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Interview

Name of author: Johanna Rendle-Short

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Institutional Address: Linguistics Program, School of Language Studies
Australian National University
Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia

Address for proofs: as above

Email: Johanna.Rendle-Short@anu.edu.au

Phone: +61 2 6125 4677 (work)

Fax: +61 2 6125 3252

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Neutralism and Adversarial Challenges in the Political News Interview¹

Abstract

This paper aims to examine journalists' adversarial challenges within the Australian political news interview. Within the Australian context, journalists tend to challenge interviewees (1) by challenging the content of the prior turn, (2) by 'interrupting' the prior turn, and (3) by initially presenting their challenge as a free-standing assertion, not attributed to a third party. As a result, journalists could be interpreted as expressing their own perspective on the topic at hand, rather than maintaining a neutralistic stance. Although the challenging nature of journalistic questions has been previously noted within the Australian context (e.g. Adkins, 1992), there have been minimal analyses of such challenges. Using the framework of conversation analysis, the aim of the following paper is to examine adversarial challenges in more detail. In particular, the paper will focus on how interviewers (IR) and interviewees (IE) collaboratively produce the political news interview in such a way as to avoid accusations of bias or non-neutrality. First, the paper will focus on the challenging nature of the IR's turn, by examining the various techniques used by journalists to ensure that they maintain a neutralistic stance. Second, it will examine the way in which IEs respond to such adversarial challenges. It will show how although politicians do not overtly accuse IRs of bias or impartiality, they clearly orient to the challenging nature of the journalists' turn.

Keywords

political news interview, adversarial challenges, neutralism, unsourced assertions,
conversation analysis, Australian context.

Biographical Note:

Johanna Rendle-Short lectures in the Linguistics and Applied Linguistics Program at the Australian National University. Her research has focused on conversation analysis, embodied discourse, and nonverbal features of interaction. Recent research has included the political news interview and interaction of children with communication disorders. ADDRESS: Linguistics and Applied Linguistics Program, School of Language Studies, School of Language Studies, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia. [email: Johanna.Rendle-Short@anu.edu.au]

Background

Previous discussions of the political news interview have focussed on the requirement for journalists to maintain a neutralistic stance (e.g. Clayman, 1988, 2002; Clayman and Heritage, 2002a; Greatbatch, 1988; Heritage, 1985; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991). Although journalists take the initiative in terms of what topics are discussed, and the ordering of such topics, objectivity and the provision of unbiased news coverage is held up as the ideal to which journalists should aim.² One way of ascertaining whether journalists are being neutral might be through an assessment of whether politicians are given equal access to air time, with equal opportunities to express policies, ideas and opinions. However, another way to determine whether a particular journalist is being objective or maintaining a neutralistic stance within the political news interview is to examine the interview process itself—how it is managed, how journalists structure their questions, and how journalists ensure that politicians provide adequate answers.

It is this latter issue, ensuring that politicians provide adequate answers, that can be ‘problematic’ for professional journalists. One way to ‘push’ or challenge politicians to adequately respond to a particular line of questioning is to present different ideas or opposing opinions. However, such challenges run the risk of being interpreted (by politicians, or by the overhearing audience) as adversarial, and thus not maintaining a neutralistic stance. Therefore, journalists need to balance any adversarial challenge against the need for objectivity.

Achieving neutralism in the political news interview

Previous research into the nature of the political news interview has demonstrated how journalists achieve neutralism in a number of key ways. First, through the very design of the political news interview, journalists are restricted to asking questions and politicians to providing answers (Clayman and Heritage, 2002a; Greatbatch, 1988; Heritage, 1985; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991; Heritage and Roth, 1995). In particular, by avoiding any responsive actions that might indicate personal approval or disapproval with what the interviewee (IE) has said (Heritage, 1985), journalists demonstrate that although they are listening and responding to the politician's talk, they are not, in fact, the intended audience.

Characteristically, therefore, interviewers (IRs) refrain from producing response tokens or verbal acknowledgements, such as 'yeah', 'mm mhm', 'mhm' which might indicate that they are the intended recipient of the talk; they refrain from producing news receipts, such as 'oh' or 'really', which might indicate an acceptance or project acceptance of the factual status of the IE's response; they avoid assessments which overtly affiliate or disaffiliate with the stated proposition; and they avoid commentating on, editorialising, or presenting their own opinions concerning public issues (Heritage, 1985; Clayman and Heritage, 2002a). In other words, in order to demonstrate their objectivity and balanced perspective towards issues of public interest and concern, they limit themselves to only asking questions (Heritage, 1985; Clayman and Heritage, 2002a). If they do make an assertion, they attribute it to a third party; and if they do need to provide background information necessary for the understanding of a question, they present it within the question turn, often as a preface to the question itself.

Challenging the interviewee

Challenging the interviewee while maintaining a neutralistic stance is a fine balancing act. As Heritage (2003: 57) states, professional journalists are expected, on the one hand, to be ‘impartial, objective, unbiased and disinterested in their questioning of public figures’ whereas on the other hand, they are expected ‘to actively challenge their sources rather than being simply mouthpieces or ciphers for them’. Challenging IEs, therefore, is not only important in terms of public accountability, it also makes for more lively listening or viewing (Clayman, 2002), as journalists ensure that IEs adequately answer questions, do not tell untruths, or do not give misleading responses.

Previous discussions have focussed on the nature of this balancing act between adversarialness and neutrality through an examination of the IR’s question design (e.g. Heritage, 2002; Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991; Clayman and Heritage, 2002a). By making questions more complex, for example, through question prefaces or additional presuppositions (Clayman and Heritage, 2002a; Heritage and Roth, 1995), IRs can situate their questions within a broader context, thus limiting the range of possible IE responses. Alternatively, IRs can exert pressure on the IE to respond in particular ways through the preference organisation of the question or question preface (Pomerantz, 1984). As Clayman and Heritage (2002a) point out, such pressure to favour one response over another affects the IR’s objectivity or neutralism. Questions, for example, that specifically favour a particular response are those that use a negative interrogative syntax, such as ‘won’t you’ or ‘isn’t it’, where there is a strong preference for a ‘yes’ response.

In spite of these seemingly clear cases of what counts as adversarial questioning techniques, measuring journalistic adversarialness or aggressiveness is not straightforward (Clayman and Heritage 2002b). Yet it is useful to have some measure of adversarialness in order to be able to assess levels of adversarialness and to compare possible increases in adversarialness over time. Clayman and Heritage (2002b) have attempted to remedy this by presenting a system for examining and quantifying the phenomenon of adversarialness³ in question design in the press conferences of two U.S. Presidents, through the examination of four basic dimensions of adversarialness: initiative, directness, assertiveness and hostility.⁴ On the basis of their quantification, they were able to demonstrate that journalists have become less deferential and more adversarial or aggressive in their treatment of the U.S. President.

Another way of assessing the level of adversarialness, however, is through examination of the ‘second turn’.⁵ Through examination of how the participants themselves, in this case the IEs, respond to particular turns, it is possible to determine whether the IEs consider the prior turn as adversarial or not. Thus IE responses provide additional evidence as to whether they themselves, as participants in the interaction, treat the IR’s prior turn as conflictual or contentious.

The Australian political news interview

Within the Australian political context, it is not uncommon for journalists to openly challenge politicians’ responses to particular lines of questioning. Such challenges are combative in form, often prefaced by the disjunction, ‘but’, thus emphasising the opposing perspective being presented to the politician and the overhearing audience. The challenges tend to be ‘interruptive’, in that journalists tend to commence their

adversarial challenge before politicians have completed their turn at talk, thus emphasising the aggressive nature of the challenge. In addition, the challenges tend to be, at least initially, unsourced. In other words, journalists appear to make free-standing assertions that are not attributed to a third party, as in, 'according to x' or 'today's paper says y'. As a result, journalists appear to be expressing their own perspective on the topic at hand.

The challenging nature of journalistic questions has been previously noted within the Australian context. Adkins (1992), for example, discusses journalists' use of disputatious challenges within the Australian context. Although Adkins notes that the challenges observed in her data do not appear to conform to the criteria for maintenance of a neutralistic stance, as identified by conversation analytic studies (e.g. Clayman and Heritage, 2002a), she argues that they occur in the data following a number of challenging turns and, as such, are a mechanism whereby journalists can respond to the temporal requirements of the interview by bringing a particular line of questioning to a close.

However, although such challenges appear to routinely occur with the Australian political news interview context, politicians do not seem to adversely react to the challenges, nor do they tend to accuse journalists of being unfair or biased.

The aim of the paper, therefore, is to examine these challenges in more detail. In particular, the paper will focus on how IRs and IEs collaboratively produce the political news interview in such a way as to avoid accusations of bias or non-neutrality. First, the paper will focus on the challenging nature of the IR's turn, by

examining the various techniques used by journalists to maintain a neutralistic stance. Second, it will examine the way in which IEs respond to such adversarial challenges. It will show how although politicians do not overtly accuse IRs of bias or impartiality, they clearly orient to the challenging nature of the journalists' turn.

Data and Method

The current data set of 16 interviews consists of six senior journalists interviewing the Prime Minister (leader of the Liberal Party of Australia) and the then Leader of the Opposition (leader of the Australian Labor Party) in the lead up to the 2004 Australian Federal election. The election was held on 9 October 2004, and for eight months prior to this date, the Prime Minister and the then Leader of the Opposition were regularly interviewed⁶ by leading journalists from both the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) and commercial radio and television programs.

Because the focus of the current analysis is on the nature of adversarial challenges and how such challenges might affect issues of neutrality and bias, it was considered important that the interviews for analysis be chosen in such a way as to avoid any suggestion that adversarial challenges were simply the result of political bias.⁷ For this reason, the criteria for choosing the interviews for analysis were as follows: (1) interviews were with senior journalists; (2) interviews were matched, in that the same journalist interviewed both the Prime Minister (John Howard) and the then Leader of the Opposition (Mark Latham); (3) journalists were from different media organisations (two from the ABC and four from varying Commercial programs); (4) interviews were from varying times in the lead up to the election. The resulting 16 interviews that comprise the data set under analysis are set out in Table 1.

Journalist	Media Organisation	Howard (JH)	Latham (ML)
Catherine McGrath (CM)	ABC	18/2/04	13/2/04
		12/5/04	12/5/04
		16/6/04	21/6/04
Mark Riley (MR)	Commercial	30/5/04	16/5/04
Alan Jones (AJ)	Commercial	2/9/04	5/10/04
John Laws (JL)	Commercial	30/8/04	30/8/04
Laurie Oakes (LO)	Commercial	3/10/04	19/9/04
Kerrie O'Brien (KO)	ABC	5/10/04	7/10/04

Table 1: *Journalist interviews with Howard and Latham*

The data have been analysed using conversation analysis (CA), a detailed, qualitative analysis of audio recordings of naturally occurring social interaction (ten Have, 1999). Through moment-by-moment analysis of talk in interaction, CA is able to identify regularities in journalists' and politicians' talk within the institutional setting of the political news interview. Adversarial challenges occur in all 16 interviews. They are adversarial both in content and in the manner in which they are initiated. The examples presented in the following analysis are representative of the types of adversarial challenges found within the interviews. They have been chosen in order to present most clearly the phenomenon under discussion, and to illustrate the sort of challenge and responses to such challenges that occur within the Australian political news interview context. The 16 interviews have been transcribed using CA transcription conventions (see Appendix).

Adversarial challenges

The following example illustrates the sort of adversarial challenge that occurs in the political news interview between experienced professional journalists and politicians. In this example, Oakes, one of Australia's most senior journalists, is interviewing the Prime Minister, John Howard.

Eg 1 [LO/JH 3/10/04]⁸

1. IE: Well those- (.) those- (.) those p- those levies
2. were involved in .h industry restructuring,
3. °and [I think [they were very strongly [suppor-°]
4. IR: → [but- [but th- [but they]'re-
5. → they're new taxes, tax >increases<=which
6. → you promised °you wouldn't introduce° so
7. IE: >Well Laurie I [can only repeat<
8. IR: [*why-*
9. IR: why should people watch this
10. and say [well you mean it this ti]:me.
11. IE: [>Well I can only repeat<]
12. IE: Well I can only repeat the commitment I
13. ma::de=and you do have to see a difference.
14. .hh between things like that,
15. .h a:nd (.) straight (.) tax increases_

The declarative statement ‘but they’re- they’re new taxes’ (lines 4 and 5) clearly challenges what the IE has to say on the topic of new levies that have been introduced. The IR tries to take the turn three times in line 4 while the IE is still talking. The first attempt occurs just after the IE says ‘and’ and may be the result of mis-timing. In other words, it may be that the IR did not know that the IE was going to continue talking after he said the final word, ‘restructuring’, of the prior turn construction unit (TCU) in line 2, and so, in accordance with Sacks Schegloff and Jefferson’s (1974) turn-taking rules, he treated it as a legitimate place to take a turn at talk. However, although one could argue that the first ‘but’ in line 4 might be due to mis-timing, additional attempts to take the turn clearly occur while the IE is mid-TCU. As such they are ‘interruptive’⁹ and are intended to force the speaker to relinquish his turn.

Each time the IR commences his turn at talk with ‘but’ he demonstrates that he wants to present an opposing idea. And each time he commences his turn at talk in overlap with the current speaker, he demonstrates his readiness to take the turn from the current speaker. With each progressive turn, the IR recycles his talk to progress the turn (see Schegloff 2000, 2002 on interruption and overlap), such that by the time he says ‘but they’re’ at the end of line 4, the IE cuts off his talk and the IR is able to successfully complete his TCU.

Such a statement, ‘but they’re- they’re new taxes, tax >increases<’ (lines 4, 5), both in terms of *what* is said and in terms of *how* it is said could lay a professional journalist open to the criticism of failing to maintain a neutralistic stance. It certainly sounds combative and might be interpreted by the overhearing audience as being adversarial.

However, the journalist works to ensure that no such charge can be laid against him. By changing the final noun of the TCU from ‘new taxes’ to ‘tax increases’ (lines 5, 6), and by then quickly adding an increment to the prior TCU, the journalist is able to change the trajectory of the emerging talk. As a result, the IR converts the prior unsourced statement into a statement that presents a contrast between what the IE promised and what he actually did (line 6). As noted by Clayman and Heritage (2002a: 232), such contrasts are particularly damaging as they serve to put pressure on IEs through the setting up of a ‘moral template’ of what is acceptable or appropriate behaviour. In this instance, it opens up the possibility that the politician’s promises concerning tax increases are not to be believed.

A second way in which the IR works to ensure that he does not lay himself open to the charge of bias or non-neutrality, is by converting the challenge into a question preface, by adding the question, ‘so why should people watch this and say well you mean it this ti:me.’ (lines 6, 9, 10).¹⁰ Within the political news interview it is permissible to ask complex questions, consisting of a statement plus question (Clayman and Heritage, 2002a); thus by adding a question, the IR is able to change the unsourced assertion from a statement that could be interpreted as presenting his own opinion, to a preface to a complex question. This subsequent question, therefore, helps to counteract any previous interpretation that the challenge might represent the journalist’s own opinion, by transforming the action-in-progress into one whose ‘official’ purpose is to solicit the IE’s viewpoint rather than to express a viewpoint in its own right. As well, by designing the question with reference to the ‘people who watch this’ (line 9), the IE shifts the ‘footing’ (Goffman, 1981), thus demonstrating

that it is not he as journalist who is challenging the IE, but that he is asking questions on behalf of the overhearing audience (Clayman and Heritage, 2002a).

In summary, the above challenge is adversarial in terms of the content of the turn, in that it commences with ‘but’ and presents information that counters what the IE has said. However, the challenge is also adversarial in terms of the sequential positioning of the turn. The IR does not wait until the IE has completed his turn, his response to a previously asked question, but rather commences his turn while the IE is mid-TCU. Furthermore, the IR persists in overlap until the IE drops out and so the IR is able to successfully complete his TCU. Having secured the turn, the IR ensures that the assertion cannot be the basis for any accusation of bias or non-neutrality, by setting up a dilemma concerning previous promises made by the IE; by changing the statement into a question preface, thus making it appear as if it were a legitimate way of presenting a question; and by indicating that he is doing this on behalf of the overhearing audience.

The above analysis has demonstrated the adversarial nature of the IR’s turn, both in content and form, particularly through the way in which the IR locally manages the sequential organisation of the talk, thus ensuring that he is the one who emerges in the clear, and is thus able to successfully state his challenge. However, the question arises as to whether the IE also treats the turn as adversarial. In other words, what information does the second turn provide in order for us, as analysts, to be confident that we are examining the talk from the participants’ perspective rather than from an analyst’s perspective. We shall now turn our attention to the IE’s response to the IR’s challenge.

The IE does not openly object to the legitimacy or the challenging nature of the IR's turn as such. In fact, the IE initially responds to the IR's turn in line 7, before the IR converts the assertion into a question-preface. In other words, the IE demonstrates his readiness to treat the IR's statement as the complete turn (c.f. Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991). However, this does not mean that the IE does not treat the prior turn as challenging as the following analysis will show.

First, in terms of content, the IE demonstrates his orientation to the adversarial content of the prior turn through his statement, 'I can only repeat the commitment I ma::de' three times (line 12). Such a statement gives the impression that he is re-stating something that has already been stated or given, and in so doing, is attacking the legitimacy of the IR's line of questioning. In particular, stressed repetition of the modifier 'only' and the verb 'repeat' emphasise the IE's orientation to the limited options in terms of possible responses to the prior turn.

Second, however, in terms of form, the IE also demonstrates his orientation to the adversarial nature of the prior turn through his continued attempts to take the turn even though the IR is still talking. The IE begins his response in line 7, even though the IR has not yet completed his TCU. The timing of his turn could be analysed as the result of miscuing of the prior TCU, and so it could be argued that the IE had not intended his turn at line 7 to be 'interruptive'. However, the IE makes a second attempt in line 11 to take the turn. In this second attempt, '>Well I can only repeat<' (line 11), the IE clearly does not wait for the IR to complete his question, but rather commences his talk at a point of maximal incompleteness, just after the IR says 'and

say' (line 10). It is only at the third attempt in line 12, once he has heard most of the IR's question in lines 9 and 10, that the IE re-states the initial phrase of his TCU in the clear. It should be noted that he does not change the trajectory of his initial response, rather he simply repeats the phrase 'I can only repeat' three times (lines 7, 11, 12).

Third, the IE prefaces all three versions of 'I can only repeat' with the discourse marker 'well', orienting to the disagreement-implicative nature of his response (Pomerantz, 1984). Although 'well' prefaces are common in many of the IE responses within the current data set, regardless of whether the prior turn appears adversarial or not, the fact that 'well' prefaces all three TCU beginnings, emphasises the combative nature of the IE's response to the previous turn.

Fourth, the IE adds an address term when he says 'well Laurie I can only repeat' (line 7). Because address terms are redundant within a dyadic interaction, any use of address terms represents the marked case. Previous analysis of the use of address terms within the political news interview has shown that apart from the opening and closing sequences, politicians tend to use address terms as a mechanism for taking the turn when the journalist is still speaking, as a way of resolving overlap when both interactants are speaking, and in dispreferred responses to particular lines of questioning (Rendle-Short, under review). Clayman (2001: f4) has also noted that the use of address terms is a 'highly recurrent practice across various forms of resistance'. As can be seen from the transcript, the politician does not repeatedly use the address term. Although he says 'well I can only repeat' three times, he only uses the address term the first time he says it (line 7). One possible reason for the non-repetition of the

address term might be that the TCU in line 7 is in response to what could be perceived as a personal attack on the IE. In other words, the address term functions as a way of ‘doing getting personal’ by retrospectively constructing the prior turn, ‘tax >increases<=which you promised °you wouldn’t introduce°’ (lines 5 and 6), as being personal.¹¹ It may be, therefore, that the IE uses the address term to mark the fact that the IR has overstepped the boundary of what counts as acceptable, neutralistic, news interview practice. The fact that the address term is not repeated in the second (lines 11) and third (line 12) versions of the repeated TCU would therefore be because in these two versions, the IE is responding to the immediate prior TCU (i.e. the question) asked on behalf of the overhearing audience, rather than being in response to the perception of a personal attack.¹²

In summary, although this IE does not openly challenge the adversarial nature of the IR’s prior turn, his response shows that he clearly orients to the contentious nature of the talk through the content of the talk; through the use of the modifier ‘only’ to emphasise limited response options; through the repeated attempts to take the turn even though the IR is in mid-TCU; through the repeated use of the disjunctive discourse marker ‘well’; and through the use of the address term as a way of marking, or retrospectively acknowledging, that the IR may have moved away from the acceptable news interview format by becoming too personal in his turn at talk.

The paper will now turn from an examination of a single case analysis to identifying the different features of adversarial challenges with the data as a whole. Through analysis of collected instances of adversarial challenges, the second part of this paper will examine recurrent ways in which IRs work to ‘legitimise’ their adversarial

challenges, before examining recurrent ways in which IEs orient to the adversarial nature of the prior turn.

Legitimising the adversarial challenge: The IR's turn

Adversarial challenges are particularly hostile in that they are frequently commenced before the politician has completed his/her turn, thus 'interrupting' the IE; are often prefaced with 'but', thus clearly challenging the IE's position; and are often sustained in such a way that IRs manage to complete their turn in the clear. As a result, IRs need to do additional work to legitimise the challenging nature of their turn. In particular, because of the initial unsourced nature of their challenge, they need to demonstrate that they are still maintaining a neutralistic stance. There are three ways in which the adversarial challenge can be legitimised: (1) footing shift; (2) appealing to fact or what could be considered common knowledge; (3) converting the challenge into a question preface.

(1) A common way to legitimise an adversarial challenge is through a shift in footing, for the IR to indicate that he/she is doing it on behalf of 'the people'. It is clearly more difficult to charge the journalist with not being objective if they are challenging politicians *on behalf of* the listeners or the overhearing audience. In the following example, the IR does not simply shift footing through reference to *any* third party, but uses the 'people' themselves, those to whom journalists are ultimately accountable.

Eg 2 [CM/JH 12/5/04]

1. IE: =we have to stop (.) people (.) earning

2. what a:re (.) modest middle incomes;
3. BUMPing i:n (.) to a forty (.) two
4. >to forty-seven cent tax bracket,<=
5. =You cannot clobber hard work
6. and clobber (.) aspiration;
7. it's just not the (.) [the approach] =
8. IR: [But (.) what]=
9. IE: =[that will build a stronger Australia;]
10. IR: =[about those at the- at the (.) t:]op end;
11. >I mean< for example you Prime Minister
12. will probably get arou:nd (.)two thousand dollars
13. a year ↓in a tax cut_
14. → ↑What about people (.) who are in
15. that lower income (.) bracket_
16. who either (.) don't have (.) children »and- and« won't=
17. IE: =>mmm_<
18. IR: >or they're older and their families have- have left,<
19. IE: [We:ll, well all-]
20. IR: [They're struggle]ing too: and how do they-
21. → WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THEM toda:y,
22. [are they still-]
23. IE: [well I'm- I'm] =HANG ON;
24. >*ah* if you let me<,
25. I'm- I'm trying to ↑answer that question;=
26. =I'm pointing out that m- a go-

27. the answer I've just ↑given;

In this example, the IR commences her turn with 'but' (line 8) and persists during overlap (line 10) so that she is able to continue the TCU in the clear. In line 14 (arrowed) she legitimises her turn by reference to a particular group of people, those who are in 'that lower tax income (.) bracket₆' (line 15). This shift in footing (Clayman, 1992; Goffman, 1981) enables her to incorporate the public into her rationale for asking the question, as she does more specifically when she says, 'WHAT DO YOU SAY TO THEM toda:y,' (line 21).

(2) Although the nature of these challenges is that they initially tend to be unsourced, and so do not demonstrate a neutralistic stance, IRs frequently present the challenge as being in some way factual. Because facts or definitions are commonly agreed upon statements, they are 'beyond dispute' and do not require the same sort of justification as for non-factual statements.¹³ Thus, presenting an assertion as fact, minimises potential charges against non-neutrality.

Eg 3 [LO/ML 19/9/04]

1. IE: THE FAMILY DEBT CRISIS,
2. THEY'RE BETTER ↑OFF; (0.3) They're better
3. off on [the weekly basis,=
4. IR: [* () *]
5. IE: =when they need the money,
6. as the bills come ↑in₆ weekly [or fortnight]ly=

7. IR: → [By definition]
8. IE: =they're better off [under our ↑plan;]
9. IR: → [By definition if] the-
10. → if they've got the debt they've had the ↑mo:ney;
11. (0.3)
12. IE: Well >Laurie< I've answered your question.
13. I've answered your ques[tion]ᵢ
14. IR: [ɔka:y, °wull-°]
15. IE: I'VE SHOWN YOU THE CABINET DOCUMENTSᵢ
16. I'VE SHOWN YOU THE GOVERNMENT'S WEBSITE,
17. I'VE TRIED TO EXPLAIN TO YOU THE NATURE
18. OF THE FAMILY DEBT CRISISᵢ

Eg 3 shows the IR attempting to take the turn 3 times (lines 4, 7, 9). He persists until he is able to talk in the clear. His challenge simply consists of one TCU, 'By definition if the- if they've got the debt they've had the ↑mo:ney' (line 9, 10). In this case, the challenge is legitimised by presenting the information as factual, 'by definition'.

Similarly, the following example shows the question turning on what counts as 'fair'. Through use of an accepted common knowledge concept, such as 'fairness', the IR once again minimises the necessity of having to rely on information known only to a third party. Thus, he once again, ensures that any charge against neutrality cannot be upheld.

Eg 4 [CM/ML 21/06/04]

1. IE: and the Government of course,
2. has produced ↓a:h (.) ah no contrary evidence
3. »in-« in the INTERIM;
4. .hh and what we've got NO:W?
5. is a political witch-hunt sponsored by: (.)
6. Tony Abbott and Mr Howard [at TAX PAYER'S EXPENSE;
7. IR: [But three times the market-
8. Three times the ma:rk_{et} rental;
9. the tax payers are paying for,
10. → ↑How ↑can ↑you say that's fair.
11. IE: Well, (.) I say it's a:h (.) >fair
12. because there was a Royal Commission:;<
13. that fou:nd that ↓ah there was no problem
14. (.) with the ↑lease,
15. [and the Government hasn't produced]

Eg 4 shows the IR taking the turn in line 7, prefaced by 'but' and persisting in overlap so that she successfully holds onto the turn. In line 10, she changes the assertion into a question preface, by directly challenging the IE to say that 'three times the market rental' is fair.¹⁴

(3) The final way in which IRs ensure that the adversarial challenge is legitimised is by asking a question at the end of their turn, thus converting the prior unsourced

assertion into a question preface. Two of the above examples (Egs 2 and 4) demonstrate how IRs can follow their challenge with a question. By adding a question, the potentially challengeable or accountable assertion is changed into an unaccountable action of simply asking a question. Although therefore, the unsourced assertion might initially ‘belong’ to the IR, by re-formulating it as a question preface, it is re-presented as having been asked on behalf of the overhearing audience. Through such shifts in participant frameworks (Goffman, 1981), IRs are able to draw on *all* participants, not only those who are direct recipients to the talk (IEs), but also those who are who impacting on the talk (overhearing audience). In addition, because there is a tendency to initially respond to the most recent TCU in the prior talk (Sacks, 1987; Heritage and Roth, 1995), the IE is more likely to focus on the question, that which has been asked on behalf of the audience, rather than challenging the prior TCU, the unsourced more adversarial assertion.

Orienting to Adversarial Challenges: The IE’s turn

IEs appear to respond to adversarial challenges in three different ways. They might respond (1) through the content of the talk, by setting up a contrast between the challenging nature of the IR turn and what the IE wants to say; (2) through the use of address terms to indicate their orientation to possible personal attacks; or more explicitly, (3) by overtly objecting to procedural aspects of the prior turn.

(1) The most common way IEs orient to the adversarial nature of the prior turn is by indicating through the content of their turn that they do not agree with, or that they challenge, the content of the IR’s talk.

Eg 5 [LO/JH 3/10/04]

1. IE: a- an organisation like Family First,
2. and I don't share all of their views
3. [on ()]
4. IR: [>No<; but you- you chose between Family First and]
5. Meg Lees; a- and (.) picked Family First;
6. >I mean« this is a party °that° (.) that won't
7. give preferences to one of your candidates
8. because she's a °lesbian.<
9. Do you agree with that?°
10. IE: → I don't ↓tuh a::llocate those >prefer(ences)<_ =
11. =I: .h I don't discri::minate °a-° .h against people
12. acco::rding to their sexual prefer[ence].
13. IR: [But these people do,
14. IE: → ↑Yes ↑all ↑right,
15. But we have to make choices;
16. (0.2)

In his response, the IE bypasses the question in line 9, and instead, challenges the prior IR statement by explicitly contrasting his position (through the personal pronoun, 'I') with the position of the party who chose Meg Lees (line 4). He commences his turn with 'I don't' both in line 10 and 11, and stresses words such as 'a::llocate' (line 10), 'discri::minate' (line 11), and 'acco::rding' (line 12) to emphasise the contrast between his position and that of the party. In line 14, after a

second challenge by the IR, ‘but these people do’ (line 13), the IE uses extreme raised pitch intonation to both indicate his awareness of the fact that he has been challenged, and his adverse reaction to such a challenge. Further evidence for the disputatious nature of the talk can be found in his next TCU (line 15) which is prefaced by the disjunction ‘but’, indicating clear disagreement.

(2) Very frequently, IEs include an address term in their response to an adversarial challenge, as indicated in the following example.

Eg 6 [KO/ML 7/10/04]

1. IE: ↓I mean uh this is not about ↓°tuh°
2. (.) personalities in the campai:gn,
3. It's about °the°
4. sub[stance of what we're putting °forward°;]
5. IR: [°↓ Oh () it's very] much
6. as we::[ll, ABOUT how people will evaluate] you: =
7. IE: → [>we:ll I mean< but but yeah but hh.]
8. IR: =as a poten[tial leader.]
9. IE: → [yeah but-] but but but Kerry;
10. °if: ↓uhm_° >there're, Australians »uh« watching
11. this program who can't find a bulk-billing doctor,
12. can't get access to a dental program,
13. can't get off a waiting list and into a hospital,
14. can't get decent education and affordability for their children,

In response to an adversarial challenge (lines 5, 6), the IE attempts to take the turn at a point of maximal incompletion (line 7). In all, he says, '>we:ll I mean< but but yeah but hh.' (line 7) 'yeah but- but but but' (line 9), clearly indicating his disagreement with the IR's proposition. At the end of this elongated attempt to take the turn, he uses the address term, 'Kerry' (line 9). Address terms are not required in dyadic interactions, when talking to just one other person, and so the use of an address term in this position represents the marked form.

Although address terms can be used as a technique for holding onto the turn when IRs and IEs are talking in overlap (Rendle-Short, under review), by the time the IE in Eg 6 uses the address term, he is already speaking in the clear. It has been suggested that one possible explanation for the use of the address term is to personalise the response in order to mitigate the potentially face threatening act of disagreeing with the IR (e.g. Brown and Levinson, 1987; see also Adkins, 1992 and Blum-Kulka and Weizman, 2003: 1582). However, as suggested above in relation to Eg 1, the IE could be retrospectively constructing the prior turn, '°↓ Oh () it's very much as we::ll, ABOUT how people will evaluate you: as a potential leader', as having been a personal attack. Through the use of the address term, 'Kerry', he is able to 'do getting personal' by marking the fact that the IE may have over-stepped the boundaries of acceptable journalistic practice.

(3) IEs can, however, overtly orient to the adversarial line of questioning on procedural grounds.

Eg 7 [CM/JH 12/5/04]

1. IE: Well I- well I- well I can- I can say
2. what »uh« is the- the truthful pos[↑]ition
3. and that is that .hh I'll remain leader
4. of the Liberal Party for so [long as the party-]
5. IR: [But that doesn't]
6. help [(they've heard that before haven't they)]
7. IE: → [No: [↑]hang on- >can you wait-< I- you-] I- do-
8. → You aske^d me to (.) give an answer; plea:se;
9. → it's: quite important °so: let me finish,°
10. >Uhm< (.) I'll stay as long as I:- ↓a:h party wants me to;
11. °and it's in the best interests,°
12. CAN I SAY in relation to Peter

Eg 7 shows the IE overtly orienting to the disputatious nature of the IR questioning by specifically reminding the IR that the IR's role in the institutional setting is to ask questions and the IE's role is to provide answers. If an IR commences his/her challenge before the IE has completed their response then they have a legitimate reason for complaint, especially, as in the above instance, where the IR commences her turn before the IE has completed his TCU. Such procedural challenges are, however, infrequent.

Very occasionally, however, it looks as if the IE does not appear to overtly orient to the adversarial nature of the prior turn. There might be minimal prosodic features that

could possibly indicate that the IE recognises the challenging nature of the prior turn, but for all intents and purposes, the IE responds to the previous turn as if it were a legitimate question.¹⁵ The following example between journalist (McGrath) and Latham shows one such instance where the IE does not appear to orient to the adversarial nature of the prior talk (line 11).

Eg 8 [CM/ML 21/06/04]

1. IE: This is about again using tax payers' money
2. for a political purpose,
3. the Government; (.) sponsoring an inquiry
4. into the Labor Party in the lead up
5. to a [federal election campaign;]
6. IR: [But- but you're against (0.3)] taxpayer rip-offs;;
7. aren't you.=
8. =So: (.) >I mean< (.) >a lot of people would see this
9. as a taxpayer rip off,
10. So why not just say okay.< (.) we'll renegotiate,
11. IE: → Well the important thing is that
12. (.) when there was a Royal Commission;,
13. Justice (.) Trevor Mo:rling said that there ↑wasn't;
14. a rip-off. He fou:nd, that the te:rms of the lea:se
15. of Centenary Hou:se are ↑reasonable;

In line 11, the IE provides an answer to the content of the prior turn asking ‘so why not just say okay « (.) we’ll renegotiate,’ (line 10). As noted by Clayman and Heritage (2002a), such ‘why not’ questions, with their underlying presuppositions, are clearly confrontational. However, the IE does not seem to orient to the fact that the IR has ‘interrupted’ his turn, and that she has asked negative polarity questions with a preference for a ‘yes’ response. The only indication that there is some discontinuity with the prior turn is the ‘well’ preface in line 11. However, as so many responses within the political news interviews have ‘well’ prefaced turns, the presence of ‘well’ by itself does not seem sufficient to justify the fact that the IE is treating the prior turn as contentious in some way.

Close examination of the above excerpt (Eg 8), however, demonstrates how the IR herself mitigates and legitimises the adversarial nature of her challenge. First, she adds a tag question (line 7) to turn the unsourced assertion into a question. Second, by re-stating the assertion in terms of ‘a lot of people’ (line 8) and by then asking a follow-up question (line 10), she makes it clear that the question is asked on behalf of the overhearing audience and is not expressing her own opinions on the subject. Thus although still contentious, in that there is a clear polarity to the questions, the IR successfully converts her adversarial challenge into a question preface asked on behalf of the overhearing audience. The clear footing shift thus mitigates the challenging nature of the prior TCU resulting in no marked IE response to the adversarial turn.

Discussion

The above analysis has shown ways in which IRs depart from the question and answer format of the political news interview, by challenging the IE, often in an adversarial or confrontational manner. Unlike ‘devils advocate’ challenges where IRs specifically refer to a third party in order to maintain a neutralistic stance (Clayman and Heritage, 2002a), the adversarial challenges discussed in this paper are characterised by journalists initially making unsourced assertions, often commencing with ‘but’ thus countering what the IE has just said, while the IE is mid-TCU. In the cases under discussion, journalists do not abandon their turns once they realise that they are talking in overlap with the other participant, instead, they design their turns such that they are still talking after the IE has discontinued their turn. Thus, the challenge is adversarial not only in content, but also in terms of its sequential development.

Having secured the turn, IRs tend to legitimise the adversarial nature of their challenge in a number of ways. For example, they might indicate that they are challenging the politician on behalf of the overhearing audience. Or, they might present their statement as factual, something that everyone knows, thus reducing the need for it to be sourced by a third party. Alternatively, they might change the interruptive adversarial declarative statement into a question preface, by asking a question at the end of their turn.

Examination of the second turns, shows how IEs tend to orient to the adversarial nature of the prior turn. They might orient to the adversarial challenge through the content of their response, or they might orient to possible shifts away from the neutral political news interview format through the use of address terms. Occasionally, they might object procedurally to the adversarial nature of the challenge (Eg 7). However,

in so doing, they do not necessarily treat the challenge itself as ‘problematic’. This is particularly the case if the IR is especially careful to ‘legitimise’ the challenge, as in Eg 8. In particular, there are no instances in the data of the IR being accused of not having maintained a neutralistic stance, thus demonstrating that the production of the interview is a collaborative achievement, with both IRs and IEs working to ensure that their talk does not shift from being an interview to a more adversarial debate or discussion (see also, Heritage and Greatbatch, 1991). In other words, the adversarial challenges are presented in such a way as to not attract possible charges of non-neutrality or accountability.

Conclusion

Clayman and Heritage (2002a) state that if unsourced assertions occur within the news interview, such that parties depart from the question and answer format, the interview loses its audience-directed character and becomes more conversation-like, often conflictual. It could be argued that the tendency for interactions to become conflictual is even more likely when IRs preface their unsourced assertions with ‘but’, attempt to take their turn before the IE has completed their talk, and continue to talk in overlap with the IE for an extended time. However, although the IRs in the current data set seem to be initially using unsourced assertions, as a way of challenging the IEs, such assertions tend not to be free-standing, in that IRs frequently follow such assertions with a question. As a result, although IEs overtly orient to the adversarial nature of the prior talk (sometimes by challenging the prior turn on procedural grounds), the interviews do not lose their characteristic news interview features. This is in part due to the work done by IRs to ensure that the challenges are not seen as being accountable by, for example, ensuring the interrogative form of their turn. By so

doing, challenges are presented in such a way that they are treated as ‘ordinary’ and ‘acceptable’, rather than ‘out-of-the-ordinary’ and ‘unacceptable’, components of the Australian political news interview. It is also due to the way in which the IRs, through their orientation to the overhearing audience, emphasise the audience-directed character of the talk. As a result, within these adversarial environments, any possibility of accusations of bias or lack of impartiality are minimised.

Politicians also work to ensure that instead of overtly *objecting* to a particular line of questioning, and thus emphasising the adversarial nature of the talk, they simply respond to the content of the prior talk, while simultaneously indicating their awareness of the adversarial nature of journalists’ questions. Thus, within the Australian context, at least, it appears as if adversarial challenges by journalists are accepted as part of the political news interview climate, with both journalists and politicians co-constructing the talk to ensure that being adversarial does not mean that news interviews lose their well-defined institutional features.

APPENDIX: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Transcription conventions are based on Gail Jefferson's notation in Atkinson and Heritage (1984).

hello.	falling terminal
hello;	slight fall
hello_	level pitch terminally
,	slight rise
¿	rising intonation, weaker than that indicated by a question mark
?	strongly rising terminal
=	latched talk
hel-	talk that is cut off
>hello<	talk is faster than surrounding talk
<hello>	talk is slower than surrounding talk
HELLO	talk is louder than surrounding talk
°hello°	talk is quieter than surrounding talk
↓↑	marked falling and rising shifts in pitch
*	creaky voice
he::llo	an extension of a sound or syllable
h <u>ello</u>	stressed syllable giving emphasis
(1.0)	timed intervals

(.)	a short untimed pause
.hh	audible inhalations
hh	audible exhalations
[]	overlapping talk
()	transcriber uncertainty
(())	analyst's comments
→	point of interest

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² As in other Anglo communities, Australian journalists are bound by a *Code of Ethics*. The first point of the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (2005) Code of Ethics states that journalists should commit themselves to 'report and interpret honestly, striving for accuracy, fairness and disclosure of all essential facts. Do not suppress relevant available facts, or give distorting emphasis. Do your utmost to give fair opportunity for reply.' The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), the major non-commercial television and radio broadcaster in Australia, is more specific. The ABC Editorial Policies (2002) insist 'directly and by implication, on four fundamentals: fairness, independence, reliability and sensitivity'.

³ More recently, Clayman and Heritage (personal communication) use the term 'aggressiveness' as the umbrella term to encompass this notion of adversarialness.

⁴ Clayman and Heritage (personal communication) have since revised the term 'hostility' and now use the term 'adversarialness' for this 4th dimension of aggressive questioning.

⁵ For a discussion of this underlying methodological principle of CA, see Schegloff (1995) and ten Have (1999).

⁶ The Prime Minister and the then Leader of the Opposition gave more than 300 media interviews during this period.

⁷ There are frequent accusations of left wing bias within, for example, the ABC (e.g. Posetti, 2001/2002) from politicians and the media itself.

⁸ The coding [JL/JH 30/8/04] indicates the initials of the interviewer (JL), initials of the interviewee (JH), followed by the date of the interview.

⁹ I am using the term 'interrupt' in its vernacular sense. See Jefferson (2004), Schegloff, (2000, 2002) and Hutchby, (1992) for discussions concerning overlap and 'interruption' in everyday conversation and talk-back radio.

¹⁰ Heritage and Greatbatch (1991) call non-third party statements that are followed by a question, Type B prefaces.

¹¹ I would like to thank Ian Hutchby for suggesting this line of analysis.

¹² It should be noted that the 'so' at the end of line 6 of the transcript indicates that although the turn-to-date could be perceived as a personal attack, the IR had not yet completed his turn. The 'so' indicates that the TCU in lines 5 and 6 was probably designed to be followed by a question. The IE, however, took the turn before the IR had commenced the question.

¹³ See also Pomerantz' (1988/1989) analysis of interviewers' use of 'facts' as an apparent way of challenging an interviewees' version of events in her discussion of the Bush/Rather confrontational interview.

¹⁴ As discussed in Clayman and Heritage (2002a: 221), 'how can you x' questions are particularly confrontational, because of the inherent presuppositions they bring to the question.

¹⁵ Heritage and Greatbatch (1991: 117) have also noted in the British news interview, that overwhelmingly IEs do not treat IR questions as expressing IR opinions, even if IR questions are 'understood as hostile or are presuppositionally weighted against the position of the IE'.