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Title: Hostile questions in the political news interview

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to examine the sequential environment of hostile or confrontational questions in the Australian political news interview. Being objective, or maintaining a neutralistic stance, is a key feature of the political news interview as demonstrated by interviewers' Question/Answer format; avoidance of response tokens; and speaking on behalf of a third person (Clayman and Heritage, 2002). Using Conversation Analysis, this paper analyses data from 16 news interviews in the lead-up to the 2004 Australian federal election, from both Commercial channels and the ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation). Although Clayman and Heritage state that within the British and American system hostile questioning is used sparingly, particularly because it erodes neutralism (p. 221), within the Australian context, it is not uncommon for questions and question prefaces to be confrontational. This is, in part, due to the interviewees themselves commencing their response while the question preface is still being formulated. Providing early responses means that interviewers are not given a chance to formulate their questions, thus giving the appearance of hostility. It is also, in part, due to the confrontational nature of the questions themselves, through the type of question structure and the setting up of preference through the use of negative questions or tag questions. Finally, it can also be due to the way in which interviewers formulate their questions. If interviewers do not make it clear that they are speaking on behalf of someone else, then their questions and question prefaces can be interpreted as being opinionated and commenting on the topic rather than maintaining a neutralistic stance. This paper will show how interviewers and interviewees manage disputatious challenges during the political interview. It will examine both the interviewers' challenge, particularly focussing on the sequential and linguistic structure of the challenge, and the interviewees' response to the challenge.

Clayman, S. and Heritage, J. 2002. *The News Interview*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.