 'agreement/disagreement': Embedded question reformulations

The reformulations examined thus far are each packaged within a distinct unit of talk which is syntactically disjoined from the ensuing response; each reformulation thus appears as a singular action in its own right. Officials may, however, embed the reformulation within some other activity.[6] In so doing they relegate the reformulation to the 'background' rather than the 'surface' of the interaction, thereby rendering its shift-implicative potential less conspicuous.

Assertions of agreement represent one common locus for embedded reformulations. Officials often assert agreement with some aspect of the preceding question, and in so doing they may also embeddedly reformulate that question. In the following extract (which was previously examined in example [8] above), the official's response begins with a statement

of agreement (arrowed) that, as a subsidiary matter, reformulates what was stated previously.

(12)   [Bentsen–Quayle Debate 10/5/88: 0:41:53]

JRN: Senator Quayle as you:: uh (0.3) mentioned here
         tonight you actively supported thee invasion of
         Granada which was thuh military operation to
         rescue some American medical students an:d to
         rescue an island from a k- Marxist takeover.
         .hhhhh If military force was necessary:. i:n that
         endeavor (0.2) why not use thuh military to go
         after thuh South American drug car:tel:s and
         after General Noriega for that matter in a surgical
         stri:ke, .hhhh since dru:gs in thuh minds of most
         Americans po:se a far greater danger: to many more
         people.
         (0.8)
AUD: x x [x-x-x-x-x-x-x-x- (2.0)
DQ: → [You're- you're absolutely ri:ght (1.2) you're
         absolutely right that thuh drug problem. (0.7) is:
         (0.4) thuh number one issue. ...

The agreement is constructed in accordance with a very common format which may be represented schematically as [agreement preface + reformulation]. This generic format is realized in this particular instance when Quayle begins with an agreement preface ('You're absolutely right that ...') which is followed by a reformulation of the preceding question ('the drug problem is the number one issue'). The reformulation is thus embedded within an assertion of agreement.

Reformulations may be embedded within asserted disagreements as well. For example, the response below begins with a disagreement (arrowed) which takes a similar form: first a disagreement preface ('I do not agree with you that ...') and then a reformulation.

(13)   [MacNeil/Lehrer 7/22/85a: 19]

((FW is U.S. Ambassador to South Africa))

JRN: But isn't this (.) d- declaration of thuh state of
         emergency:: (0.2) an admission that the eh South African:
         government's policies have not worked, and in fact that
         the um- United States (0.3) administration's policy of
         constructive engagement (.) has not worked.

FW: → I do not agree with you .hhhh that the approach we
         have taken (.) toward South Africa is- ay- is an
         incorrect approach. .hhhhh We want (0.8) to see that
         s- system change. ...

Notice that while the question asks whether the South African government's policies and the U.S. policy of constructive engagement 'have not worked', this becomes transformed within the reformulation into a question about whether U.S. policy alone 'is an incorrect approach'. This transformation is not insignificant; whether a policy 'has worked/has not worked' is just one criterion by which its 'correctness/incorrectness' may be assessed. Moreover, while it is difficult to argue with the assertion that U.S. policy 'has not worked' (since at the time of the interview apartheid remained in place), one can still assert its overall 'correctness' even in the face of it 'not having worked' thus far, and this is precisely what the public official does in the ensuing talk. At any rate, this reformulation is managed within an assertion of disagreement rather than as an action in its own right.

The respondents in extracts (12) and (13) are in the first instance merely expressing agreement or disagreement with a proposition encoded in the journalist's question. Nevertheless, as a subsidiary matter such agreements/disagreements also establish a revised version of what was said, and this can in turn serve as a basis upon which further talk can be built. Embedded reformulations are not immune to being noticed as incipiently evasive and countered (see example [8] above). However, this evasive potential does seem to be rather muted by virtue of the fact that the reformulation is done within an assertion of agreement or disagreement instead of being offered as an unvarnished action in its own right.

Concluding remarks

We have been examining one specific practice that public officials employ when responding to questions from journalists. This analysis goes some way toward explaining why it is often difficult for analysts to pass judgement on the adequacy of an answer in a defensible way. Whether a public figure has answered the question, or has failed to do so, or has done something in-between, can be quite problematic. Even when observations are restricted to a particular response practice, such as a question reformulation, the analysis of its functional import may be far from simple. As we have seen, this practice may be used either to manage a complex response trajectory or to shift the topical agenda. And in the

latter case, although the question reformulation initiates a departure from the agenda of the original question, it simultaneously proposes that the agenda to be pursued is related to that posed at the outset. Accordingly, research on answering conduct will have to proceed incrementally, exploring particular response practices that seem to be implicated in answering or declining to answer a question, and paying close attention to how such practices are treated by the interactants themselves. The present paper represents one effort in that direction.

As it turns out, explicit (i.e., non-embedded) question reformulations are not distributed equally across journalistic interrogations of public officials. Of the collection of reformulations that form the data base for this study, very few instances were found in ordinary news interviews; most appeared either in presidential press conferences or in the 1988 presidential debates.

This distributional pattern probably results from differential opportunities for follow-up questions in these settings, which in turn derives from the different systems of turn taking which are operative in each setting. In most news interviews a single journalist is in charge of the questioning at any given time; that journalist has the freedom to ask follow up questions and, correspondingly, to pursue inadequate answers. Press conferences, by contrast, have multiple journalists present, and it is up to the public official to determine, after each response, who is to be the next questioner;[7] in this context, journalists are not assured of the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. The 1988 debates are quite similar to press conferences in this respect; with a panel of journalists asking questions in a prearranged order, prompt follow-up is not systematically provided for. Of course, any 'next' journalist can follow up on the previous journalist's question (as when Tom Brokaw followed up on Brit Hume's question in extract [9] above), but that is fairly uncommon, perhaps because the journalist must then forgo his or her prepared question in favor of the locally relevant follow-up (Schegloff, 1987: 224).

The press conference format embodies just those conditions that give rise to question reformulations. First, since journalists are not assured of a follow-up question, they are more likely to construct complex questions that contain multiple components, thereby combining the question and its follow-up within a single turn at talk. Hence, there should be a greater need for question reformulations in order to clarify how such questions will initially be addressed and dealt with. Second, since follow-up questions are less likely, officials may feel free to use reformulations for evasive purposes, confident that the matter will probably not be pursued any further. Accordingly, the relevance and usability of this response

practice is dependent upon local interactional contingencies posed by turn taking and related arrangements.

While explicit reformulations are more likely to be used in settings involving a press conference format, even then they are not particularly commonplace. Agenda-shifting reformulations, in particular, appear to be rather rare. This may seem puzzling, given the widespread perception that politicians are evasive and difficult to pin down. Why aren't such reformulations used more often? One possible explanation may derive from the obviousness of this practice in many of its manifestations. I first noticed reformulations of this sort in the 1988 presidential debates, where their evasive import soon became apparent, at least in some cases. I have since replayed these examples in my undergraduate classes, and students quickly saw through the practice and recognized the mischief that was taking place without any hinting on my part. In short, an explicit reformulation can be a somewhat transparent way of sidestepping a question, one that is vulnerable to the journalist's follow-up questions as well as the audience's negative judgements, and this may explain why it is not used more often.

This is not to say that politicians are less evasive than was previously believed; it may simply be that skilled interrogatees rely on more subtle methods of evasion. Embedded reformulations, for example, are not so transparent, and they appear to be more widely distributed, cropping up in both news interviews and press conferences. Indeed, the notion of an 'embedded reformulation' greatly broadens the phenomenon with which this paper began. It suggests that a much larger range of activities may be implicated in the process by which public figures change, sidestep, or evade journalists' questions, and future research might fruitfully proceed to examine such practices on a case by case basis. Finally, whether these or related practices also appear in nonjournalistic contexts also remains to be explored.

Notes

1. Research on the organization of news interview conduct is perhaps the most thoroughly developed. For a sampling of recent work, see Clayman, 1988; 1989; 1990, 1991; 1992; Clayman and Whalen, 1988/1989; Greatbatch, 1986a; 1986b; 1988, 1992; Harris, 1986; 1991; Heritage, 1985; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991; Schegloff, 1988/1989.

2. References to particular question components may also be embedded within clausal and sentential units devoted to answering. Thus, in the following the President embeddedly refers to successive parts of the question as they are addressed (arrowed).

[Nixon Press Conference 8/22/73: 719]

JRN: Mr. President, at any time during the Watergate crisis
        did you ever consider resigning?
        And would you consider resigning if you felt that your
        capacity to govern had been seriously weakened?
        And in that connection, how much do you think your
        capacity to govern has been weakened?

RN: → The answer to the first two questions is no.
     → The answer to the third question is that it is true that
        as far as the capacity to govern is concerned, that
        to be under a constant barrage — 12 to 15 minutes a
        night on each of the 3 major networks for 4 months —
        tends to raise some questions in the people's mind
        with regard to the President, and it may raise some
        questions with regard to the capacity to govern.

Hence, a similar outcome may be achieved without producing a separate sentence or clause.

3. Pomerantz (1988) and Maynard (1989: 94–97) discuss how questions can encode presuppositions or expectations concerning the inquired-about matter. Harris (1986) examines similar phenomena in the context of news interviews.
4. It is important to distinguish between an *analyst's* determination that some response departs from the topical agenda established by the question, and determinations made by *the interactants themselves*. In this paper the term 'agenda shift' is used rather broadly to refer to any analyzable departure; it is an exogenous characterization produced by the analyst. In contrast, the term 'evasive/evasion' is generally restricted to those agenda shifts that are actually recognized, pursued, and countered by a journalist.
5. Embedded question reformulations will be discussed further in the next section of this paper.
6. The distinction between 'exposed' and 'embedded' actions is derived from Jefferson (1983).
7. The Reagan administration made some attempts to alter the press conference turn taking system, but these variations were short-lived (Schegloff, 1987: 223–225; Smith, 1990: 128–129).

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